MISSION FOR AMERICA · CHAPTER 00 · THE BOOK

Introduction

November 2026

Published by New Consensus · newconsensus.com

About the Mission for America

The Mission for America is a comprehensive, detailed plan for a 10-year national mobilization to build a new, clean economy capable of providing prosperity, security, and freedom for all. We are writing this plan for the president who enters the White House in 2029, their administration, and the leadership of the 121st Congress.

They will inherit a historic double crisis:

- The AI and economic crisis: the mass replacement of workers by artificial intelligence, intensifying decades of wage stagnation, deindustrialization, and the systematic dismantling of America's means of making a living
- The climate and environmental crisis: the breaking of a 2.6 million-year climate cycle, threatening the conditions for life on Earth — even as climate has fallen off the political radar

Technology has been automating away jobs since long before AI, which is why real wages for the bottom half of U.S. workers stagnated for decades while GDP skyrocketed. Until now, lost jobs were replaced by low-wage service work, gig labor, or what anthropologist David Graeber called "bullshit jobs" — administrative roles that are largely unnecessary and do not make the economy more productive. AI presents an unprecedented challenge: the new industries it makes possible will be staffed by AI, not humans. They will not replenish the jobs they destroy.

In one of history's most unexpected twists, AI is poised to rapidly displace professionals, managers, and knowledge workers before it replaces manual laborers. The physical infrastructure for this white-collar replacement is already in place — it is the same network of screens, keyboards, and enterprise systems that enable remote work. When an AI can perform tasks, make business decisions, and control those enterprise systems as well as a human, the marginal cost of making the switch is zero. While the replacement of manual laborers with robotics will also accelerate, it will proceed more slowly because building, installing, and maintaining physical robots still carries a tangible unit cost.

Imagine January 2029: a vast segment of the professional-managerial class is sitting at home without income, unable to make their house payments, and stripped of their imagined futures. Simultaneously, a huge portion of the working class is laid off as collateral damage from the ensuing collapse of consumer demand. The Mission for America is a roadmap for what the president and our government must do in that moment. It includes sweeping, immediate programs to get people into meaningful, lucrative work while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a new, clean economy that guarantees shared prosperity forever with radically reduced working time. Even after the great AI replacement, there will still be an enormous amount of vital work to do that requires humans:

- Establishing the care economy as a source of rewarding, well-paid jobs that ensure dignity for our elders and everyone who needs care
- Building the best health care and education systems the world has ever seen, and restoring and improving all of our public services
- Building a replacement for the doomed fossil fuel economy, which continues to radically alter our atmosphere and heat the planet, even when the news media and policymakers look away

- Rebuilding and upgrading our homes and buildings for energy efficiency, health, safety, and quality of life
- Restoring our public infrastructure and hardening it to withstand severe climate impacts
- Transforming agriculture to sustainable methods, restoring access to clean water for all Americans, and stopping the circulation of toxins in our food, water, and air

Capitalism alone does not possess a mechanism to channel labor and resources into these essential missions, even with the incredible productivity gains brought by AI and robotics — especially not when most potential customers have had their incomes cut off. If we want this work done, society must organize to make it happen. We need comprehensive plans and institutions with the power and resources to execute them.

To achieve this, the U.S. must switch from "decline mode" back into "mission mode" — a state of national action modeled on the exceptional U.S. industrial mobilization around World War II. The Mission for America calls for restoring our capacity for public investment and economic coordination, primarily through a revived Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). The RFC will operate as a massive public development bank and venture fund, financing the launch of entirely new industries, creating tens of millions of high-wage jobs, and supplying the world with the technology required to transition to a clean economy.

The plan is organized into a series of targeted, 10-year "national missions." Most are associated with a specific sector of the economy — such as clean power, electric vehicles, public transportation, or green steel. Others are designed around solving specific challenges, like drawing down atmospheric greenhouse gases or guaranteeing access to clean and safe water for all Americans. In each mission's chapter, we show how other missions make seemingly impossible or difficult feats possible — or even easy — for that particular mission. In this general introduction, we cover the central concepts, institutions, and tools of the Mission for America, starting with the idea of a national mission itself.

The Mission for America is not merely a plan to deal with AI. It is not just a climate plan. Or a jobs plan. It is a blueprint for the total, sweeping upgrade of our economy needed to solve the defining crises of the 21st century and unleash an era of radical abundance.

We are aware that climate has fallen off the political radar. In 2024 it barely registered in the presidential race. The news cycle has moved on to AI, to tariffs, to the latest outrage. But the atmosphere hasn't moved on. 2024 was the hottest year in recorded history.[1] The three-year period from 2023 to 2025 averaged 1.48°C above pre-industrial temperatures — within measurement uncertainty of the 1.5°C threshold that scientists warned would activate irreversible tipping points.[2] Since 2002, Greenland has lost an average

[1]World Meteorological Organization. (2025, January 10). WMO confirms 2024 was the warmest year on record at 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels. https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2024-warmest-year-record; NASA. (2025, January 10). Temperatures Rising: NASA Confirms 2024 Warmest Year on Record. https://www.nasa.gov/news-release/temperatures-rising-nasa-confirms-2024-warmest-year-on-record/

[2]World Meteorological Organization. (2026, February). WMO confirms 2025 was one of the warmest years on record, with the 2023-2025 three-year average reaching 1.48°C (±0.13°C) above pre-industrial levels — the warmest three-year period on record. https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2025-was-one-of-warmest-years-record; IPCC. (2018). Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C. https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

of 30 million tons of ice every hour.[3] The West Antarctic Ice Sheet is losing mass at an accelerating rate, holding enough ice to raise sea levels by up to 16 feet.[4] A February 2026 study in *One Earth* found that multiple climate systems — boreal permafrost, the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, the Amazon rainforest, Arctic sea ice — are closer to destabilization than any prior model predicted, with cascading feedback loops that could lock the planet into a "hothouse Earth" trajectory even if emissions later drop.[5]

Climate change has not paused because we stopped paying attention. It has accelerated. The oceans absorbed a record 23 zettajoules more heat in 2025 than the year before.[6] U.S. climate disasters cost $115 billion in 2025 alone.[7] James Hansen — the NASA scientist who first warned Congress about global warming in 1988 — now projects warming could reach 1.7°C by early 2027 and argues that true climate sensitivity is far higher than mainstream models assume.[8] The Mission for America treats the climate crisis with the seriousness it demands — not as a secondary concern to be addressed after the AI employment crisis, but as an inseparable part of the same emergency. The economy cannot be rebuilt on a burning planet, and the planet cannot be saved without putting millions of people to work building the replacement for the fossil fuel economy.

The Mission for America will more than achieve international climate goals that the U.S. once agreed to. Most U.S. climate plans aim only to reduce domestic output of greenhouse gasses. But the U.S. accounts for only 15% of global emissions. Bringing the U.S. economy all the way to net-zero would barely affect the world's trajectory toward catastrophic warming. That's why the Mission for America is designed around the goal of supplying the world with the technology, equipment, machines, materials, goods, and services it will need to get to net-zero as rapidly as is physically possible. Additionally, the U.S. will need to provide skillful international leadership and financing on highly favorable terms for low- and middle-income nations. Bringing U.S. emissions as close to net-zero as possible, as fast as possible, is also part of the Mission for America, because this will set an example for other countries, raise expectations for what nations can accomplish in a short time, and provide a guaranteed domestic market to prime the pump for the industries we must build to supply the world.

The U.S. has a practical responsibility to help supply and lead the global green transition because we hold so much of the world's capacity for accomplishing it. The present state of the climate crisis is like a building that is burning while four fire trucks are parked at a gas station next door with the crews standing in line for coffee. The U.S. is one of those trucks, the others being China, Europe, and the rest

[3]NASA Scientific Visualization Studio. (2025). Greenland Ice Sheet Mass Variation Since 2002 (GRACE/GRACE-FO). Between 2002 and 2025, the Greenland Ice Sheet lost an average of approximately 264 Gt per year (~30 million metric tons per hour). https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/31156; NOAA Arctic Report Card. (2025). Greenland Ice Sheet. https://arctic.noaa.gov/report-card/report-card-2025/greenland-ice-sheet-2025/

[4]Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition. (2025). Antarctic Ice and Rising Sea Levels. The West Antarctic Ice Sheet contains enough ice to raise global sea levels by 4-5 meters (13-16 feet) and is losing mass at an accelerating rate. https://www.asoc.org/learn/antarctic-ice-and-rising-sea-levels/; Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. (2025). New study identifies sequence of critical thresholds for Antarctic ice basins. https://www.pik-potsdam.de/en/news/latest-news/new-study-identifies-sequence-of-critical-thresholds-for-antarctic-ice-basins

[5]Ripple, W. J. et al. (2026, February 23). The risk of a hothouse Earth trajectory. *One Earth*. DOI: 10.1016/j.oneear.2025.101565

[6]Cheng, L. et al. (2026, January 6). New Record Ocean Temperatures and Related Climate Indicators in 2025. *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*. https://climateadaptationplatform.com/oceans-break-heat-records-in-2025-fueling-extreme-weather/

