

# THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY PRIORITIES FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION



## The Road Ahead: Guidance for the Biden-Harris Administration on Policy Priorities for Economic and Social Inclusion

On January 19, 2021, Inauguration Day eve, the NYU School of Professional Studies (NYU SPS) and its Committee on Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging, Equity and Accessibility (IDBEA) hosted a forum where NYU faculty and industry experts from various disciplines offered guidance to the Biden-Harris administration.<sup>1</sup> The policy areas highlighted by the participants provide a roadmap to furthering social justice under the administration through public policy.

### Memo Highlights

**Climate Change** - Focus federal incentives and direct investment in areas related to clean energy technology, battery storage, infrastructure to support industrial applications of electric vehicles, and carbon capture.

**Housing Crisis** - Promote a multi-pronged approach including expansion of low income housing tax credits, greater funding for the housing choice voucher program, incentivizing developers to create more affordable housing, and zoning reform legislation.

**Credibility of the Press** - Create a regulatory framework for managing the epidemic of misinformation on social media, partner with Big Tech on repressing the virality of false information, pass in-state legislative protections for journalists, and diversify the newsroom.

**Inclusive Leadership** - Reset U.S. moral leadership on the global stage.

**Travel Industry** - Distribute vaccines across borders and all population segments and re-establish the U.S. as welcoming to all communities.

**Education Reform** - Amplify leadership voices that are grounded in research and practical experience and encourage the close partnership between federal, state, and local governments.

### Moving Beyond Political Will for Climate Change

Addressing the climate crisis has been identified as an immediate priority by the Biden-Harris administration. On his first official day in office, President Biden signed an executive order to have the United States rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement. The plans of the new administration are comprehensive and bold, including a commitment to a decarbonized electricity system by 2035 and net-zero emissions by 2050. According to Dr. Carolyn Kissane, the Academic Director and Clinical Professor at the Center for Global Affairs, these ambitions will require a heavy investment in infrastructure - "these plans require investments in new infrastructure—clean energy technologies, battery storage, electrical vehicles, carbon capture storage... a lot of the technology is available, but must be moved into our system." While the political will is evident, Dr. Kissane notes, the economic will needs to be present in order to put the money forward necessary for such an ambitious agenda.

### A Multi-Pronged Approach to Addressing the Housing Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a recalcitrant affordable housing crisis in the United States. The loss of jobs and income displacement has resulted in an estimated 30-40 million Americans facing eviction or foreclosure on their homes. In recognition of the need to provide some temporary relief, the Biden administration signed an executive order extending the nationwide ban on evictions and foreclosures, though it only applies to a subset of households. This temporary relief must be followed by a multi-pronged approach to addressing fairness and equity in housing more generally. Dr. Dustin Jones, Academic Director of the US Graduate Programs and a Clinical Assistant Professor of the Schack Institute of Real Estate, remarked on the urgency for the Biden administration to reinstate the housing rules and regulations that were rolled back under the prior administration. So much of housing policy is determined at the local level that Dr. Jones argues the most effective way for the federal government to influence this area is through the power of the purse. To receive funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Dr. Jones recommends that cities must once again be held accountable for tracking discriminatory housing

<sup>1</sup>Learn more about [IDBEA research and community engagement programming](#) at the NYU School of Professional Studies.

practices within their districts. In addition, Dr. Jones advocates for an expansion of low income housing tax credits, greater funding for the housing choice voucher program, and incentivizing developers to create more affordable housing. He also highlights new proposed zoning reform legislation: “[T]here are some very bold proposals... tying zoning reform to federal dollars. So, if you want HUD for community development in your city, or if you want infrastructure dollars from the federal government to improve your roads, highways, and other transportation, you need to look at zoning. And that is a very unique approach to incentivizing cities.”

The current housing crisis also requires that we think about real estate reform more broadly. Ken McIntyre, CEO of the Real Estate Executive Council, notes “Generally they [real estate firms] think about people, they think about pipeline, they think about talent, they think about what we refer to as a workforce, but there’s so much more to diversity ... there’s diversity in where you spend your money as a company, as a municipality, as a government.”

