

May 15, 2019

The Honorable Michael Bennett  
Bennet for America  
PO Box 44494  
Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Senator Bennet,

Congratulations on your decision to run for president. Americans deserve a robust debate about our country's future and who has a voice in shaping it. We write to you as members of the Declaration for American Democracy coalition as well as voting rights, good government, civil rights, faith, environmental, labor, and grassroots organizations representing millions of Americans committed to protecting and expanding the right to vote, ending the dominance of big money in politics, and restoring ethics and accountability to Washington.

We applaud your sponsorship of the For the People Act, and your choice to reject corporate PAC money for your campaign. Your personal decision to lead by example on these issues is an important first step in rebuilding the public's faith in our political system. Now we look forward to seeing your comprehensive plan to address the structural inequities that have denied too many people access to the ballot and silenced too many voices, while giving those with wealth and access undue influence in Washington. Our democratic institutions are under attack, and need renewal and repair.

We strongly encourage you to incorporate into your campaign platform the principles of the attached democracy reform agenda developed by the Declaration for American Democracy coalition. This agenda is reflected in the historic passage in the For the People Act, introduced as H.R. 1—the first bill of the new House Democratic majority—to signify its priority. It passed the House in March with the support of all Democratic House members. Its companion, S. 949, was recently introduced by Senators Tom Udall (D-NM) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and was cosponsored by every Democratic Senator. We encourage you to treat the policies included in these bills, and listed in the document below, as the foundation for your own democracy platform and that you explore additional new aspirational reform measures to revitalize our democracy.

In addition to proposing a specific, bold platform to combat corruption and strengthen and expand our democracy, we want to know how you'll champion these reforms on the campaign trail. We'd like to hear how you'll make your democracy revitalization plan a

central part of your campaign and build support for these policies. If elected, this platform's enactment must be your first priority in 2021.

Americans are looking for leaders who will take on our broken, entrenched campaign finance system, and who are committed to guaranteeing the absolute right of all eligible Americans access to the ballot. Your leadership and commitment to action on these issues will show voters across the country that, like them, you believe our democracy works best when it represents everyone, not just those able to unduly influence policies based solely on their power and their wealth.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the reform agenda and your plans to prioritize these pressing issues as soon as possible. We will reach out to you to schedule a meeting shortly.

Sincerely,

20/20 Vision

African American Ministers In Action

Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AkPIRG)

American Promise

Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Blue Future

Brave New Films

Call For Peace

Campaign for Accountability

Campaign for America's Future

Center for American Progress

Center for Media and Democracy

Center for Popular Democracy

Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists

Clean Elections Texas

Clean Water Action

Coalition to Preserve, Protect and Defend

Coalition to Restore Democracy

Codepink

Color of Change

Common Cause

Common Defense

Communications Workers of America

Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces  
Corporate Accountability  
Courage Campaign  
Daily Kos  
Demand Progress Education Fund  
Democracy 21  
Democracy for America  
Democracy Initiative  
Democracy Matters  
Democracy Spring  
Disciples Center for Public Witness  
Disciples Justice Action Network  
End Citizens United Action Fund  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Equal Citizens  
Food & Water Action  
Franciscan Action Network  
Friends of the Earth Action  
Generation Progress  
Get Money Out - Maryland  
Global Witness  
Greenpeace USA  
Herd on the Hill  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Indivisible  
Indivisible Kansas City  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable  
Iowa County Grassroots Citizens for Peace and Justice  
Just Foreign Policy  
League of Conservation Voters  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
LeftAction  
Main Street Alliance  
MapLight  
MAYDAY America  
MomsRising  
MoveOn  
MOVI, Money Out Voters In  
NAACP

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Bar Association  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New American Leaders  
New Mexicans for Money Out of Politics  
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)  
Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)  
Open Democracy  
Patriotic Millionaires  
Pay 2 Play  
Peace Action  
People Demanding Action  
People For the American Way  
People's Action  
Progressive Turnout Project  
Project: Outreach-Frac Sand Sentinel  
Protect Democracy  
Public Citizen  
Reclaim Our Democracy  
Revolving Door Project  
RootsAction Education Fund  
Small Planet Institute  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Stamp Stampede  
Stand Up America  
Take On Wall Street  
The All On The Line Campaign  
Tikkun/Network of Spiritual Progressives  
Truman National Security Project  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
United for Democracy Now  
United To Amend  
UnKoch My Campus  
Voices for Progress  
Voter Rights Action

Win Without War

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign

Wisconsin Grassroots Network

Women Donors Network Action (WDN Action)

Working Families Party

# Declaration for American Democracy

## Policy Platform

Together we must build a democracy where everyone participates, every vote is counted, voting rights are fully enforced, and everyone's voice is heard. We deserve to have a say in decisions that affect our lives, and to be fairly represented by elected officials who respect our democratic foundations and institutions and are responsive to our needs in order to make our lives better.