[7]Climate Central. (2025). Billion-Dollar Disasters: 2025 in Review. 23 billion-dollar weather and climate events totaling $115 billion in damages (CPI-adjusted). Climate Central assumed tracking after NOAA discontinued its Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters program in May 2025. https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/2025-in-review

[8]Hansen, J., Kharecha, P., Morgan, D. & Vest, J. (2026, February 6). Another El Niño Already? What Can We Learn from It? Columbia University. https://jimehansen.substack.com/p/another-el-nino-already-what-can

of the world — each representing roughly one quarter of the planet's GDP and manufacturing capacity.[9] In the race to overhaul global industry and infrastructure, the U.S. is an absolutely essential inventor and producer. Many of the world's fundamental green technologies were invented in the United States, though we have neglected to build the mass manufacturing capacity here to supply global markets. The U.S. contains only about five percent of the world's population, but it produces one quarter of global GDP and contains 17% of its manufacturing capacity, including some of the most technologically advanced and high-value manufacturing capacity in the world.[10] Even after all the economic and political blunders of the past several decades, the U.S. remains the indisputable world leader with regard to both financial and military power.[11] If any major part of the world fails to rise to the industrial challenge of building a new, clean economy, then we will encounter catastrophic global warming. The U.S. is one of those major parts, and for the reasons just mentioned, perhaps the most important. We have a responsibility to add to the total industrial capacity of the world available for the green transition both because it is needed and because we have the means to supply it.

That is our practical responsibility, but we are also bound by a moral responsibility: The U.S. is the source of 25% of the cumulative greenhouse gasses that are heating the planet — far ahead of any other nation.[12] Our nation accumulated its incredible wealth and power over the past century, fully aware for much of that period that we were changing the composition of the atmosphere in a way that would heat the planet. The warming effect of carbon dioxide was known as early as the late 19th century.[13] We pumped trillions of tons of it into the atmosphere anyway. Now we have a responsibility to use that power and wealth to undo the damage and to work with the rest of the world to accomplish a transition to a clean economy.

If U.S. political leaders had to campaign for the Mission for America purely on the basis of our moral responsibility, there would be no hope. Fulfilling our responsibility, however, just so happens to be the only path to providing shared economic prosperity and progress for all Americans. Building a global clean economy is simply the only opportunity big enough to fully turn around America's economic prospects.

For decades, a powerful fatalism has dominated American politics when it comes to economics and industry. First, experts on both sides of the aisle said we needed to retreat from manufacturing in the U.S. because we couldn't compete with low-wage workers in developing countries. Rather than invest in modernization and automation to compete, we simply gave up on entire sectors of our industrial

[9]Bown, C. P., & Clausing, K. A. (2023, October). Working Paper 23-8: How trade cooperation by the United States, the European Union, and China can fight climate change. Peterson Institute for International Economics. https://www.piie.com/publications/working-papers/how-trade-cooperation-united-states-european-union-and-china-can-fight

[10]Worldometer. (2023, December 19). United States Population. https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/; Thomas, D. (2023, November). Annual Report on the U.S. Manufacturing Economy: 2023. National Institute of Standards and Technology. https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/ams/NIST.AMS.600-13-upd1.pdf

[11]Kagan, R. & Daalder, I. H. (2016, April 25). The U.S. can't afford to end its global leadership role. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-u-s-cant-afford-to-end-its-global-leadership-role/

[12]Ritchie, H., Rosado, P., & Roser, M. (2023, December 12). Data Page: Cumulative CO_2 emissions. Data adapted from Global Carbon Project. Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-co-emissions

[13]American Institute of Physics. (2023, May). The Discovery of Global Warming: The Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Effect. https://history.aip.org/climate/co2.htm

economy.[14] As a result, millions of Americans lost high-wage industrial jobs and entire regions were economically devastated, setting the stage for the rise of anti-democratic, right-wing political movements.[15] Then, when China and other rapidly industrializing nations moved into capital-intensive industries where wages are a very small factor, the same experts said we had fallen too far behind in manufacturing to ever catch up again, and good jobs continued to flow out of the country.[16] That fatalism began to crack when Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022. In under three years, the IRA triggered $470 billion in private clean energy investment, more than 330,000 jobs, and over 300 factory projects across the country.[17] It was a tiny fraction of what the Mission for America calls for, but it was a strong start. Then Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in July 2025 and killed the key credits driving the boom — the EV credit, the home solar credit, the energy efficiency incentives.[18] Industrial policy works. But programs built on tax credits alone are politically fragile. The Mission for America is designed to be harder to kill.

The most remarkable thing about America's strong global political and industrial position is that it survives after decades of underinvestment and social and economic decline.[19] Decades of laissez-faire policies initiated by both parties gutted the public sector, shut down national industrial policy, offshored jobs, and encouraged financialization across the economy. Corporate profits continued to soar, but millions of American workers suffered the consequences of these actions.[20] Nevertheless, the U.S. economy continued to grow in terms of total GDP — thanks in part to its centrality in global financial and consumer markets and the U.S. dollar's status as the global reserve currency. However, gains were unequally distributed to the extreme.[21] Disastrous and unpopular wars in the Middle East badly damaged America's global credibility — yet it remains, at least for now, a global hegemon. America's leadership has persisted through these failures because, despite everything, the foundations of its economy, international standing, and democracy are exceptionally deep. The Mission for America is a dream for what America could achieve if it utilized, rather than undermined, its wealth and global position.

The Mission for America is based on an intellectual and policy framework of true abundance. Somehow "abundance" has become a catchword for billionaires slashing regulations and cutting their taxes. Let's

[14]U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment. (1990, February). Making Things Better: Competing in Manufacturing. https://ota.fas.org/reports/9028.pdf; Guilford, G. (2018, May 3). The epic mistake about manufacturing that's cost Americans millions of jobs. Quartz. https://qz.com/1269172/the-epic-mistake-about-manufacturing-thats-cost-americans-millions-of-jobs

[15]Berman, S. (2021, May). The Causes of Populism in the West. Annual Review of Political Science, 24,71-88. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503; Lempinen, E.(2022, November 14). Loss, fear and rage: Are white men rebelling against democracy? Berkeley News. https://news.berkeley.edu/2022/11/14/loss-fear-and-rage-are-white-men-rebelling-against-democracy

[16]Scott, R. E. et al. (2022, January 31). Botched policy responses to globalization have decimated manufacturing employment with often overlooked costs for Black, Brown, and other workers of color. Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/botched-policy-responses-to-globalization/

[17]The White House. (2024, November). Investing in America: By the Numbers. Biden-Harris Administration; American Clean Power Association. (2024). Clean Energy Investing in America Report. Data reflects cumulative investments announced between August 2022 and January 2025.

[18]Internal Revenue Service. (2025). FAQs for modification of sections 25C, 25D, 25E, 30C, 30D, 45L, 45W, and 179D under Public Law 119-21 (July 4, 2025), commonly known as the One, Big, Beautiful Bill. https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/faqs-for-modification-of-sections-25c-25d-25e-30c-30d-45l-45w-and-179d-under-public-law-119-21-139-stat-72-july-4-2025-commonly-known-as-the-one-big-beautiful-bill-obbb

[19]Ibid.

[20]Mishel, L., Gould, E., & Bivens, J. (2015, January 6). Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts. Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/; Lazonick, W. (2014, September). Profits Without Prosperity. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2014/09/profits-without-prosperity

[21]DePhillips, R. (2016, July). Economic Freedom for the Free: How Neoliberalism Is Leading to Greater Income Inequality Within Countries. [Doctoral dissertation, Temple University]. Temple University Library. https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/api/collection/p245801coll10/id/394855/download

reclaim it. A national economy as large and advanced as the U.S. economy is not a zero-sum system. Reindustrialization does not have to come at the expense of our other national priorities — on the contrary, it's how we fulfill them. Modern industrialized nations have coordinating and financing institutions that activate labor and capital to build up capacities and wealth. Without those institutions, an economy is like an organism that no longer grows. The U.S. used to be well equipped with those growth institutions, but they were dismantled after World War II as part of the general transition to neoliberal management of the economy and due to other peculiar American political factors. The Mission for America calls for restoring our nation's capacity for public investment and economic coordination.

America will be able to confront its mounting crises only once its leaders across the public and private sectors can dream it is possible to do so successfully. New Consensus is a non-partisan think tank. This edition of the Mission for America is written for the 2028 presidential cycle — for the candidates, their teams, Congressional leaders, journalists, and policy makers who will shape the next administration. Our aim is not that future leaders adopt or endorse it by name, as many did in the 2020 campaign cycle with the Green New Deal, but rather that they will adopt the underlying ideas and make them their own. For that to happen, they need to see a detailed, realistic plan that spells out exactly how it is possible to accomplish the enormous goals of providing prosperity for all Americans while supplying the world with everything it needs to stop global warming before it is too late. That is the purpose of the Mission for America.

