



# 14 Policy Priorities to Heal the Nation: A Moral and Economic Agenda for the First 100 Days



“If America does not address what’s happening with visionary social and economic policy, the health and well-being of the nation is at stake....What we need is long-term economic policy that establishes justice, promotes the general welfare, rejects decades of austerity and builds strong social programs that lift society from below.”

*Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Shailly Gupta Barnes and Josh Bivens, Moral Policy = Good Economics*

On behalf of the 140 million poor and low-income people in the country, the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival – and our 45 state coordinating committees, thousands of religious leaders, scholars, economists, advocates and hundreds of supporting organizations – insists that the following policies from the Poor People’s Jubilee Platform take precedence during the first 50-100 days of the new administration and 117th Congress.

## Our 14 Policy Priorities:

### 1. Enact comprehensive, free and just COVID-19 relief:

This relief must prioritize the needs of essential workers, people of color and poor and low-income people who have been hit hardest in this pandemic, including:

- Mandate the collection, monitoring and reporting of the impact of the pandemic by race, ethnicity income, occupation and geography and in high risk congregate settings
- Equitable and free COVID-19 testing, treatment and quality care, including mental health care and safely tested vaccines, regardless of income, age, ability, documentation status, insured status or any other factor; first access to the vaccines must be guaranteed to low-wage frontline workers, as well as health workers, the elderly and most vulnerable
- A targeted plan to guarantee access and education around the safety and efficacy of vaccines, especially for poor and low-income communities
- A guaranteed and adequate income, including rapid and direct payments to all low-wage and temporary workers for the duration of the crisis



- A national rent freeze and mortgage moratorium, as well as a national moratorium on utilities' shut offs, without credit penalties
- Increase the impact of food and economic security programs like SNAP, WIC, CTC and EITC by raising the minimum allocations and expanding eligibility
- Resources to keep all rural hospitals and community health centers open, with an infusion of resources to Indian Health Services
- Permanent protections for Social Security, SSI, SSDI, Medicare and Medicaid
- Emergency OSHA standards for health workers, first responders and anyone else in frontline positions
- Protections for people in mental health facilities, prisons, detention centers, juvenile detention centers and other congregate settings
- Suspension of all CBP and ICE enforcement and ensuring all emergency provisions are made available to immigrants, including undocumented people
- Increased support for public schools to provide continuous, equitable and quality remote learning access for the duration of any school closures, including for children with disabilities, and for schools to continue to provide social services for qualifying children and families
- Student debt relief
- These measures must remain in place until the economy recovers from the bottom up and we are guaranteed health care, housing, and adequate incomes for all.

## **2. Guarantee quality health care for all, regardless of any pre-existing conditions:**

This begins with expanding Medicaid in every state, securing Medicare, working towards enacting a public universal health care option and building up our public health infrastructure. It also includes fully funding and expanding Indian Health Services and ensuring quality health care for those who are incarcerated and detained.

## **3. Raise the minimum wage to \$15 / hour immediately:**

Increase the minimum wage immediately to \$15 / hour and then annually until it reaches a true housing wage (estimated at \$23 / hour in 2018). Guarantee the right to form and join unions to all workers.

## **4. Update the poverty measure:**

A new measure must replace the current poverty line to accurately reflect current conditions of poverty and economic insecurity. The new measure must take into account race, age, familial status, ability, geography and sexual orientation and establish a new basis for eligibility, appropriations and allocations of resources.

## **5. Guarantee quality housing for all:**

Expand public and affordable housing and rental assistance. Stop all foreclosures and evictions immediately; enact a rent freeze, including stopping all increases in rent; and cancel rent and mortgage payments that cannot be paid. Move the burden of proof off of renters and households that are facing eviction to the financial interests that are seeking evictions.



## **6. Enact a federal jobs program to build up investments, infrastructure, public institutions, climate resilience, energy efficiency and socially beneficial industries and jobs in poor and low-income communities:**

Prioritize rural and urban areas that have been hit by deindustrialization, climate disasters and economic crisis. Invest in:

- socially beneficial sectors (care economy, health care, long-term care, teaching, service sectors)
- environmentally sustainable infrastructure jobs that expand and retrofit public and affordable housing, water / sanitation systems, public transit, utilities / broadband access, and sustainable food production and distribution
- expand health care and public health infrastructure, training and capacity, including rural hospitals and community care clinics, nursing capacity, EMT, long-term care, mental health and substance abuse
- convert vacant properties into affordable public housing
- repair and retrofit schools to be energy efficient and climate resilient and otherwise build up teaching and school capacity
- cultural training and production of art, music and cultural work
- training and placement in ICT, R/D and automation sectors

Ensure that this expanded infrastructure is publicly held for the common good, rather than corporate and private profit.

## **7. Protect and expand voting rights and civil rights:**

This includes:

- a restoration of the Voting Rights Act and a pre-clearance formula that applies to formerly covered VRA jurisdictions as well as any states that have passed voter suppression laws since 2013
- making Election Day a holiday
- ensuring the formerly and currently incarcerated the right to vote
- ensuring a comprehensive Census count
- examining the need to expand the Supreme Court
- setting an aggressive plan to appoint federal judges
- appointing an attorney general with a fully staffed and committed Civil Rights Division
- extending statehood to Washington D.C.
- police and criminal justice reform based on the demands of grassroots organizations and communities, including this Campaign, who are most egregiously impacted by police violence, mass incarceration and abuses of police power

## **8. Guarantee safe, quality and equitable public education, with supports for protection against re-segregation:**

Increase public education funding at all levels, especially for poor and low-income students and communities. This includes additional resources for public schools to provide:

- online and remote learning to all students
- social programs and services to poor families



- increased support for students with disabilities and ESL programs
- teacher / admin support
- infrastructure / technology upgrades
- arts / cultural / extracurricular programs.

