

6 Six Recommended Goals for the Biden-Harris Administration: *Bold Solutions that Center Workers & Unemployed People*

Now that the 2020 election season has concluded, one critical charge for the incoming Biden-Harris administration is to fight alongside the bold and energized communities that are organizing and building power for workers and unemployed people. Voters across the country came together to repudiate a decades-long, divisive economic strategy driven by xenophobia, anti-Black racism, and sexism. The Biden-Harris administration must join the efforts of these communities and prioritize enacting and enforcing policies that will deliver higher wages and benefits, safer workplaces, and the right to organize, among other reforms, to every worker in the United States.

In this document, the National Employment Law Project recommends that all actions contemplated by the Biden-Harris administration be measured against the six goals listed below. These goals should also function as guiding principles to help direct the next administration to enact bold solutions for all working people in the United States—by centering the pressing needs of underpaid Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, including immigrants.

1. Dismantle systemic racism and center workers of color in all policies and actions.
2. Build worker power.
3. Lead the country through a Just Recovery from COVID-19 and the recession.
4. Make sure policies benefit ALL workers at ALL phases of their work lives.
5. Rebuild and restore the federal government's capacity to develop and implement robust pro-worker agendas that center the needs of Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, including immigrants.
6. Govern from a place of abundance.

1

Dismantle systemic racism and center workers of color in all policies and actions.

White supremacy is baked into the very fiber of our country. The United States was founded and built by white colonial settlers on the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Black people for capitalist exploitation, and the creation of legal and political systems that created a racial hierarchy with white men at the top and Black women at the bottom.

The United States fought a civil war that only eliminated chattel slavery to preserve the Union. And after stifling the promise of freedom in the Reconstruction era, it dismantled the gains of Reconstruction and continued systemic racial oppression against Black people and all people of color in the form of Jim Crow laws and discriminatory laws for employment, education, and housing.

Despite civil rights leaders' calls for inclusion, legislators in the 1930s chose to preserve the underclass status for Black agricultural and domestic workers, thereby excluding them from the protections of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935, the Social Security Act (SSA) of 1935, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1938.

The freedom movements of the 20th Century, including the Pullman strikes, A. Philip Randolph's efforts to desegregate the workforce, and the civil rights movement led by Black activists, made jobs and freedom the rallying cry for justice. With committed organizing and mass mobilization, Black labor leaders won incremental expansions of opportunity and extensions of workplace protections, even as systemic racism and bias protected a fundamentally unjust economic system. When lawmakers did stand by Black workers, the commitments were too often temporary at best and sabotaged at worst.

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Seven decades later, Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, including immigrants, continue to unite by fighting for health and safety in every area of their lives, fighting to dismantle racist systems such as private health care and the criminal legal system, and demanding just wages, decent working conditions, and robust protections on the job, just to name a few. Workers of color are the backbone of every pro-worker movement in this country.

Together, we must acknowledge the depth of white supremacy that permeates every aspect of our society and demand that policymakers methodically enact policies and changes that go to the root cause of how racism manifests itself. To avoid repeating the mistakes in the NLRA, SSA, and FLSA excluding Black workers, we must center the needs and demands of people of color in all decisions made and any actions taken.

2

Build worker power.

Our economy is not working for far too many people in this country, with a small percentage of the population taking home an increasingly larger share of the nation's wealth. This is not an accident. For too long, Congress and presidential administrations have advanced policies that rig the economy in favor of the interests of corporations and the financial sector and against the workers who produce wealth for them.

The administration must champion policies that increase employer accountability and expand the right to all forms of organizing and collective action by workers. Over the last four decades, federal policies have greatly eroded the bargaining power of workers and instead, concentrated more power in the hands of corporations and those who already have substantial wealth and power. Giving employers more power over their workers, policymakers have also allowed many companies to shed responsibility for providing safe and just working conditions, through which workers can thrive on and off the job. They have perpetuated and worsened the racial wage and wealth gaps and contributed to the ever-increasing degradation of work and working conditions for too many.

The COVID-19 pandemic and recession—exacerbated by the inadequate wages employers pay so-called “essential” workers, the unsafe conditions employers impose on workers, and the utterly broken status of unemployment insurance programs for those who are out of work or unable to work—has caused unnecessary misery for tens of millions of people. Since the pandemic began, there has been an outpouring of public support for worker safety and health, and worker organizing for better working conditions has gained far greater visibility. The lives of human beings are more valuable than their labor—and worker health is intrinsically linked to public health. Workers are joining in solidarity not only to confront unjust employers and corporations, but also to demand robust enforceable protections of their rights to fair wages, safety, freedom from discrimination, and adequate public goods and benefits.