The 2024 election did not produce a candidate willing to propose anything on the scale of the Mission for America. That does not surprise us, but it does not discourage us either. The crises the Mission for America addresses have only grown more acute. The climate disasters keep getting worse — $115 billion in U.S. damage in 2025 alone. Housing, health care, and higher education — the basic building blocks of a middle-class life — have become unaffordable for a growing share of Americans. The federal government's capacity to execute basic functions has been systematically degraded. And the voters who chose a politics of destruction did so in large part because no one offered them a credible politics of construction.

Every candidate preparing for 2028 will face a question no one answered in 2024: What is your plan for an economy strangled by extreme income inequality, climate disasters costing hundreds of billions a year, and hollowed-out institutions that Americans can no longer depend on? By 2028, the new question of mass AI layoffs will almost certainly also be the central concern of most voters. The Mission for America is the only plan that answers all of these at once — because they are all the same problem.

To pitch a nation on a mission, a leader must be able to first imagine it. Moreover, a leader cannot take a nation on a mission alone but must have the support of a network of other leaders, experts, staff, and participants in other roles who can imagine the mission and know how to operationalize it. Our purpose in creating the Mission for America is to enable and empower a new generation of leaders to imagine what is possible and to give them a detailed blueprint for making it happen.

America and the world after the Mission

The Mission for America is a mobilization of people, resources, and capital to accomplish tangible goals. If carried out successfully, America and the world will be different in many important ways. The following is just a partial list of what the Mission for America is designed to accomplish in 10 years if executed successfully:

- Tens of millions of new, high-wage jobs will have been created.
- Wages will have risen dramatically and conditions improved in tens of millions of already-existing jobs thanks to labor market competition with the newly created jobs.
- Entire new industries will have been built, producing valuable and essential goods and services that either were offshored or were never developed in the U.S. — including industries necessary for the conversion to a clean economy.
- Carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. will have been brought to near zero. Emissions of other human-caused greenhouse gasses such as methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gasses will have been dramatically reduced.
- Nearly 100% of the energy produced on the nation's power grids will be clean, including solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and nuclear. New long-distance, high-voltage power lines will ensure reliable and cheap power to every community in America.
- A new institutional landscape will have been created that provides long-term financing and coordination for launching, scaling, and modernizing companies and industries in areas where private capital fears to tread.
- Most homes and buildings will have been upgraded to achieve total decarbonization, improved energy efficiency, comfort, health, and safety — which will have created millions of high-wage jobs in the process. At the end of the Mission for America, most homes and buildings will produce no greenhouse gas emissions and will produce more energy than they consume.
- At least 99.9% of cars on the road will be electric, thanks in part to building a dense fast-charging network that makes owning an EV more convenient than owning a gas-powered vehicle.
- Batteries will have been developed and will be in mass production capable of powering large, long-haul trucks, and a charging and battery-swapping system to make electric-powered long-haul trucking feasible will have been built.
- All rail transport will have been electrified. This goal could change if another type of clean technology emerges to power trains.
- Technology for building and retrofitting long-haul cargo ships to run on 100% hydrogen and/or ammonia will have been developed, and a clean shipbuilding industry will be in full swing. We will have made significant progress toward transitioning shipping to clean fuels at least for ships going to, from, and around the U.S. Other technologies to make shipping more efficient, such as kites and sails, will have been developed and implemented. This goal could change if another type of clean technology emerges to power ships.

- Hydrogen-powered long-haul aircraft will have been developed to replace large fossil-fuel passenger and cargo jets. Hydrogen-powered jet production will be online. We will have gotten as far as possible toward converting the U.S. jet fleet to hydrogen. This goal is also subject to change if another technology develops that turns out to be better than hydrogen for large jets.
- The U.S. will be the leading exporter of technology and equipment the world needs to reduce its emissions as much as possible, as fast as possible.
- New institutions will have been established to provide financing and technical assistance to nations that need it to build clean economies. In 10 years, the U.S. will have made major deals around the world with low-interest financing over long periods, with provisions for loan forgiveness if clean economy plans are carried out.
- Many new nuclear power facilities will be coming online on military bases across the country, providing reliable clean power to the whole nation — and importantly providing huge quantities of excess power to CO2 drawdown efforts and hydrogen production.
- Billions will have been invested into discovering and developing new technologies to draw down or eliminate CO2 and other greenhouse gasses from the atmosphere, and viable technologies will be in service on a scale large enough to cool the planet.
- The U.S. will have researched and tested last-resort methods for immediately and safely cooling the earth and will have solutions ready to launch at scale pending approval by the international community. Some example methods include releasing reflective substances into the upper atmosphere and installing mirror-cover in extremely hot population centers to reduce local temperatures.

On top of all that, assuming that AI-driven layoffs have become a real problem, another achievement of the MFA will be allowing the country to re-mobilize tens of millions of workers back into the workforce, in what might have to be radically different jobs than they are trained for and used to:

- Every community will host new institutions that retrain and reemploy workers from all different backgrounds including people who have never joined the workforce to high level managers and professionals.
- Emergency measures and economic stabilizers will be activated to prevent mass evictions and other kinds of displacement if millions are in fact driven out of work by AI. (See the MFA's AI Shock plan.)

In general, these and all the other Mission for America goals are designed to be achieved on a 10-year timeline. We address questions about the feasibility of that timeline in a section dedicated to that topic below. For now, it's worth briefly mentioning some semantic issues around the 10-year time frame of the Mission for America. Sometimes, as a shorthand, we say that the U.S. will be at net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in 10 years. But there are too many unknowns when it comes to certain aspects of curtailing greenhouse gas emissions, such as those produced by agriculture, and unknowns regarding the feasibility of removing greenhouse gasses from the atmosphere, to be able to predict exactly how close to net zero is possible to achieve. The Mission for America is designed to get as far toward net-zero emissions as is physically possible — which, to be specific, we believe is at least 95% of the way.

A few of the emissions-reductions solutions are designed to be readied over the 10-year time frame, and then begin scaling up at or before the 10-year mark. These include hydrogen-powered aviation and shipping, and electrified long-haul trucking, which are a few of the very small number of technical problems that still must be solved.

How America stumbled, how we get back up

We used to build industries, infrastructure, and institutions to make life richer and more secure for each new generation. We did this as individuals, families, communities, businesses, and as a nation. We did it by competing and cooperating, by planning and executing. By building in that way for three centuries, we achieved a level of freedom, security, and prosperity that our ancestors never dared to imagine. The world was watching. Patriotic leaders of every independent nation strove to emulate our success. Humanity came to expect that life for every generation should be easier, safer, and more abundant than for the last.

Then our leaders became possessed by a new idea: Society did not exist.[22] The grand plans of the past did not drive progress. Planning and cooperating as a nation were, in fact, harmful. They shut down national economic development institutions.[23] They stopped trying to repair and replace fading industries and let millions of high-paying jobs slip away. They starved public services and infrastructure of resources. Wages sank when compared with the price of essentials such as housing, transportation, healthcare, and education.[24] America no longer made its own living, and wealth streamed out of the country as workers spent down their savings, governments and companies sold off their assets, and everyone borrowed. All this was based on a faith that if nations would only "get out of the way," business would take off to new heights of innovation and investment.[25]

We learned through that experiment, however, that without coaxing and assistance from society at large, business will generally seek the easiest path to profits, which tends to be financial speculation, not economic development — even if over the long term that leads to lower growth for business as a whole.[26] Though it did not happen immediately, most of the world followed the United States down the path of laissez-faire economics. Today, global business is stuck, generally afraid to invest on the scale that would quickly raise living standards for billions of people still living in poverty or reduce greenhouse-gas emissions fast enough to avert disaster from global warming.

The Mission for America is a playbook to get the U.S. economy unstuck — a plan for total economic mobilization, modeled largely on the mobilization for World War II. That mobilization was launched to overcome two intertwined crises: the Nazi conquest of Europe and the collapse of business confidence that culminated in the Great Depression and created the conditions for fascism's rise. The Mission for

[22]The Guardian. (2013, April 8). Margaret Thatcher quotes. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes

[23]Ibid.; Office of the President. (2022, April 14). Economic Report of the President, Chapter 1: The Public Sector's Role in Economic Growth. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Chapter-1.pdf; Omarova, S. T. (2023, March 23). Industrial Policy Requires Public, Not Just Private, Equity. Democracy: A Journal of Ideas. https://democracyjournal.org/arguments/industrial-policy-requires-public-not-just-private-equity/

[24]Pickert, R., & Hague, J. (2023, November 27). Just How Bad Is the US Cost-of-Living Squeeze? We Did the Math. Bloomberg. https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2023-inflation-economy-cost-of-living/

[25]Kuttner, R. (2019, June 25). Neoliberalism: Political Success, Economic Failure. The American Prospect. https://prospect.org/economy/neoliberalism-political-success-economic-failure/

[26]Graham, J. R. et al. (2006). Value destruction and financial reporting decisions. Financial Analysts Journal, 62(6), 27-39. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.871215

America takes the same approach to today's intertwined crises: global warming and the hollowing out of the nation's economic foundations. The World War II mobilization was consciously designed to rely on, and remain within the bounds of, American political and economic traditions — which is how it won the support of business, labor, and voters of all political persuasions.[27] The flexibility and dynamism of its approach allowed the U.S. to mobilize industry much faster and on a greater scale than European and Soviet command-and-control efforts. The state led the industrial transformation and mobilization, but the leaders were drawn largely from industry, and participation was voluntary and organized using the market mechanisms that everyone was already used to. As a result, the mobilization played out with far greater speed, scale, efficiency, and creativity than any economic development effort in history.[28]

As it was in the run-up to World War II, the American public today is divided. In the 1930s, most Americans did not support entering the European war against Hitler, even after he attacked America's closest allies and began transporting masses of people to concentration camps. A large portion of Americans even supported Hitler and openly advocated for fascism as the only path out of the Great Depression.[29] Only the attack on Pearl Harbor allowed President Roosevelt to take the U.S. to war. Today, 70 percent of Americans acknowledge that climate change is a serious problem — but it is not what keeps them up at night.[30] They are worried about the economy, about AI taking their jobs, about the cost of groceries, about the chaos in their government. Climate has not stopped mattering. It has been pushed off the front page by emergencies that feel more immediate.

