

“REPAIR & RESTORE” A POLICY AGENDA FOR BLACK AMERICA

“We have concluded that all of our social, political, and economic objectives center around two interrelated priorities: Expanding access to the BALLOT & the BUDGET.”

Our purpose is to mobilize people around two central areas that are essential to making government work for us rather than against us:

- Expanding Access to the Ballot.
- Expanding Access to the Full Federal Budget.

We seek to preserve the integrity of our democracy, and to responsibly harness the full extent of the federal government’s spending power for state and local priorities related to jobs, public education, and health care. We believe that in doing so we can have stronger families, safer neighborhoods, thriving businesses, less household debt, and reduced tax burden.

For too long, those running for political office have taken us for granted. The people vote politicians into office, but those politicians fail to deliver on the needs of the people. This must stop. We will define our priorities and hold politicians accountable for furthering our priorities.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This document is inspired by a democratic vision and a set of values that we believe are necessary to ensure equal opportunity in America. Structural economic racism was at the heart of American slavery and segregation, and their effects continue to permeate our society in the most insidious ways. Without tackling the underlying mechanisms that determine how resources are allocated in America, we will fail to deliver the promise of equality and freedom to the descendants of American slaves and those that have been systematically denied social and economic opportunity in America.

This agenda's central purpose is to change the way the Civil Rights community engages those who seek our political support at the local, state, and national level. We recognize that in the past we have given our votes and political support to political parties and politicians without specifically defining the policies and legislative change we seek in exchange for our support. This has resulted in failed political and economic outcomes for the communities we serve. In the interest of furthering civil rights in America, we seek to change this relationship by educating our members on the specific policy goals we seek so they can be better informed about the candidates they choose to support. While we do not endorse political candidates, we want to be clearer about the specific policy priorities around which we will organize and advocate. ***We have concluded that all of our social, political, and economic objectives contained in this proposed policy agenda center around two interrelated priorities essential to making government work for us rather than against us:***

- Expanding Access to **the Ballot**; and
- Expanding Access to **the (Full Federal) Budget**.

It will take expanded access to voting (“the Ballot”) AND funding (“the Budget”) to address the underlying systemic conditions that result in poverty, economic inequality, the breakdown of the family, and the destabilization of underserved communities. We can no longer support a political environment in which elected officials court us for our votes to get in office, and then embrace economic assumptions that prevent funding the priorities we need once they are in office. We need voting AND funding, “the Ballot AND the Budget,” in order to erase the vestiges of American economic apartheid and to preserve our democracy. To this end, we will educate our members on where political parties and candidates for political office stand on expanding access to the ballot, and responsibly harnessing the full extent of the federal government's spending power for state and local priorities.

The proposals contained herein are designed to level the playing field and minimize the disparities that Blacks and minorities face by promoting the following areas:

- Protect & Expand Voting Rights
- Expand “the Public Purse” for Federal Spending
- Pass A Federal Job Guarantee
- Provide Free Public Healthcare for All
- Federally Fund Public Education and Abolish Student Loan Debt

While this policy agenda is not exhaustive, we do believe it represents the broadest, most robust set of funding priorities to address the foundational needs of any civil society. We will work vigorously to build public support for these public policies in our effort to realize a more inclusive America.

(1) EXPAND ACCESS TO THE BALLOT

We must restore the integrity of our democracy by protecting the interests of voters, so our voices are not drowned out by voter suppression tactics and the influence of special interest groups. Blacks have fought long and hard for access to the ballot, and we must do everything possible to preserve and protect those victories.

A. Make Voting a Constitutional Right

While the U.S. Constitution prohibits the restriction of voting based on race, sex and age, it does not explicitly state that U.S. citizens have a right to vote. And it was intentionally designed this way. James Madison [argued the problem](#) as such: “Allow the right [to vote] exclusively to property [owners], and the rights of persons may be oppressed... . Extend it equally to all, and the rights of property [owners] ...may be overruled by a majority without property....” As a result, the Constitution left voting to individual states, which led to unfair voting practices.

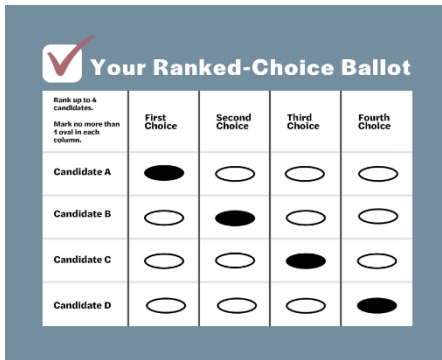
Over the years, there have been amendments to the Constitution; however, there are still persistent inconsistencies with state authority over voting laws, regarding such things as: voting ID requirements, felon voting, absentee ballots, and residential voting. For example, even though the 15th Amendment prevents the denial of the right to vote on account of race or color, certain states can still require some form of ID to vote that black or brown people disproportionately don't have. Congress is powerless in protecting the individual right to vote and overseeing voting policies/procedures that ensure elections are accurate, fair, and efficient.