The Biden-Harris administration must stand shoulder to shoulder with workers who exercise their rights and endeavor to build power and demand that their government work for them, including through enforcement actions and policy reforms. The administration must champion policies that increase employer accountability and expand the right to all forms of organizing and collective action by workers.

3

Lead the country through a Just Recovery from COVID-19 and the recession.

The Trump administration made deliberate decisions in response to the pandemic that exacerbated wealth and health inequalities in the United States and caused tremendous suffering. More than [270,000](#) people have died, and of the close to [14 million](#) who have been sick, we have no idea what future health conditions they may have as a result of COVID-19. More than [25 million](#) workers have lost their jobs or experienced negative job-related consequences, and well over 160,000 businesses have [shuttered](#), with 60% of them being permanent closures.

While COVID-19 would have been a crisis even with an effective federal response, the outcomes did not have to be nearly so devastating. For example, Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness [estimates](#) that between 130,000 to 210,000 of the first 220,000 deaths would not have occurred had our response been as effective as that of other nations.

Recovery from the pandemic and recession must center the needs of underpaid workers in frontline jobs.

And as with every crisis in this country, the harm falls disproportionately on underpaid Black and Indigenous people and other workers of color, including immigrants. The fall-out of the pandemic has laid bare what we already know—institutional racism and employment discrimination have concentrated workers of color in frontline jobs where they are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 than white workers, and important protections such as paid sick days, paid leave, and adequate access to unemployment insurance are often unavailable to workers of color.

Recovery from the pandemic and recession must center the needs of underpaid workers in frontline jobs—whose health, along with the health of their families and communities, is daily endangered so that they can earn a paycheck. The Biden-Harris administration must pay particular attention to those who, because of race, age, disability, or medical condition, are more likely to become sick and perhaps die from COVID-19—and those who are shut out of the unemployment insurance system, such as undocumented workers, or who do not receive meaningful unemployment payments, because of the bad choices made by state legislatures.

4

Make sure policies benefit ALL workers at ALL phases of their work lives.

The Biden-Harris administration must prioritize the needs of workers who by virtue of race, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, ability, immigration status, disability, arrest or conviction record, or job classification, are either excluded from workplace rights and protections or prevented from enforcing their rights. Workers should be entitled to good jobs and economic security because we are all human beings worthy of dignity.

Workers deserve to support their families, thrive, and be safe on the job—and therefore in their lives—at all phases of their work lives. Young workers should not have to work for substandard wages and poor benefits just so they can “pay their dues;” workers who are between jobs should have adequate social insurance protections to maintain their economic footing while searching for suitable employment; workers should not have to choose between their jobs and their caregiving obligations, whether it be for children or older family members; and everyone should be able to retire without fearing poverty.

5

Rebuild and restore the federal government’s capacity to develop and implement robust pro-worker agendas that center the needs of Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, including immigrants.

No administration has done more to destroy faith in the capacity and integrity of the federal government than the Trump administration. The atrocities are too numerous to name, but the administration deliberately undermined the public sector at every opportunity, sabotaged important programs and entire agencies to pursue a deregulatory and racist agenda, and misused taxpayer resources with shocking abandon.

The Biden-Harris administration must boldly and aggressively work to restore not just the capacity of the federal government to serve the public, but also the public’s faith in its ability to be an agent for the common good. It must restore staff and authority to enforcement agencies across the government, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor. It must rescind harmful and racist Executive Orders, including

the so-called [Muslim ban](#), the “[religious freedom](#)” order, the recent orders banning effective diversity, equity, and inclusion [trainings](#) for federal employees and federal contractors, and an order taking away [civil service](#) protections from those federal government career employees who work on public policy.


The Biden-Harris administration must be laser-focused on promulgating new regulations and policies that center the needs of underpaid Black and Indigenous people and other people of color by paying careful attention to what workers are demanding at the grassroots level: Better wages, safer jobs, the right to organize, better healthcare, a meaningful voice at work, and aggressive protection of the environment. These should be the goals the Biden-Harris administration pursues in partnership with workers across the country.

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6

Govern from a place of abundance.

We live in a country with abundant wealth and enough resources to both support those who are struggling **and** to build an economy that works for everyone, not just the rich. The Biden-Harris administration must carry that message forward and reject any arguments toward austerity that would dampen the opportunity before us for meaningful recovery and longer-term structural change. Congress and the administration must make strategic investments in our communities across the country—and these investments will more than pay for themselves many times over in the future. The single most effective way to get our financial house in order is to create an economy where everyone can thrive.



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