This can change with the right political leadership. One condition for making the Mission for America possible is that such leadership comes along before it's too late. When we began this project, we expected that a "Pearl Harbor" climate event — a disaster so dramatic it would shock the public into demanding action — might shift American opinion. In a sense, it has arrived many times over. The year 2024 was the hottest in recorded history. In 2025, 28 billion-dollar climate disasters cost the U.S. $115 billion. Three Category 5 hurricanes tore through the Atlantic. The Los Angeles wildfires caused $61 billion in damage in a single event. And yet public attention remains consumed by other emergencies — economic anxiety, mass deportations, the gutting of federal agencies, the creeping sense that the institutions Americans depend on are being dismantled. The climate Pearl Harbor keeps happening. The problem is that Americans are already fighting too many fires to notice another one.

No matter how bad the climate crisis becomes, however, it is likely that most people in the U.S. will be able to live normal lives at least over the next couple of decades, the time frame in which urgent action must be taken. That is why the Mission for America must also include immediate and obvious economic benefits for all Americans, including those who will never care about global warming. Those who reject that climate change is happening can still understand that, for a variety of reasons, the world is moving away from the fossil fuel technology upon which the U.S. economy is based, which undeniably threatens

[27]Levine, S. (2004, May 23). In WWII, Patriotism Unified a Nation. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/05/23/in-wwii-patriotism-unified-a-nation/a605dcd6-f2da-42e0-ae00-83d990429aba/

[28]Hendricks, B., Gunn-Wright, R., & Ricketts, S. (2020, March 10). The greatest mobilization since WWII. *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*. https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/56/the-greatest-mobilization-since-wwii/

[29]Rothman, L. (2018, October 4). More Americans Supported Hitler Than You May Think. Here's Why One Expert Thinks That History Isn't Better Known. *Time*. https://time.com/5414055/american-nazi-sympathy-book/

[30]Pasquini, G. et al. (2023, August 9). Why Some Americans Do Not See Urgency on Climate Change. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/08/09/why-some-americans-do-not-see-urgency-on-climate-change/

American prosperity but also creates an opportunity. The Mission for America is designed to be equally a climate plan and a plan for reinventing our national economy to survive and thrive in the changing world of the 21st century — one that can power a political movement that draws at least some support from the half of America that is unconcerned with climate change. Because of the evenly divided nature of American politics, winning just a small amount of bipartisan support is the difference between victory and defeat.

The three modes of national action: a framework for thinking of national development

To manage their economic development, modern industrialized nations have three different modes of action: mission, maintenance, and decline. These describe a nation's priorities, political and business culture, and available ways of acting in a given time. The Mission for America is a plan to return the U.S. to mission mode.

In mission mode, national leaders mobilize government, business, and other institutions to achieve goals. Beyond patchwork improvements to existing economies, this approach creates new industries, builds institutions, launches transformative infrastructure, and improves state capacity. Effective mobilization of people and resources in mission mode stems from a united focus on shared national objectives, lending legitimacy to the government and motivating voluntary participation from non-governmental institutions like labor unions and private industry. Goals that galvanize a nation are either typically urgently necessary or clearly beneficial to the populace. The Mission for America is designed to be both.

Mission mode is made possible by modern communication, transportation, and industrial systems that allow national and local governments, communities, businesses, and other institutions to coordinate effectively to accomplish big things. The history of the modern nation-state is the story of the emergence of this capacity. Leaders of pre-modern societies often worked to achieve big changes, but it was impossible to make big things happen in a short period of time without the communications technologies that power modern societies or the mass-manufacturing technologies that enable rapid changes to the physical capacities of a society today.[31]

In mission mode, challenges that seem impossible or difficult in other modes become possible, even easy. That's why mission mode is not exhausting but is exhilarating, renewing, and makes a nation stronger every year that it strives to achieve its mission. Understanding this dynamic is key to understanding why the Mission for America is feasible, especially from within a society in decline mode, where such ambitious goals might appear unattainable.

Think of mission mode as the equivalent of running, maintenance mode as walking, and decline mode as watching TV on the couch. When you run, you're using a different mechanism of movement from walking. You are flying through the air, occasionally tapping the ground with your feet. When you are walking, you are putting one foot in front of the other, with little speed or momentum. With walking, it is impossible to go very fast. Running allows you to go much faster — five to 10 times faster. Moreover, running is efficient, requiring only two or three times the energy as walking. Significant speed is impos-

[31]Schot, J., & Steinmueller, W. E. (2018, November). Three frames for innovation policy: R&D, systems of innovation and transformative change. Research Policy, 47(9), 1554-1567. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2018.08.011

sible or very difficult when walking, but it is easy when running, a far more efficient mode of motion. For a sedentary person who's been physically declining for many years, however, running might feel impossible.

An example of mode-switching that made difficult tasks easier is the transition from craft production to mass production during the World War II mobilization. Initially, aircraft were made individually, by specialized craftsmen who built each plane as a slightly unique work, custom fitting parts that would not be interchangeable in other planes. This was necessary because mass manufacturing techniques had not yet achieved the precision required by airplanes, especially their engines. However, planners knew that the war's demands necessitated mass production. This shift involved the aircraft industry being generously paid to teach the auto industry to build planes, and the auto industry adapting to higher-precision mass production than it had ever attempted before. Initially challenging, this transition drastically reduced the time and labor needed per aircraft. This switch from craft to mass production enabled the U.S. to produce tens of thousands of large, new, modern airplanes in just a handful of years.[32]



Figure 1: B-24E Liberator bombers on one of the assembly lines at Ford's Willow Run plant, 1942.

Source: Hollem, H. (1942). Production. B-24E (Liberator) bombers at Willow Run. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8b05936/

In the World War II mobilization, the airplane mass production case was just one of thousands repeated across the economy. Virtually every industry was pulled "off the couch" to begin investing again in new capacities, new techniques, and new technologies. World War II investment and coordination institutions created dozens of entire new industries, such as the synthetic rubber industry which went from non-

[32]Herman, A. (2012). Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II. Random House. ISBN: 978-0812982046.

existent to producing nearly a million tons of rubber a year by the end of the war.[33] Other industries that were jump-started, massively scaled up, or both, by World War II public institutions include aluminum, chemicals and petrochemicals, plastics, electronics, telecommunications, tanks, shipbuilding, aerospace and rockets, food processing and packaging, machine tools and industrial machinery, construction and infrastructure, and many others.[34]

But mission mode can't be launched in single industries or sectors of the economy in piecemeal fashion. It demands a certain economy of scale. Part of this is the need for large institutions, such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), to finance and coordinate large-scale action, and that simply can't work on the scale of a single industry. Shifting an entire industry into mission mode requires a collective openness to innovation and risk-taking, from leadership to line workers. As a general rule, that can be accomplished only by mobilizing the nation as a whole. While small groups, like startups motivated by making huge profits of world-changing products, can adopt similar behaviors, such widespread transformation in large corporations occur typically only in the context of a national mobilization.[35]

Many people misunderstand mission mode, assuming it can happen only in wartime. But most examples of national missions happened voluntarily in peacetime. All the European and Asian "economic miracles" from the 1960s to the 1990s were peacetime economic mobilizations.[36] The U.S. mobilization around World War II, on which we have closely based the Mission for America, resembled a peacetime mobilization in many ways because the president began the mobilization when Congress and the majority of Americans were still adamant that the U.S. not enter the war. When Roosevelt began the mobilization, the U.S. perhaps felt less urgency about the crisis of fascism in Europe than it feels today about the crisis of climate change. Peacetime institutions under ordinary circumstances were sufficient to allow FDR to lay the groundwork for mission mode, even if it took the attack on Pearl Harbor for him to get the nation all the way there.

Like any powerful force, state power can be either harmful or healthy, destructive or creative. Early attempts by societies to mobilize economically with national missions did not always go well. Pre-industrial societies that were still one bad harvest from mass death were extremely vulnerable to weather, blight, and the experimental or poorly designed policies of newly powerful states. Agriculture in early, industrial, capitalist societies tended toward consolidation around a small number of increasingly homogenous crops. This helped cause disasters like the Great Famine in British-controlled Ireland, during which food continued to be exported while more than one million people died.[37] Agricultural and economic policies imposed by British rule in India were responsible for 50-100 million excess deaths, according to some

[33] American Chemical Society National Historic Chemical Landmarks. (1998). U.S. Synthetic Rubber Program. http://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/whatischemistry/landmarks/syntheticrubber.html (accessed Month Day, Year).