In order to bypass many of these voting challenges, we need a 28th amendment to the Constitution for the right to vote. This would prevent voter suppression efforts not covered in the current anti-discrimination amendments. A constitutional amendment is preferable over a law because it offers permanent systemic change to help guard against future political corruption. It also assures that Congress shall have the power to enforce and implement this article by appropriate legislation.

B. Expand Access to Voting by:

- (1) Automatic voter registration, in which eligible citizens are automatically registered to vote when they interact with a government agency unless they choose not to be.
- (2) Ensuring online voter registration is available for all, creating a secure online portal where people can register to vote, as well as check and update their registration records.
- (3) Allowing same-day voter registration, early voting, and no-excuse absentee voting for those unable to register on voting day.
- (4) Also, preventing gerrymandering, removing criminal disenfranchisement laws, inhibiting voter purging (provide notice to voters before removing their names from the voter list), and increasing election security to provide safe and secure voting.

C. Implement Ranked Choice Voting



Ranked choice voting is an electoral system that allows people to vote for multiple candidates, in order of preference. It's popularity continues to increase, as [these jurisdictions](#) have currently adopted it. Instead of just choosing one candidate, you fill out the ballot saying who is your first choice, second choice, or third choice (or more as needed) for each position. The candidate with the majority (more than 50%) of first-choice votes wins.

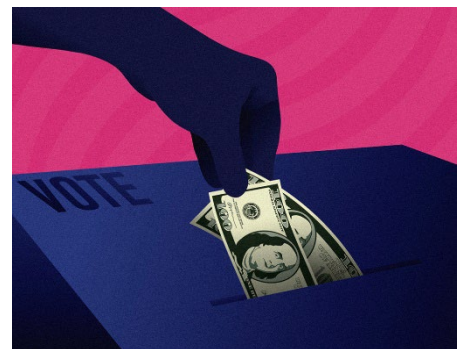
If no candidate receives a majority of first-choice votes, then it triggers a new counting process. The candidate who did the worst is eliminated, and that candidate's voters' ballots are redistributed to their second-choice pick. That process continues until there is a candidate who has won most votes.

Ranked choice voting strengthens our democracy by 1) providing voters with more choices. The two-party system often under-represents the needs of the majority and maintains partisan power. Increasing choice removes voter frustration of just choosing the lesser of the two evils and provides a more representative outcome. A [majority of voters](#) believe that a third party is necessary. 2) Ranked choice saves time and money by replacing preliminary and runoff elections. Since all the candidates are on one ballot, there would not need to be a preliminary election to narrow votes down to two candidates, nor a runoff election if neither candidate wins the majority vote. 3) Also, ranked choice promotes positive campaigning instead of negative attacks during the election cycle because candidates would also be competing for second-choice voice, so they would not be able to rely on just disparaging their main opponent.

D. Reverse "Citizens United"

Protecting our constitutional democracy from voter suppression and the undue influence of big money in politics is critical to ensuring the social, political, and economic interests of Americans. Campaign finance regulations give billionaires, multinational corporations, and shadow non-profits the power to shape our politics in ways that subvert the will of voters.

Citizens United, shorthand for a landmark 2010 Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC*, changed campaign finance and money in politics in the United States, particularly impacting independent political spending. It removed the limits on how much individuals could contribute to PACs (Political Action Committees), and allowed corporations, non-profit groups, and unions to give to PACs for the first time (also in unlimited amounts). Traditional PACs could now donate directly to a candidate's campaign fund. PACs could also generate their own media, creating TV ads promoting or attacking a candidate. We must overturn *Citizens United*.



The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, the Freedom to Vote Act, and the For the People Act are three current legislative proposals that seek to address voter access, election integrity and security, campaign finance, and ethics in the voting process.