The next president of the United States should stand with Americans across the country and commit to enacting policies to address these key principles, building on the foundation of the For the People Act, H.R. 1, passed this year in the House of Representatives (and its Senate companion, S. 949).

1. **Our democracy must include the right to vote and have that vote counted.** A strong democracy is one where voting is a fundamental right, civic responsibility, and free from discriminatory rules.
2. **Our democracy must be honest.** A strong democracy is ethical, accountable, and serves the people.
3. **Our democracy must have meaningful participation.** A strong democracy is one where our influence is based on the force of ideas, not the size of our wallets.
4. **Our democracy must provide transparency into our government and our elections.** A strong democracy is one where people know who is trying to gain influence over our representatives and our votes.
5. **Our democracy must be responsive.** A strong democracy works to respond to the needs of people and their communities, building trust in governance and equity.
6. **Our democracy must uphold our checks and balances.** A strong democracy is one where the Executive is balanced by a responsible, functioning Congress and independent judiciary, in which no official, including the President, is allowed to abuse their power.

In addition to proposing a specific, bold platform to combat corruption and strengthen and expand our democracy, leaders must champion these reforms on the campaign trail. Leaders must make democracy revitalization plans a central part of their campaign and build support for these policies. If elected, this platform's enactment must be the next president's first priority in 2021.

## **Our democracy must include the right to vote and have that vote counted.**

A strong democracy is one where voting is a fundamental right, civic responsibility, and free from discriminatory rules. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively with Congress to pass legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act and other policies that incentivize electoral participation.

This should include same-day and automatic voter registration, statehood for Washington, D.C, improving access to polling locations, early voting, restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated people, the option to vote by mail, and providing federal resources to local election administrators to ensure our elections are secure from the national security threat of hacking and interference by hostile foreign powers and other nefarious actors, among other things.

For additional policies to expand and protect the right to vote, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.

## **Our democracy must be honest.**

A strong democracy is ethical, accountable, and serves the people. Americans need to trust that their representatives in Congress or the executive branch are working in the best interest of all Americans, not themselves or the people who fund their campaigns. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively with Congress to pass legislation that strengthens and expands federal ethics rules and oversight while reducing the appearance or possibility of corruption of Congress and executive branch officials.

This should include policies to give federal ethics watchdogs more resources and authority, strengthen disclosure and conflict-of-interest rules for the executive branch and Congress, ensure those rules apply to the president and vice president, [note: much of this document uses lower case] and bolster anti-corruption and honest services laws, among other anti-corruption measures to safeguard public trust.

For additional policies to ensure ethics and accountability in Washington, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.

## **Our democracy must have meaningful participation.**

A strong democracy is one where our influence is based on the force of ideas, not the size of our wallets. Our voices and communities should be heard as loudly in our elections and policymaking as wealthy donors and corporate interests that have been unduly influencing our government. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively with Congress to end the dominance of big money in politics, empower and incentivize small-dollar fundraising, and clarify and strengthen oversight of our campaign finance rules.

This should include a constitutional amendment to allow states and Congress to set reasonable limits on what money can be raised and spent to influence our elections and a small-donor public financing program that will give everyday Americans an ability to support the candidate of their choice while allowing candidates with support from their communities to run for office without relying on wealthy special interests. This platform should also include policies to strengthen laws prohibiting foreign money in politics, clear rules on how outside groups can engage in our elections, and a plan to ensure our campaign finance laws are being enforced.

For additional policies to address our broken campaign finance system and ensure oversight and accountability, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.

## **Our democracy must provide transparency into our government and our elections.**

A strong democracy is one where people know who is trying to gain influence over our representatives and our votes. Our government and those trying to influence it should be open, transparent, and accountable. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively with Congress to require more transparency in political spending and ethics and spending decisions being made by the federal government.