[34] Burton, K. D. (n.d.). The Scientific and Technological Advances of World War II. The National WWII Museum. https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/scientific-and-technological-advances-world-war-ii

[35] One place to capture a glimpse of this dynamic is in the Oscar winning documentary American Factory (2019) which compares the culture of an American factory under Chinese management with its counterparts in China. The workers and managers in China feel themselves to be engaged in a national project of economic development that is not only about building wealth but also about making China great again. The managers in the US factory are at a total loss in trying to manage American workers who sometimes seem to have no sense of responsibility to any project greater than collecting their paycheck.

[36] Bayoumi, T. (1995, January 1). The Postwar Economic Achievement. Finance and Development, 32(002). International Monetary Fund. ISBN: 9781451952643. https://doi.org/10.5089/9781451952643.022

[37] Mokyr, J. (2023, October 26). Great Famine | Irish history | Britannica. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history/Great-Famine-relief-efforts

studies.[38] When the first totalitarian communist countries rapidly industrialized, they caused similar calamities, but on an even more concentrated and enormous scale thanks to their larger populations, the accelerated pace of change and greater control that modern societies could exert on populations, the lack of political institutions to protect people from misguided or malicious policies, and arbitrary and chaotic rule by dictators.[39] Nevertheless, nations across various political systems learned from these experiences. Recent national economic development missions have generally seen rapid, steady progress, with inevitable missteps leading to easily resolved economic imbalances, not death. National missions are now safer and more effective.

Just because nations have the capacity to carry out missions to improve their economies doesn't mean they always use it. Often, from mission mode, nations settle down into maintenance mode, seeking only to maintain current infrastructure, industry, and institutions. Nations in maintenance mode don't necessarily begin disinvesting from industry or state infrastructure, but they don't push for any significant expansions and offer only patchwork fixes to problems that arise.

Several different dynamics lead to nations leaving mission mode for maintenance mode. Powerful constituencies who felt their power was diminished under mission mode might reassert themselves by nudging society back to maintenance mode. This was the case after World War II in the U.S. when the representatives in Congress of Southern elites demanded the dismantling of national investment and coordination institutions. These institutions, having challenged white supremacy by providing employment opportunities in northern industries to southern Black workers, were seen as a threat to the existing power structure.[40] Alternately, constituencies that were newly empowered by economic growth during mission mode might push for a return to the normalcy of maintenance mode in order to enjoy their newfound wealth without all the chaos and uncertainty of continued rapid growth.[41] Another dynamic is that leaders can simply become tired after years of urgent growth and want to rest. If mission mode solved the crisis it was meant to, why continue?

Due to a mix of all three dynamics above, the United States began to slide into maintenance mode after World War II ended.[42] Smaller missions were launched after World War II in partial attempts to keep mission mode going, including the space program and the War on Poverty. But the overall trend was to remove the state from the economy and let things continue however the "free market" determined.

Though corporations and small businesses had profited enormously through the World War II mobilization, as a constituency American business wanted to be free of the unrelenting demands of mission mode and take profits at a more leisurely pace using the capital that had been accumulated through the war. Right-wing business leaders, politicians, academics, and activists worked in a concerted fashion to convince the nation that economic planning and public investment outside of wartime was a threat to

[38]Sullivan, D., & Hickel, J. (2023, January). Capitalism and extreme poverty: A global analysis of real wages, human height, and mortality since the long 16th century. World Development, 161, Article 106026. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106026

[39]Library of Congress. (1996, April). Revelations from the Russian Archives: Internal Workings of the Soviet Union. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/intn.html

[40]Brown, S. H. (2011, November). The Role of Elite Leadership in the Southern Defense of Segregation, 1954-1964. The Journal of Southern History, 77(4), 827-864. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41305949; Katznelson, I. (2014, February). Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time. Liveright Publishing Corporation, W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 9780871407382.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid.

both prosperity and freedom.[43] Their protestations largely fell on deaf ears until economic stagnation combined with inflation to create "stagflation." With no other comprehensive solutions on hand, politicians starting with Jimmy Carter began to favor dismantling the last of the investment and coordination capacity of the state and a radical disengagement of the state from the economy.[44] Ronald Reagan moved even more zealously in the same direction, while ramping up indiscriminate and wasteful military spending that contradicted his own anti-government ideology. Thus ended the last vestiges of the New Deal consensus that enabled the prior 30 years of mission mode.

The Korean and Vietnam Wars had also drawn time, money, and political capital away from America's domestic political mission. Perhaps most importantly, the new and large American middle class, whose wealth and comfort would have come as a shock to an American in the 1930s, no longer saw America's national mission as necessary.

Unfortunately, maintenance mode usually eventually leads to decline mode, in which basic investment is forgotten, and things start to fall apart. Nations never intentionally enter decline mode, and generally only come to terms with the fact they are in decline once it is too late to easily reverse it.

In decline mode, a nation begins deconstructing the companies, institutions, and state capacities it built while in mission mode. Governments begin cutting back on social services and investments in national infrastructure. This is done either through gratuitous privatization for privatization's sake, or by defunding programs to kill them. The state's capacity to execute what programs are left is also diminished. The fruits of mission mode are auctioned off or abandoned. People begin to expect worse results from the government, which in turn makes it easier to gut more programs, as angry voters vengefully elect anti-government politicians.

At first, companies begin pulling back from investing in physical assets and instead put their money into the financial casino. Many companies begin to consolidate, and smaller companies get bought out by large conglomerates — only to become stripped down into worse versions of themselves.

Nations rarely recover from decline mode by gradually moving back to maintenance mode. The problem is that the longer a nation lives in decline mode, the more elites, companies, and government agencies develop survival strategies and business models compatible with or dependent on decline. Elites who build their wealth during a period of mission-driven national growth can then live on that capital without necessarily investing heavily as the country slides into decline mode. In general, only the urgency and disruption of a national mission can break the web of dysfunctional and corrupt habits and relationships that keep a nation in decline.[45]

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[43] Phillips-Fein, K. (2010). Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal. W.W. Norton & Company.

[44] Menand, L. (2023, July 17). The Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/07/24/the-rise-and-fall-of-neolib-eralism

[45] Galston, W. A. (2014, October 20). The new challenge to market democracies. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-new-challenge-to-market-democracies-the-political-and-social-costs-of-economic-stagnation/; Library of Congress. (n.d.). U.S. History Primary Source Timeline. Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945, The Post War United States, 1945-1968. https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/

[46] Graziano, M. (2022, July 20). United States: the end of an illusion of omnipotence. https://theconversation.com/united-states-the-end-of-an-illusion-of-omnipotence-186421; Rapley, J. (2023, September 4). America Is an Empire in Decline. That Doesn't Mean It Has to Fall. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/04/opinion/america-rome-empire.html

Today, the United States is not in mission or maintenance mode — America is in decline.[46] And the decline is accelerating. In 2025, the federal government's own capacity to function was systematically degraded — whole agencies hollowed out, hiring frozen, decades of institutional knowledge discarded. The most ambitious industrial policy in a generation was killed within three years of its passage. This is what decline looks like when it picks up speed. As we'll explain, jumping straight to mission mode is the way to get out of decline. The Mission for America is a political strategy, policy framework, and national business plan to do just that.

Only a president can call America to a mission — and ensure it's accomplished

Nations are called to missions by leaders. In the U.S., given the structure of our system, that responsibility falls on a president. Most nations that have undertaken national missions since World War II have been democracies, with political parties or coalitions of parties pitching their nations on the missions in elections or from office, including Germany, France, the Nordic nations, Japan, South Korea, and many others.[47] In some cases, the mission was pushed by a single leader above all, while in other cases a broad team of leaders presented it together. It should be possible for the Mission for America to be introduced by a coalition of leaders in office or running for office, including a president and congressional leaders. They could represent a single party, a new non-partisan movement, or a mix of leaders from different parties and independents. In the U.S. system, however, presidents or presidential candidates are the de facto leaders of political parties and movements, and they are the only figures who have the centrality to cut through the noise and speak audibly to the whole American people. Therefore, the role of pitching America on a mission likely must fall to a president and their team.

We call for the Mission for America to be pitched in the context of a presidential campaign. It is difficult for Americans to imagine this happening because it has never happened before in our history. In the two times we embarked on a national mission to transform and build up our economy (the Civil War and World War II), the mission was proposed by a president already in office, and both times it was in the context of war. It is unfortunate that we can't point back to a moment in our history when a presidential candidate and their party or coalition proposed a national mission and then carried it out. But this is not an insurmountable obstacle, and we can look outside of the U.S. for evidence to show us why.