(2) EXPAND ACCESS TO THE BUDGET

A. Reject the “Pay For” Myth to Expand the “Public Purse”

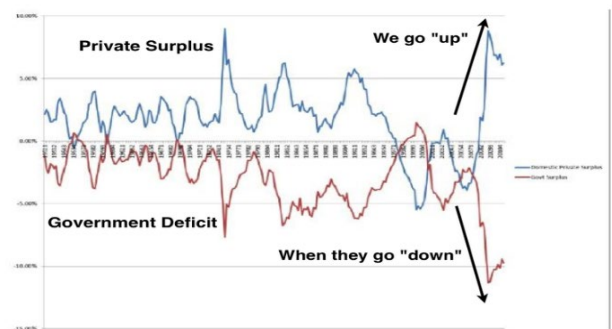
The ability of the federal government to invest in public priorities is being unnecessarily constrained by the outdated economic assumption that the U.S. government’s ability to responsibly spend is capped by how much revenue it generates in the form of taxation and borrowing. Economic research and current practices make it abundantly clear that this budget assumption is false and does not apply to the federal government. As the sovereign issuer of the nation’s currency, inflation, not revenue, is the only limit to responsible spending by the federal government, and what triggers inflation is a much more complex phenomena than simply being a function of creating too much money. As such, deficit spending is the operation by which the federal government invests in public priorities, and we need to harness the democratic power of money creation to fund the things we need.

We must increase public spending for productive purposes! The ability of the federal government to deliver on the reparative economic needs of Black America depends upon having a more accurate and robust understanding of the capacity of the federal government to responsibly deficit spend on public priorities. The misguided belief that the federal government needs to reduce deficit spending places unnecessary constraints on our public spending power and limits our policy imagination.

Deficit spending is expansionary fiscal policy, meaning that the government spends more than it receives—it is the difference between the amount of money the federal government spends into circulation and the amount of money it taxes out of circulation.

Deficit spending is “net public money creation;” it increases economic growth by providing a surplus in the nongovernment sector of the economy for productive public priorities related to job creation, health care, public education, infrastructure, and protecting the environment. More responsible deficit spending by the federal government would promote economic stability and economic growth for households, businesses, and state & local governments through lower household debt, more funding for local/state priorities, and lower local/state taxes.

Public vs. Private Balance



The federal government must utilize the power of “the public purse” in the same manner it does to bailout banks and well-connected corporations, expand the military budget, and give tax breaks to the wealthy. To accomplish this, Congress must do the following:

A1. Reject PAYGO & the Byrd Rule

PAYGO (“pay as you go”) is a House budget rule that seeks to balance the nation’s budget by requiring that tax cuts and mandatory spending increases must be offset (i.e., “paid for”) by tax increases or cuts in mandatory spending. The Byrd Rule in the Senate restricts what can be included in reconciliation legislation by stipulating that deficit spending cannot continue to rise above a 10-year window. “PAYGO” and the Byrd Rule are harmful because they unnecessarily constrain federal spending on priorities desperately needed by the American people.

A2. Change How the CBO Scores Bills

Rather than evaluating proposed legislation based upon revenue and its impact on the deficit (which is not a constraint for federal spending), the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) should be directed to evaluate new legislation for potential inflation risk, (which is the only limit on federal spending) and propose measures to mitigate such potential risk.



The House and Senate Budget Committees must hold hearings to clarify the full extent of the federal government’s spending capacity in light of recent practice and the emerging new consensus that responsible federal government spending is not capped by revenue.

Additionally, we call on the House Financial Services and the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committees to hold hearings to reassess the now discredited link between unemployment and inflation and determine whether there are more effective metrics for maintaining price stability and fighting inflation than the FED’s current reliance on interest rate policy.

A3. Remove the Debt Ceiling Limit

The “debt ceiling” is an unnecessary, arbitrary constraint that places a legal limit on the total amount of federal debt the government can accrue. For a currency issuing country like the U.S., the federal debt is not a record of the amount of money the nation owes creditors. It is instead a historic record of how many dollars the federal government has added to people’s pockets without subtracting (taxing) them away.

B. Support The Following Policies & Priorities

With an expanded view of the federal government's spending capacity ("the Budget), we seek passage of the following priorities that are federally funded and administered at the state and local level:

B1. Pass a Federal Job Guarantee

Achieving true full employment in America was a key economic policy goal of the Civil Rights Movement. The view was that unemployment creates economic insecurity and scarcity, preventing people from being able to take care of their families, forcing them into a life of crime, and stoking racial tension.

The policy objective of mainstream policymakers and their economic advisors is "maximum unemployment," not true full employment. By defining the goal as 4-5% employment, there will all be tens of millions of unemployed people, many of whom will be people of color and the poor. Reliance on this "Natural Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment" (NAIRU) is an approach to monetary policy that has been widely discredited. We should not balance the economy on the backs of the unemployed and the poor.

To remedy this, economists and civil rights leaders seek passage of federal legislation guaranteeing full employment in America through a job guarantee.

A Federal Job Guarantee is a federally funded, state and locally administered program that promises a decent paying, dignified job with full benefits at a livable wage for every American who wants a government job. This policy proposal is designed to abolish involuntary unemployment in our society by providing a public option for jobs for millions of Americans, many of whom are Black, who are not able to find meaningful employment in the private sector.