### **Re-Establishing the Credibility of the Press**

Misinformation in public discourse has been worsened by attacks on the press, which performs several critical functions in democratic societies, including serving as a watchdog over private and government activities, a check on abuses of power, and a source for credible information. As Dr. Jennifer Scott, Clinical Assistant Professor at the Division of Programs in Business, stated: “If we want to move forward in a society that is pluralistic and inclusive, that generates civil discourse, we have to look at where the press is and we have to look at the administration working to restore the role and responsibilities of the press in our democracy.” According to Dr. Scott, this work includes creating a regulatory framework for managing the epidemic of misinformation on social media, partnering with tech companies on repressing the virality of false information, and instating legislative protections for journalists.

Part of the work of re-establishing the credibility of the media across the electorate also requires ensuring the diversity of the newsroom itself. Ms. Arianna Davis, an adjunct instructor at the Center for Publishing, warned that the goodwill towards diversity initiatives may not last. “Everyone is committing to doing better; they may hire a few people and then go back to business as usual. So, I think what we need to see happen is more official inclusion and diversity, rules or efforts or campaigns put in place.”

### **A New Kind of Inclusive Leadership**

The polarization and divisiveness that is evident throughout the country requires a new kind of civic leadership discourse from the Biden administration—one that protects and promotes dialogue. Raul Sanchez, Clinical Assistant Professor at the English Language Institute, highlights the careful and intentional use of language that is vital to this effort. “Language plays an important role in how we construct reality. [T]he phrase ‘nation of immigrants’ was removed from the mission statement of our Citizenship and Immigration Services [by the previous administration], which President elect Biden has vowed to return...these things are very important. We want to make sure the language we use is inclusive.” According to Mr. Sanchez, this new inclusive leadership posture is also necessary on a global stage, which the U.S. can begin to demonstrate by reentering the World Health Organization, joining an international vaccine consortium, and playing a leading role in dealing with the current global COVID-19 health crisis.

### **Reigniting the Travel Industry**

Although the pandemic has left virtually no industry untouched, few have been as hard-hit as the travel and tourism industry. From March 2020 through the end of 2020, the pandemic has resulted in \$492 billion in cumulative losses for the U.S. travel economy and an unprecedented 42% annual decline from 2019. Reigniting the travel and tourism industry is integrally tied to the global vaccine roll out. As John Tanzella, the President and CEO of International LGBTQ+ Travel Association, stated, “[T]he real key to coming back to life is a vaccine. It must be widely distributed amongst all people and all segments of the country.” Beyond the vaccination, Mr. Tanzanella notes the repair work required of the Biden administration to make the United States an inclusive travel destination. “We [saw] more and more over the last four years ... the [web] traffic of looking at things to do in America ... decreased every year. ... The interest of particularly ... minority communities, they don’t really want to go somewhere [that has a] President [who] is feeling hatred toward our communities.”

### **Education Reform Grounded in Research and Experience**

Like the travel industry, educational institutions have weathered enormous disruption. Virtually overnight, K-12 schools and universities pivoted to an exclusively online modality of instruction. As a result, we have seen previous gross educational inequities further exacerbated by the digital divide. For communities of color, which were already at a systemic disadvantage when it came to educational opportunities, the pandemic has pushed them even further behind. To address this educational crisis requires leadership that is grounded in research and practical experience. Dr. Sonya Anderson, President of Thrive Chicago, explains, “I cannot emphasize enough, quite frankly, how important it is to have folks who really understand the issues on the ground, particularly in the K-12 sector, understand the issues and challenges that young people face everyday... who really have a keen understanding of issues around race, class, gender, and diversity, and the impact and the ways that those things show up in schools every single day.” Dr. Anderson is hopeful that the Biden administration will work closely with state and local governments on educational reform given the highly decentralized nature of the educational system in the United States.