Internationally, numerous examples exist of countries that mobilized to build a new economy in peacetime, under democracy, when leaders proposed a national mission in a campaign or from office. After World War II, social democratic developmentalist parties won elections with resounding majorities all over Western Europe and many parts of East Asia and Latin America.[48] These parties proposed sweeping programs of modernization and industrialization. By and large, they delivered immediate progress, and their populations rewarded them with additional terms in office that allowed them to make more dramatic transformations. In nearly all these cases, democracy proved its utility by allowing electorates to keep

[47] Gorokhovskaya, Y., Shahbaz, A., & Slipowitz, A. (2023, March). Marking 50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy. Freedom in the World 2023. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2023/marking-50-years-struggle-democracy-and-against-dictatorship-lessons-from-past-50-years-of-freedom-in-the-world; Dizikes, P. (2019, March 7). Study: Democracy fosters economic growth. Massachusetts Institute of Technology News. https://news.mit.edu/2019/study-democracy-fosters-economic-growth-acemoglu-0307; Galston, W. A. (2014).

[48] Berman, S. (2020, January 15). Can Social Democrats Save the World (Again)? Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/15/social-democracy-save-world-again-socialism

the pressure on the dominant party by flirting with others. In postwar Japan, for example, voters gave the Socialist Party one term in office early on, which impelled the dominant Liberal Democratic Party to refocus on delivering continuous economic progress for the population.[49] Similar patterns can be found in most other rapidly industrializing postwar democracies.

Such democratic engagement is crucial because national economic development missions, like the Mission for America, require multiple political terms to implement. Hence, they must provide tangible and immediate benefits to voters so that they elect more leaders who support the mission as time goes on. The Mission for America is designed to provide clearly visible benefits to the entire nation in general, and to tens of millions of people directly, almost immediately, so that the president will gain seats instead of lose them in the first midterm elections. This strategy is vital for maintaining momentum and political backing to accomplish ambitious objectives.

And indeed, the Mission for America is a plan to make big things happen — modernizing old industries and creating new ones, building and repairing infrastructure, achieving technological breakthroughs — and making them happen as quickly as possible. A plan of this scale will require billions of dollars in public investment, coordination between many industries, the support of political leaders at all levels of government, and cooperation with America's international allies.

While states and local governments have a huge role to play in the Mission for America, they are incapable of doing this mission on their own. There are simply too many states, each with unique interests and local needs, to cooperate on a mission this big. It is extremely unlikely that all 50 governors and a majority of all state legislatures will agree on a unified vision for the country. Even if they did, maintaining coordination and cooperation between 50 state governments for a decade would be impossible without federal leadership. States and local governments also don't have the economic resources to marshal the necessary level of investment, as most operate on shoestring budgets and have constitutional bans on running deficits.[50]

The private sector is incapable and unwilling to carry out this type of mission on its own. Private industry has a natural tendency to chase short-term profits over long-term investment — even at the expense of their own future success.[51] This short-sighted behavior has been encouraged by decades of American policy decisions and cultural norms. Court decisions such as Dodge vs Ford Motor Co. (1919) solidified the norm of shareholder supremacy and oriented corporate behavior around the short-term desires of corporate shareholders.[52] Financial deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in dozens of new, esoteric financial mechanisms that promised significantly higher returns than traditional investment in physical assets.[53] At its core, the private sector's focus on immediate profits often overlooks the long-term investments necessary for national transformation.

[49]Johnson, C. (1982). MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975. Stanford University Press.

[50]Rueben, K. S., & Randall, M. (2017, November 27). Balanced budget requirements. Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/balanced-budget-requirements

[51]Martin, R. (2015, October 9). Yes, Short-Termism Really Is a Problem. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2015/10/yes-short-termism-really-is-a-problem

[52]Dodge et al v Ford Motor Co. et al, 204 Mich. 459 (1919). https://casetext.com/case/dodge-v-ford-motor-co

[53]Krippner, G. (2012). Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance. Harvard University Press. ISBN: 978-0674066199.

Given these limitations, only the federal government has the scale, resources, and mandate to successfully initiate and lead a mission as ambitious as the Mission for America. Therefore, the Mission for America is a plan for a president and their administration to mobilize the federal government to accomplish a set of national missions corresponding to different challenges and sectors of the economy.

America has largely forgotten that presidents and the federal government can get big things done other than war. Until recently, the biggest thing most people could remember a president doing domestically was the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which expanded public healthcare programs and made deals with insurance companies to change some health insurance policies. Important, yes — but tiny compared with what our double crisis demands. Biden's Inflation Reduction Act went much further, triggering the largest clean energy investment boom in American history. And even the IRA was only a fraction of the Mission for America's scale. The distance between what presidents have attempted and what the Mission for America calls for is still enormous — but the IRA proved that when government leads, private capital follows.

To understand what presidential leadership is capable of, we must look back to Franklin Roosevelt who inherited the Great Depression and took actions bold enough to overcome it. He approached it with a willingness to act audaciously and try anything. His schemes often included misguided policies and programs that backfired. However, voters backed him and his party in election after election because his biggest and most decisive actions worked astonishingly well to solve the economic crisis, raise living standards, and build wealth. When World War II came, FDR's mission expanded to include mobilizing our economy to supply the U.S. and allied militaries with an overwhelming and unimaginable quantity of weapons and materials — all while building an entirely new, technologically advanced industrial economy that would provide prosperity and security for generations.

Some of President Roosevelt's bold actions included:

- Taking the U.S. currency off the gold standard — against the advice of nearly all his closest advisors — to allow expansionary lending and spending to get the economy growing again.[54]
- Closing and recapitalizing the failing banking system, combined with a personal appeal via his famous radio "fireside chats" to the nation in which he asked the public to have faith that when it reopened, it would be worthy of their trust.[55]
- Massively expanding the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), created as an emergency measure by Herbert Hoover, and turning it into a permanent investment and coordination institution that would guide the U.S. economy through both the Depression and World War II.[56]
- Directing the RFC, which became the largest corporation in the world, and other war-mobilization institutions that he created to fund and coordinate the creation of entirely new industries and vast new infrastructure and recruiting thousands of leaders from industry and finance to lead those efforts.[57]

[54]Richardson, G., Komai, A., & Gou, M. (2013, November 22). Roosevelt's Gold Program. Federal Reserve History. https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/roosevelts-gold-program

[55]Latson, J. (2015, March 12). How FDR's Radio Voice Solved a Banking Crisis. TIME. https://time.com/3731744/fdr-fireside-chat-banking/

[56]Olson, J. S. (1988). Saving Capitalism: The Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal, 1933-1940. Princeton University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1m322tm

[57]Ibid.

- Creating scores of other investment and coordination institutions, many as spin-offs of the RFC, and many of which live on today as public or private corporations and agencies such as the FDIC, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and the Export-Import Bank.[58]
- Creating the Social Security system, which perhaps did more than any other single policy in American history to reduce poverty and increase prosperity.[59]
- Creating the Civilian Conservation Corps (against the resistance of almost everyone in his cabinet and the military) that gave millions of unemployed and homeless people jobs that maintained or restored their employability, provided income to millions, and provided important investment and restoration for countless communities.[60]
- Modernizing and scaling national infrastructure in projects that provided employment to millions and that accomplished feats as great as delivering electrification to virtually every American.[61]

By making those bold moves and many others, Roosevelt massively expanded the size of the U.S. economy and advanced it technologically to heights that would have looked like magic before his presidency. What he added to the U.S. economy and society formed the basis of the next 80 years of American global prosperity.

The Double Crisis

As mentioned, the Mission for America is designed as a response to dual crises that America and the world are facing:

- The AI and economic crisis, and
- The climate and environmental crisis

Both threaten to radically intensify in the coming years. Only action on the scale of the Mission for America can resolve them, and they're also part of what will make the Mission for America politically feasible as the disruption caused by the crises changes the bounds of public opinion.

Even if we didn't have the climate and environmental crisis, the Mission for America would still be the best path to rebuild American prosperity, create millions of high-wage jobs, and prepare the economy for the age of AI. Likewise, even if we didn't have the AI and economic crisis, moving off of fossil fuels, "electrifying everything," and ending waste and pollution would greatly improve quality of life for the whole world.

In history, many nations have undertaken transformations on an equivalent scale to the Mission for America proactively, without needing to be pushed by a crisis, but as it happens, we are facing these two crises now, and both have unique consequences and solutions in the United States.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Romig, K. (2023, June 2). Social Security Lifts More People Above the Poverty Line Than Any Other Program. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/social-security-keeps-22-million-americans-out-of-poverty-a-state-by-state

[60] Speakman, J. (2006, Fall). Into the Woods: The First Year of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Prologue Magazine, 38(3). https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/fall/ccc.html

[61] Elving, R. (2020, April 4). In The 1930s, Works Program Spelled HOPE For Millions Of Jobless Americans. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2020/04/04/826909516/in-the-1930s-works-program-spelled-hope-for-millions-of-jobless-americans

The AI and economic crisis

The crisis most Americans feel right now — the one that dominates the headlines and keeps families up at night — is economic. And at its sharp edge is artificial intelligence.