Jobs would be created to rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure, as recommended, for example, in the [\\$2.6T infrastructure improvements](#) proposed by the American Society of Civil Engineers, and the green jobs found in proposals to address our climate crisis and clean up the environment.

A public option for jobs is so critical because the private sector, as important as it is for our economy, is not able to create enough good paying jobs for every American. A Federal Job Guarantee fills this gap in the labor market by eliminating involuntary unemployment, improving wages and benefits, ending economic insecurity due to unemployment, and reducing racial scapegoating due to labor competition.

A benefit of a federal job guarantee is that it's an automatic stabilizer, which means that spending is automatically approved, just like unemployment benefits or social security, regardless of which political party is in power.

The Fight for Full Employment Legislation

Sadie Alexander



Dr. Sadie Alexander was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in economics in the United States in 1921 and the first woman to receive a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1927. She was also the first to recommend and champion a job guarantee, a concept embraced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the time. Being denied the ability to practice as an economist in the pre-Civil Rights era, Alexander believed that full employment was essential to providing economic security for Blacks and reducing racial hostility from Whites over the threat of labor competition.

Civil Rights Organizations & the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom



The NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, AFL-CIO, and the COFO created a platform agenda of activism, unity, and protection that led the way for the prominent Big Six leaders—Martin Luther King Jr., James Farmer, John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young—to organize the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Two of the ten demands for this March included a federal job program to provide “meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages,” and a national minimum wage to “give all Americans a decent standard of living.” Training and jobs for the unemployed was central to the civil rights movement, as a means of defeating poverty.

Prominent Organizations of the Civil Rights Movement

- 1909 ---> NAACP
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- 1942 ---> CORE
Congress of Racial Equality
- 1957 ---> SCLC
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- 1960 ---> SNCC
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
- 1955 ---> AFL-CIO
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
- 1961 ---> COFO
Council of Federated Organizations = NAACP, CORE, SCLC, + SNCC

7. A massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers—Negro and white—on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.

8. A national *minimum* wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living. (Government surveys show that anything less than \$2.00 an hour fails to do this.)

Coretta Scott King



Coretta Scott King mobilized [1.2 million people](#) in the mid to late 1970's for demonstrations calling for a Federal Job Guarantee. For Scott King, a job guarantee provided Blacks with economic well-being and material flourishing.

This culminated in the passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, a watered-down bill which endowed the Federal Reserve with a mandate to pursue full employment but did not guarantee the right to a job. Unemployment is tremendously damaging. Coretta Scott King went so far as to call it “economic violence.”

Since then, many economists, civil rights leaders, environment advocates, and politicians have worked for decades to develop a robust and thorough theoretical defense of a Federal Job Guarantee.

B2. Provide Free Public Healthcare for All



Free public healthcare would provide federally funded, national health care to every American who wants it regardless of income, free at the point of service, with no networks, no premiums, no deductibles, and no copays.

To address health issues impacting our communities, we must go to the source, ensuring every individual has access to healthcare. Whether contracted through private organizations or administered through public providers, free public healthcare is paid for by the government regardless of age, health status, or an individual's ability to pay. There would be no premiums or annual deductibles. Those with employer-sponsored health insurance would be allowed to opt-in, however, those who prefer to maintain their private insurance can do so.

Free public healthcare would eliminate exorbitant debt and unnecessary loss of life due to inadequate health coverage and inability to pay medical bills.

And since minorities and the poor are disproportionately affected by health care disparities, a free public option for healthcare would greatly aid in reducing those disparities. With an expanded sense of the public purse (or the federal government's spending capacity), this national health care plan can provide the same level of quality and service as private healthcare.

B3. Federally Fund Public Education & Abolish Student Loan Debt

First, we must reduce educational disparities by providing federal funding of public education Pre-K through post-secondary (including minority-serving institutions such as HBCU's, vocational schools, and trade schools). Currently, public education is funded through state and local taxes, which means that school funding varies based on the tax allocation of a given school district. Federal funding would give ALL students access to a quality primary and secondary education, free public college, and minimize the tax burden on citizens.

Second, we must abolish ALL student loan debt and not just the debt of a select few. Student loan debt has increased to \$1.73 trillion. Abolition of student loan debt would better position students economically after graduation by reducing their personal debt. No student should have to take on a debt burden in order to prepare themselves to be a productive member of society as an adult. We have the fiscal policy capacity to responsibly support this advocacy as we do government aid towards wars.

Expanding access to the Ballot and the Budget are of the utmost urgency if we want to repair and restore justice in our communities.