This should include federal agency rulemaking to mandate disclosure of corporate spending in our elections, more stringent disclosure requirements for politically-active nonprofit groups, more information about online advertising (including efforts to determine if hostile foreign powers are influencing American voters), and easy access to federal ethics and financial disclosure forms.

For additional policies to ensure our democracy is open and transparent, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.

## **Our democracy must be responsive.**

A strong democracy works to respond to the needs of people and their communities, building trust in governance and equity. Our government and judicial system should be reflective of our communities and responsive to it. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively with Congress to reduce the power of lobbyists and corporate influence in Congress and the executive branch, as well as nominate and approve judges who believe our Constitution protects all of us, not just the wealthy and well-connected, and work to ensure a structurally functioning Congress.

This should include policies that expand the cooling-off period for members of Congress and federal officials to become lobbyists, limit the outsized role played by lobbyists in campaigns, expand the definition of lobbyist to eliminate loopholes, and prevent federal officials from profiting off their public service.

For additional policies to ensure government is responsive to its people, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.

## **Our democracy must uphold our checks and balances.**

A strong democracy is one where the Executive is balanced by a responsible Congress and independent judiciary, in which no elected or appointed official, including the president, is allowed to abuse their power. The president should endorse, prioritize, and work aggressively to implement policies that restore the balance between the branches and demonstrate that the president is not above the law.

This should include committing to policies that ensure the president does not abuse the powers of government to settle political scores or place themselves or their friends and family above the law. The president must also respect Congress's constitutional role in decisions about going to war and approving nominees, and not invoke emergency powers under improper pretenses to sideline Congress.

For additional policies to ensure our elected officials are committed to the rule of law, please see the policy addendum at the end of this document.



# Policy Addendum

The For the People Act that passed the House this year with unanimous Democratic sponsorship and its Senate companion is supported by every Democratic lawmaker. This sweeping legislation provides an important foundation to develop a democracy and ethics reform platform. Below are various policies that could be included as the basic outline of any plan aimed at reducing the power of big money, making it easier to vote, and ensuring public officials are working in the public interest. We encourage presidential candidates to treat the policies included in these bills, and listed in the document below, as the foundation for a democracy platform and that candidates explore additional new aspirational reform measures to revitalize our democracy. In addition, we expect that presidential candidates will campaign on, publicize, and regularly discuss their positions on fixing our system.

## **1. Our democracy must include the right to vote and have that vote counted.**

- Restore and reauthorize the Voting Rights Act.
- Enact automatic, online, and same-day voter registration.
- Allow the option to vote by mail.
- Ensure voting rights restoration for formerly-incarcerated persons.
- Support policies to help ensure no individual waits longer than 30 minutes to vote.
- Require paid time off for voting during early voting periods or on Election Day, coupled with stronger enforcement mechanisms and the establishment of private rights of action against employers for violations.
- Require early voting.
- Implement voter pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds.
- Require districts to be drawn by independent redistricting commissions using criteria that ensure legislators will represent the will of the voters and require transparency and public participation in the process.
- Provide grants to states to improve voter participation with flexible registration opportunities; early voting; improved voting system security; and automatic voter registration.
- Ensure polling place accessibility and develop uniform ballot standards and guidance for polling place resources.
- Protect access to the ballot by limiting states' ability to remove voters from the rolls through purging, caging, or interstate cross-checks; and prohibit the use of false information to discourage voting.
- Require the Director of National Intelligence to determine if a foreign government interfered in a federal election within a reasonable amount of time after every election and impose sanctions if necessary.
- Reauthorize and fully fund the Election Assistance Commission and require it to develop best practices for states to prevent and deter voting rights violations and model training programs and grants for poll worker recruitment.
- Prohibit voting systems without a voter-verified paper record.
- Demand mandatory audits of voting systems and grants to conduct them.

- Prohibit a state's chief election administration official from taking part in political campaigns.
- Require states to obtain declaratory judgment or preclearance that any new congressional map does not discriminate on account of race or color in contravention of the Voting Rights Act.
- Abolish the Electoral College and provide for direct election of the president.
- Ensure a fair and accurate census and prohibit the Department of Commerce from implementing any major operational design that has not been researched, studied, and tested for a period of not less than three years before the date on which the applicable census occurs.
- Ensure that District of Columbia residents have full congressional voting rights and self-government, which only statehood can provide.