As we described at the opening of this plan, AI is not just another wave of automation. Previous waves displaced factory workers, and the lost jobs were eventually replaced by worse ones: service work, gig labor, Graeber's "bullshit jobs." AI is different. It targets cognitive tasks across virtually every industry — professionals, managers, knowledge workers — and the new industries it creates will be run by machines, so they will not hire back the workers AI displaces. This is not a distant hypothetical. It is the central economic anxiety of 2026, and by 2028 it will almost certainly be the defining issue of the presidential race.

But this sharp, immediate crisis did not appear out of nowhere. It is the intensification of a process that has been grinding down American workers for decades.

For decades, the United States has been dismantling and exporting its means of making a living in a process that has enriched the professional, managerial, and owning classes while eroding the wealth and quality of life of approximately the bottom 80% of income earners.[62] In response to this long decline, our political system has supplied two kinds of leaders: "decline managers," who seek merely to slow the rate of our demise, and "destroyers," who erode state capacity while selling off national assets and resources to the lowest bidders. Americans living through 2025 saw both dynamics in rapid succession — an ambitious industrial policy built and then dismantled, federal agencies gutted, experienced civil servants purged — and have watched the cycle accelerate.

As our government changed hands back and forth between decline managers and destroyers, inflation-adjusted wages for most workers have fallen or remained flat, public services and infrastructure have atrophied, and the costs of housing, healthcare, and education have skyrocketed.[63] This has led to a sharp loss of trust in our national institutions and culminated in a political crisis that continues to deepen.[64] Democratic norms and institutions that Americans took for granted are under sustained pressure — not just from dramatic events, but from the steady erosion of the government's capacity to function and the public's faith that it ever will.

On top of this gradual systemic unraveling, the U.S. economy is plagued by periodic financial collapses that are an unavoidable consequence of our economic system and its institutional framework. With every crisis, the destroyers allow the decline managers to take the lead in working out a bailout of the system — and then spend the following years relentlessly attacking them for it. In the past two crises — the 2009 financial collapse and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic — decline managers created trillions of dollars worth of new money, in the form of debt, with which to bail out companies, investors, and even, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers directly.

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[62]Flaaen, A., Pandalai-Nayar, N., & Boehm, C. (2019, August 15). A new assessment of the role of offshoring in the decline in US manufacturing employment. Centre for Economic Policy Research, VoxEU. https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/new-assessment-role-offshoring-decline-us-manufacturing-employment; Lei, S., et al. (2017, October 5). Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America (Updated). Urban Institute. https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/

[63]Mishel, L. et al. (2015, January 6). Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts. Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/; Turchin, P. (2023, June 2). America Is Headed Toward Collapse. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/06/us-societal-trends-institutional-trust-economy/674260/

[64]LaFrance, A. (2023, March 6). The New Anarchy. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/04/us-extremism-portland-george-floyd-protests-january-6/673088/

In both of those recent crashes, financial leaders on Wall Street and in the government believed that a collapse as devastating as the Great Depression would come if the federal government did not immediately bail out failing banks and other private financial institutions. They were probably right. But the creation of trillions of dollars of debt to bail out big banks during the 2009 financial collapse — while many ordinary Americans lost their homes — left citizens and politicians from both parties disillusioned and embittered. Thus, more than a decade later during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government adopted a more inclusive approach that provided financial support to small businesses and workers, in addition to big corporations and financial institutions.

In hindsight, leaders in both parties hold serious qualms about unrestrained bailouts. Many Democratic and Republican members of Congress feel they were rushed into approving reckless bailouts by Wall Street CEOs and federal officials. When the U.S. inevitably encounters another financial collapse, bailouts may not come quickly and freely enough to prevent a major financial catastrophe. This would not be wholly inappropriate. Rushed bailouts do nothing to correct the long-term fragility of our financial system. If the U.S. finds itself in the depths of a financial crisis on the scale of the Great Depression, leaders and the public may be willing to look for long-term solutions.

Beyond the immediate economic challenges, there are deeper systemic issues at play. Like the climate crisis, the economic crisis contains self-reinforcing feedback loops. As the state fails to deliver economic security, angry voters often elect anti-state leaders and parties that only make matters worse. For decades, the Republican party has practiced an anti-government electoral strategy, and has governed in a way that generally reduces the stability and capacity of the federal and state governments, for example by stigmatizing public service and expanding the national debt without restraint. The Democratic party often competes with the Republicans by promising anti-government policies of its own and has typically worked to reduce the debt after Republican presidencies that blew it up, making cuts to public services and social programs along the way.

AI threatens to accelerate all of these feedback loops at once. Mass displacement of workers — not just blue-collar, but white-collar professionals who believed they were insulated — would collapse consumer demand, trigger financial crises, and overwhelm a political system already fractured by decades of decline. The economic anxiety that drove voters to populist movements in 2016 and 2024 would intensify by orders of magnitude.

The Mission for America is the answer to that displacement: it creates enormous demand for physical work — manufacturing, construction, installation, infrastructure, care work — that AI cannot yet do. When societies fall into unemployment spirals, as most industrial countries did during the Great Depression, the only way to decisively turn that around is to create programs for mass employment in productive and necessary work. The New Deal mainly mobilized unemployed workers in make-work, consistent with the prescription of economist John Maynard Keynes that the government could "pay people to dig holes in the ground and then fill them up" — and that such policies would, on a sufficient scale, jumpstart demand and get a depressed economy rolling again.[65] Though it helped to stem the free

[65]Keynes, J. (1936). The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money. Palgrave Macmillan.

fall of the depression, those kinds of policies never fully restored confidence and growth in the economy. Only the mobilization around World War II that created jobs making actually valuable and necessary goods could do that. The Mission for America follows the World War II model, not the New Deal model: it employs everyone in productive, lucrative work building the industries that we need domestically and that the whole world needs at large.

The Mission for America will build permanent economic and financial stability by adding the institutions and industries our society is missing — so the next crash doesn't require another bailout, and the next wave of automation doesn't leave millions stranded.

The climate and environmental crisis

The planet keeps getting hotter regardless of whether it's on the front page. In 2026, climate has been crowded out of public attention by economic anxiety, AI disruption, and political chaos — but the physics hasn't paused.

The world is already experiencing the consequences of global warming — and this will only intensify in the coming years. Extreme, prolonged, deadly heat, and catastrophic droughts, wildfires, floods, and other disasters are accelerating at unpredictable rates. The effects of climate change are unevenly distributed, and many densely populated regions will experience far greater warming than the global average. Some parts of the world will experience conditions fundamentally incompatible with human life.[66] In the coming decades, millions of people will die from the effects of climate change, and hundreds of millions or even billions more will be displaced.[67]

Several factors not often considered may already be causing global warming to accelerate exponentially. Climate feedback loops happen when warming accelerates the release of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere and oceans, which in turn causes greater warming, which leads then to faster release of greenhouse gasses, and so on. There are many known (and probably still unknown) kinds of climate feedback loops, and here are just a few:

- Ice-albedo feedback: When ice melts, it exposes surfaces like water or land underneath. Because these surfaces are darker than ice, they absorb more sunlight and heat, leading to more melting and overall greater global warming.[68]
- Permafrost thawing: As global temperatures rise, permafrost thaws, releasing stored methane and carbon dioxide, further warming the atmosphere.[69]
- Water-vapor feedback: Warmer temperatures increase evaporation, leading to more water vapor in the atmosphere. Water vapor is a greenhouse gas, so this increases warming.[70]

[66]Hoegh-Guldberg, O. et al. (2022, May 24). Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C: 3 — Impacts of 1.5°C global warming on natural and human systems. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157940.005

[67]Henley, J. (2020 September 9). Climate crisis could displace 1.2bn people by 2050, report warns. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/09/climate-crisis-could-displace-12bn-people-by-2050-report-warns ; Christensen, J. (2019, January 16). 250,000 deaths a year from climate change is a 'conservative estimate,' research says. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/16/health/climate-change-health-emergency-study/index.html

[68]Flanagan, E. (2021, February 25). The Global Carbon Budget and Permafrost Feedback Loops in the Arctic. The Arctic Institute. https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/global-carbon-budget-permafrost-feedback-loops-arctic/

[69]Ibid.

[70]Buis, A. (2022, February 8). Steamy Relationships: How Atmospheric Water Vapor Amplifies Earth's Greenhouse Effect. NASA. https://climate.nasa.gov/explore/ask-nasa-climate/3143/steamy-relationships-how-atmospheric-water-vapor-amplifies-earths-greenhouse-effect/

- Ocean methane: When ocean temperatures rise, methane hydrates deep in the ocean can destabilize and release methane.[71]

Paradoxically, another factor contributing to accelerated warming is the reduction in fossil-fuel use and the shift to cleaner alternatives. Burning fossil fuels like coal and diesel releases aerosol particles which temporarily cool Earth by reflecting sunlight away.[72] Unlike long-lasting greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide, these aerosols have a short-term cooling effect because they settle back to the earth over a few years. As we transition to renewable energy, the long-term warming impact of accumulated CO2 persists, while the temporary cooling from aerosols quickly dissipates.[73]

To be clear, continuing to burn fossil fuels so that aerosols continue to have their cooling effect is not an option. Burning fossil fuels releases CO2 which increases global temperatures in effect permanently every day that we continue. The warming effect of CO2 added to the atmosphere is cumulative, which means that the longer we burn fossil fuels, the hotter the planet will get. And the limited cooling effect of aerosols cannot protect us from the unlimited warming effects of releasing more CO2 into the atmosphere.[74]

Hence, as we reduce how much fossil fuels we are burning, and as we switch from dirtier to cleaner fuels (i.e., fuels that release fewer aerosols), we will experience an immediate increase in global temperatures. Some scientists estimate that the cooling effect of the aerosols, which we will lose, may be as great as several tenths of a degree.[75] This means that even as we act to solve the crisis, temperatures will temporarily spike higher, potentially well beyond the 1.5°C threshold that the international community set as a guardrail.

