

Build Back Better Part 2  
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There is a division of opinion on what constitutes "infrastructure." The common definition has to do with the brick and mortar elements that make society possible: roads, bridges, transportation, water systems, and energy. There is no doubt that poor infrastructure of this sort makes for unhappy citizens. Potholes are a nuisance and can harm vehicles. But lead in water from rusting pipes can damage the health and brains of everybody. Neglected railroads can cause massive accidents and death tolls. Bridges can collapse. Subways can flood. The Infrastructure Act addresses these things. There is at least some bipartisan support for passing this bill.

But a country's infrastructure also includes the lives of the citizens themselves. For a government to be trusted by its citizens, there must be evidence of legislation that makes lives not only better, but in some cases, possible. For governments to be essential, citizens depend on fairness: laws, jobs, amenities (housing and food), education, health, care for the needy unserved.

Most well-developed countries, mostly democracies, have extensive social nets that address all of these issues. The United States is an outlier in this case. These amenities are readily available to the upper classes; partially available to the working classes; and least addressed for the neediest, the poor and people of color. A visit to an Indian Reservation or to the Mississippi Delta or West Virginia will verify this.

Previous presidents and Congresses contributed to the better lives of our citizens. During the expansion of the country, the government provided land in the Homestead Act which encouraged pioneers to settle and farm the land (not available in Europe). Lincoln ended the system of slavery. Congress passed an act guaranteeing free education from elementary through high school to every child living here. Teddy Roosevelt established national parks to preserve our treasures forever for the people. He also introduced the badly needed clean food and drug laws. President Nixon (surprise) promoted environmental protection for air and water.

The 21st amendment finally included women among those who could vote, and President Johnson pushed for voting rights for the Black population, against great pushback.

President Biden is the latest incarnation of a president with a broad vision of making our republic better. He is addressing issues that have been ignored for almost a century, including public health, welfare, voting rights, and a spate of other programs that are badly needed. They fall into several basic categories:

Children and Caregiving. If women are to return to work after the pandemic shutdowns, they can do so only if money is poured into childcare (very neglected profession) and care for the elderly and sick. Those double responsibilities fall on women and have not yet been addressed.

Affordable Health Care. Unlike health care in Europe, our creaky system does not cover all. The elderly who need care, drugs, eye care, and hearing care have no insurance for it. Prescription costs should be negotiated by the government. The drug pandemic needs national attention, involving policing and government remedies, not just punishment. Maternal mortality in the unserved population will finally be addressed. There needs to be repair of the damage to children from leaking lead pipes.

Middle Class Strengthening. Affordable housing, education for pre-school children and specialized schooling for post-high school are essential needs.

Saving Democracy. The most desperate need today is saving our democracy from an unrelenting attack by the cult of authoritarians working for (and with) disgraced former president Trump and (behind the curtain) Vladimir Putin.

These benefits could bridge the gap between urban and rural America. In the interim, we must pass a voting rights act that can stop many Republican Trump Cult states from their campaign to make voting difficult for people of color, the old, and the young.

We need legislation to make redistricting after the 10-year censuses a process in the hands of independent geographers or other experts. Having redistricting in the hands of one political party is a blueprint for our current disaster.

We must support the Lincoln Project, which may be the core of a new conservative party. The Trump Cult is in death throes.

684 words

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