## **2. Our Democracy must be honest.**

- Make the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) permanent, grant it subpoena power, and establish a similar office for the Senate.
- Strengthen the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) and ensure the director may only be removed pursuant to a finding by the president of neglect of duty or malfeasance in office.
- Give the Office of Special Counsel timely access to material available to an agency that relates to an investigation, review, or inquiry relating to whistle-blower allegations or prohibited personnel practices.
- Require executive branch ethics waivers to be made public on agency websites.
- Require agencies to report any conflicts of interest for the president and senior administration officials during the rule-making process.
- Increase disclosure of Members of Congress's personal finances to include office expenses, gift reports, and foreign travel.
- Make Members of Congress's voting records more accessible online.
- Require committees to post public hearings and markup schedules, testimony, and audio/video bill language online.
- Require audio and video of Supreme Court proceedings to be available online.
- Require a code of ethics for the Supreme Court.
- Strengthen the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to require all completed FOIA requests to be available online and fully fund and staff FOIA offices.
- Require public disclosure of White House visitor information, including records of visitors to any location where the president or vice president regularly conducts official business.
- Prohibit the president from holding assets considered a disqualifying financial interest under applicable criminal code – but allow such assets to be put in blind trust.
- Require the president, vice president, and Members of Congress to file a financial disclosure report by May 15 of the year in which the individual assumes office or within 30 days, whichever is later.
- Require the president and vice president to disclose and divest any potential conflicts of interest and require presidential appointees to recuse in any specific matters involving the president's financial conflicts of interest.
- Require the president to submit tax returns to OGE, including the previous three years' worth of returns before assuming office; OGE must make returns publicly available on the Internet.
- Require the president to report income/assets/liabilities owed to foreign country where U.S. is negotiating trade/modifying tariff treatment/etc.

- Require the president to disclose private business transactions with foreign governments during the previous 10 years; require disclosure each month thereafter regarding private business transactions between businesses affiliated with the president and foreign governments.
- Prohibit executive branch officials from benefitting from government matters where the president has a financial interest.
- Limit taxpayer funds for non-commercial flights for cabinet officials.
- Prohibit executive branch officials from benefitting from government matters where the president has a financial interest.
- Prohibit Members of Congress from serving on for-profit boards, trading in individual stocks, and using their official positions to further the financial interests of themselves or their immediate family members.
- Expand income and asset disclosure requirements in the Ethics in Government Act to include closely-held corporate entities that are controlled by filers.
- Require the president, vice president, and immediate family members to reimburse Treasury for costs pertaining to stay at hotels or establishments where they have ownership or financial interests.
- Prohibit agencies from spending government funds for employee lodging at establishments owned by public officials or relatives.
- Provide for intelligence assessment regarding efforts of foreign powers to gain influence through the financial interests of the president and family members.
- Strengthen anti-corruption/honest services/illegal gratuities laws. For example, modify the definition of “official act” for purposes of bribery of public officials; broaden the definition of official act to include the personal and substantial participation through, or investigation of, a question, matter, cause, suit, proceeding, or controversy.
- Codify longstanding norms concerning White House interference with independent executive agencies and functions such as the Department of Justice and the FBI.

### **3. Our democracy must have meaningful participation**

- Pass a constitutional amendment authorizing Congress and the states to set reasonable limits on raising and spending of money to influence elections; grant Congress AND states authority to distinguish between natural persons and corporations/artificial entities for purposes of campaign spending.
- Create a small-donor public financing system for House and Senate races that can include innovative programs like matching funds, vouchers, tax credits, and other solutions.
- Repair and modernize the presidential public financing program by establishing a matching fund program for qualified candidates.
- Reconstitute or restructure the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to break the current gridlock and ensure the agency is upholding our campaign finance laws and has the authority to hold violators accountable.
- Revise the definition of coordination to ensure that super PACs do not operate as arms of a candidate’s campaign.
- Close loopholes that allow foreign money into our elections, including through U.S. corporations that are partially or wholly owned by foreign interests.