This also encompasses 100% student debt relief for poor and low-income borrowers, proportionally less debt relief with higher incomes, as well as federal resources to ensure that 2-4 year colleges, technical programs and higher education can be free for everyone who wants to attend.

## **9. Comprehensive and just immigration reform:**

End the building of the southern wall, demilitarize immigration / border enforcement and repeal mandatory detention, deportation, child detention and family separation. Establish a special task force to identify and reunite families. Ensure regular and timely access to legal documentation and residency. Make immigrants eligible for all public welfare and social programs.

## **10. Ensure all of the rights of indigenous peoples:**

Protect the rights and sovereignty of First Nations, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, including the free expression of religion, sacred lands and practices. This includes protecting Oak Flats, the sacred lands of the Apache people in Arizona, from being destroyed and the water source contaminated by the extractive mining company, Resolution Copper. This devastation will prevent the Apache Stronghold from exercising their right to the free expression of their religion and must be stopped immediately.

## **11. Enact fair taxes:**

Enact fair taxes on the wealthy, corporation and Wall Street by: repealing the 2017 tax law provisions that reduced the top marginal tax rate, slashed the corporate tax rate and allowed for deductions on pass-through business incomes; instituting a wealth tax and implementing the other tax provisions from the Poor People's Jubilee Platform.

## **12. Use the power of executive orders:**

Use the power of executive orders to meet these demands. This means reversing all executive orders of the previous administration that have exacerbated systemic racism, poverty, the denial of health care, unjust immigration enforcement, and climate devastation. It also means issuing new executive orders, especially around debt relief for those who cannot pay them, including medical debt, housing debt, water / utilities debt and student debt; relieving municipal debt and bonds for local and state governments in fiscal crisis; and waiving all interest payments.



### 13. Redirect the bloated Pentagon budget towards these priorities as matters of national security:

These resources must be moved away from the war economy and put to use to fight COVID-19 and poverty, invest in health care, jobs, infrastructure, education and more. This also includes ending the provision of military grade equipment and training to local and state law enforcement.

### 14. Work with the Poor People's Campaign to establish a permanent Presidential Council to advocate for this bold agenda.

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**We are encouraged by the commitment of President-elect Biden to take these issues seriously.** When he joined the Moral Monday Mass Assembly on the voting power of the poor on September 14 in front of over 1 million viewers, Biden said that under his presidency, “ending poverty will not just be an aspiration, it will be a theory of change — to build a new economy that includes everyone, where we reward hard work, we care for the most vulnerable among us, we release the potential of all our children, and protect the planet.” **(Watch President-elect Biden's statement from September 14, 2020 and also his and Vice President-elect Harris statements at the Poor People's Campaign's Moral Action Congress in 2019.)**



**This is a reconstruction and restoration agenda that, when implemented, can repair and transform the lives of people of every race, ethnicity, age, sexual and gender orientation, who have been suffering unjustly, for far too long.** Poor and low-income people, moral and religious leaders, advocates, progressive economists and public health experts hold this agenda as necessary for the true healing of the nation. Indeed, the pre-existing problems of poverty, economic insecurity and systemic racism, combined with the gross impact of COVID-19 on poor and low-income people from Appalachia to Alabama, Michigan to Mississippi, California to the Carolinas, necessitates a bold, moral and Constitutionally consistent agenda that can heal the great wounds in the body and soul of America.

**The policy priorities for the first 50-100 days of the Biden/Harris Administration must lift from the bottom and take seriously the costs of inequality.** After all, every year, we lose \$1 trillion to child poverty costs and \$2.6 trillion in lost earnings from gender and racial wage gaps; we have lost \$1.3 trillion in government revenue by lowering the corporate tax rate in 2017 and \$6.4 trillion in endless wars; inaction on climate change may cost close to \$3.3 trillion annually; and 250,000 people die from poverty and inequality every year. And the cumulative financial costs of the pandemic alone are estimated to be \$16 trillion.

**These costs are threats to genuine democracy in this country. The health, healing and well-being of the nation depends on concretely and expeditiously addressing policy-based systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation and the denial of health care, militarism and the false narratives of religious and white nationalism.** When left unaddressed, these narratives divide and pit us against each other, while giving rise to a modern form of economic tyranny for the 140 million people who are poor



or one emergency away from being poor in the wealthiest country in human history. We cannot heal by refusing to address poverty, blaming the poor, or through the failed approach of neoliberalism and austerity.

**The priorities above are Constitutionally consistent, morally defensible and economically sane.** They come out of the lives, struggles, agency and insights of the 140 million and their moral, economic and legal allies. They embody a politics of love, justice and truth that can defeat the politics of death, heal the nation and bring us down the path towards genuine democracy. Rather than the puny politics of right or left, we must be guided by a politics of what is right or wrong.

**We have been organizing around these priorities for the past several years and will continue to do so until they are met. We who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes.**



**Poor People's Campaign**  
A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