### **4. Our democracy must provide transparency into our government and our elections.**

- Establish new reporting requirements for Senate-confirmed and other political appointees to disclose whether they have solicited or contributed funds for political purposes to PACs, trade associations, and certain nonprofits.
- Require disclosure of large donors to nonprofits that intervene or participate in political campaigns, such as a politically-active 501(c)(4) organization, to ensure voters know who is behind their spending.
- Require presidential inauguration committees to disclose their expenditures and restrict funds being used on purposes unrelated to the inauguration.
- Enhance transparency and disclosure for online political advertisements to ensure digital ad spending is at least as transparent as requirements for broadcast advertisements.
- Require shareholder authorization for certain political expenditures by public companies; require certain expenditures to require a board vote; and provide investors and the public with more information about political spending.
- Require already public information about nonprofits to be put online in a searchable, usable format.
- Permit television cameras in all open sessions of the Supreme Court unless it decides by a majority vote that such coverage would violate the due process rights of any parties involved.
- Promulgate rulemaking by the Securities and Exchange Commission to require more disclosure of political spending and donations.
- Promulgate rulemaking by the Internal Revenue Service to bring clarity to rules governing 501(c) political activity.
- Issue an executive order requiring government contractors to disclose all of their political spending.
- Require the Government Publishing Office to make congressionally-mandated reports, such as those from the Congressional Research Office, available online.
- Make government data machine readable and in an open format.
- Require public disclosure of deferred prosecution agreements.
- Require public corporations to disclose how much money they give to industry associations.
- Require financial disclosure forms of senior government officials and members of Congress to be better accessible for public review.
- Address recordkeeping requirements for apps such as "Signal" that do not preserve records.

## **5. Our democracy must be responsive.**

- Establish a 5-year ban on individuals appointed to Executive Schedule positions, and senior Congressional staff, from engaging in lobbying activities at the federal level.
- Enact a lifetime lobbying ban on former Members of Congress.
- Revise the definition of lobbyist to ensure those who provide paid strategic advice in support of a lobbyist contract must register as lobbyists and lower the threshold of hours required to trigger lobbying registration.
- Amend the Lobbying Disclosure Act to provide more information (e.g., specific office lobbied, not just "House" or "Senate;" more information about what was asked of a Member of Congress; and information about how a lobbyist urged an office to vote).
- Ban communications by a former political appointee with intent to influence officers or employees at their former executive branch agency or department.
- Ensure that executive branch officials do not receive incentive "bonuses" from private sector employees for entering government service.

- Require senior financial services regulators to recuse themselves from any official actions that directly or substantially benefit the former employers or clients for whom they worked in the previous two years.
- Prohibit political appointees from taking career positions in the civil service for two years after the individual separates from a political position.
- Restrict the total amount of money a lobbyist can donate to, bundle, or solicit for a member of Congress or congressional candidate to the individual contribution limit (currently set at \$2,800 per election).
- Ban contributions to congressional committee members from entities under the committee's jurisdiction; consider also banning members of Congress and congressional candidates from soliciting contributions from lobbyists while Congress is in session.
- Close a loophole in the Foreign Agent Registration Act by eliminating a provision that allows persons to avoid registering as foreign agents if they register under the Lobbying Disclosure Act.
- Grant more independence for agency Offices of Civil Rights to investigate and prosecute wrongdoers.
- Create an Office of Equity (similar to an Office of Governmental Ethics) to examine who benefits from expenditures and policies, through an equity lens.
- Ensure all branches of government can function as intended, potentially including reforming the Senate's processes and the size and structure of the Supreme Court.

## **6. Our democracy must uphold our checks and balances.**

- Prevent political interference in applying the law by committing to support equal application of the law and guarantee the independence of the Department of Justice, FBI, and other law enforcement agencies. The president should prevent improper White House interference and involvement in specific law enforcement matters and report to Congress and the public on contacts between the White House and agencies in specific cases.
- Restore Congress's role in decisions of war by making a transparent case to the public, providing the legal reasons for using military force, and consulting with and seeking approval from Congress before proactively launching new conflict.
- The president must use emergency powers responsibly by respecting Congress's authority as a coequal branch, and not use emergency powers to circumvent the normal political process. Restore congressional power by requiring congressional approval for emergencies that invoke significant authorities.
- The president must respect the Constitution by seeking and obtaining Senate approval for qualified nominees. The president should not appoint family members to key positions and should select people based on merit.
- Checks should be placed on the presidential pardon power so that presidents do not use this power to place themselves above the law or dangle the prospect for unlawful purposes.
- Ensure the independence of civil servants, and ensure that a president does not intimidate, discriminate, or retaliate against them based on political affiliation or work in prior administrations.
- Ensure that the security clearance process is used for national security purposes, not to exercise political favor or retribution.
- Protect the independence of the judiciary and ensure that a president nominates justices who will protect an inclusive democracy. The president also should commit to ensuring that Executive branch officials comply with court orders.