Unfortunately, that threshold is no longer hypothetical. The year 2024 shattered 2023's record as the hottest in recorded history and was the first year to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.[76] In 2025 alone, the United States suffered 28 billion-dollar climate disasters totaling $115 billion in damage — three Category 5 hurricanes, the $61 billion Los Angeles wildfires, catastrophic flooding, and unprecedented tornado outbreaks. What scientists warned about for decades is now the daily news. The consequences are intensifying:

- Mass death from heat in areas that are hot, densely populated, and low-income and therefore lacking in infrastructure to protect people from extreme warming.[77]

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[71] Davies, R. (2023, December 11). Researchers: Frozen methane under the seabed is thawing as oceans warm, and things are worse than we thought. Phys. https://phys.org/news/2023-12-frozen-methane-seabed-oceans-worse.html

[72] Voosen, P. (2022, July 30). In a paradox, cleaner air is now adding to global warming. Science. https://www.science.org/content/article/paradox-cleaner-air-now-adding-global-warming

[73] Ibid.

[74] Kirk, K. (2023, June 12). Aerosols: Small Particles with Big Climate Effects. NASA. https://climate.nasa.gov/explore/ask-nasa-climate/3271/aerosols-small-particles-with-big-climate-effects/

[75] Turner, N. (2022, June 8). Aerosols from burning fossil fuels are masking global warming, UW researchers find. Seattle Times. https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/aerosols-from-burning-fossil-fuels-are-masking-global-warming-uw-researchers-find/

[76] Zhong, R. & Collins, K. (2024, January 9). See How 2023 Shattered Records to Become the Hottest Year. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/09/climate/2023-warmest-year-record.html ; Cohen, L. (2024, January 10). 2023 was officially the hottest year ever. These charts show just how warm it was — and why it's so dangerous. CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charts-show-2023-officially-hottest-year-ever-recorded/ ; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2024, January 12). 2023 was the world's warmest year on record, by far. https://www.noaa.gov/news/2023-was-worlds-warmest-year-on-record-by-far

[77] Lüthi, S., Fairless, C., Fischer, E.M. et al. Rapid Increase in the Risk of Heat-Related Mortality. Nature Communications 14, 4894 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-40599-x

- More frequent and powerful storms that will sometimes hit major cities unequipped to deal with high winds and flooding.[78]
- Uncontrollable wildfires that begin to destroy densely populated areas.[79]
- Devastating flooding in population centers unequipped to deal with it.[80]
- Serious droughts that threaten agricultural and even drinking water supplies.[81]
- The disruption of food supplies from failures in agriculture and fishing.[82]

And those are just a handful of the possible catastrophic consequences we face.

Aside from climate change, the environmental crisis is also the result of industrial pollution. This harms millions of people and affects human and animal biology in ways we are only starting to understand.[83] Countless toxins are now found in drinking water, food, human bodies, and even breast milk. It is close to impossible to study the effects of these low-level toxins on humans because it is unethical to construct experiments where people are subjected to them. Nevertheless, it is known that many toxins humans are exposed to cause harm at any concentration. Most people have been conditioned to believe that a high level of daily pollution is the inevitable by-product of living in an industrial society and often don't even recognize the amount of pollution they are exposed to on a daily basis. The reality is, however, that millions of people die prematurely worldwide because industry is polluting the air they breathe.[84]

Much more can be said about the destruction of the natural environment by human activity, and we will develop this idea further in future chapters.

Feedback loops between the two crises

Each of the twin crises have effects that intensify the other. For example, climate change causes droughts and natural disasters that threaten the global supply chain — inevitably causing rising prices and shortages of key goods.[85] Rising temperatures will accelerate climate migration from developing countries, draining developing countries of their most talented workers and placing unpredictable strains on developed countries' immigration systems.[86] Concurrently, the more that national economies are

[78]Colbert, A. (2022, June 1). A Force of Nature: Hurricanes in a Changing Climate. NASA. https://climate.nasa.gov/news/3184/a-force-of-nature-hurricanes-in-a-changing-climate/

[79]Turco, M., Abatzoglou, J. T., Herrera, S., Zhuang, Y., Jerez, S., Lucas, D. D., AghaKouchak, A., & Cvijanovic, I. (2023). Anthropogenic climate change impacts exacerbate summer forest fires in California. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. 120(25). https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2213815120

[80]Zhou, L. (2023, September 29). The "new abnormal": The rise of extreme flooding, briefly explained. Vox. https://www.vox.com/climate/2023/7/11/23791462/nyc-flooding-brooklyn-weather-climate-change

[81]Borenstein, S. (2023, April 13). As Earth warms, more 'flash droughts' suck soil, plants dry. Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/drought-sudden-agriculture-climate-change-heat-bef55fc8c34a430b29f023bca40acc0

[82]Hasegawa, T., Shirogami, H., Fujimori, S., Takahashi, K., Hijioka, Y., & Masui, T. (2021). Extreme climate events increase risk of global food insecurity and adaptation needs. Nature Food. 2(8), 587-595. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00335-4

[83]Rahman, M. M. et al. (2021, June 18). Is industrial pollution detrimental to public health? Evidence from the world's most industrialised countries. BMC Public Health. 21(1175). https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-11217-6

[84]Peters, G., & Wooley, J. T. (2023, December 25). Presidential News Conferences. The American Presidency Project. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-news-conferences; Lerer, L. (2021, January 20). How Joe Biden Became a Steady Hand Amid So Much Chaos. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/us/politics/president-joe-biden.html

[85]Leslie, J. (2022, March 10). How Climate Change Is Disrupting the Global Supply Chain. Yale Environment 360. https://e360.yale.edu/features/how-climate-change-is-disrupting-the-global-supply-chain ;

[86]Huang, L. (2023, November 16). Climate Migration 101: An Explainer. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-migration-101-explainer; Lustgarten, A. (2020, July 23). The Great Climate Migration. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html

burdened by the climate crisis, the fewer resources they will have to reduce emissions and adapt to a warming climate in the short run.

The Mission for America is designed to break both cycles at once — by tackling the environmental and economic crises simultaneously, turning negative feedback loops into positive ones. That is why a comprehensive mobilization is necessary, and why half-measures will always fail.

What it will take to solve the twin crises

What makes solving these kinds of self-reinforcing, spiraling crises difficult is that small, measured steps are insufficient. Overcoming an accelerating crisis requires an effort large and powerful enough to not only counter the downward fall but also create lift in a positive direction. It is unsustainable, both financially and politically, for a society in a downward spiral to merely slow decline. Decline management is expensive and doesn't result in new sources of revenue from growth. It is much more expensive to spend trillions of dollars over the course of decades making decline less painful than it is to spend billions in a short period of time to reverse it. Perhaps most importantly, voters who don't experience growth and progress will ultimately lose faith in decline managers and begin to look for alternatives. Too often, these alternatives are anti-democratic despots looking to divide citizens and profit from decline. Liberal democracies rarely survive in decline mode for very long. Leaders committed to liberal democracy must pull them out of decline before it is too late.[87]

In other words, solving these enormous, intractable, and intensifying crises requires a sort of "national escape velocity." The Mission for America is designed to achieve that, by organizing effort of sufficient scale and impact, and by front-loading the mission with enough tangible progress for voters that they will give it a chance to continue.

This is why the Mission for America is not only a policy framework but also a political strategy for a president and a national business plan for corporate and small-business America. Its plans would lead very quickly to more jobs and higher wages by providing millions of high-wage "shovel-ready" jobs and training. It ensures that those expenditures will be afforded by large increases in national income from lucrative investments that will take some time to yield results.

Assuming current political, economic, and climate trends persist, the Mission for America is designed to be an economically, technologically, and politically feasible plan to overhaul the entire economy. Continuing America's 300-year national lucky streak, we are blessed with the exact combination of resources, labor, capital, and institutions that will allow us to solve the double crisis — if only we can muster the leadership to act proactively and wisely.

How a mission to solve the double crisis could unite America

America's intense political polarization makes it difficult for some to imagine how a president could unite America behind a national mission. The American electorate has fractured into two distinct political tribes, and the divide between them gets larger every year. Although this divide has its roots in the middle of the 20th century, it has been worsened by the rise of social media and conspiracy-driven news

[87] Galston, W. A. (2020 July). The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy. Journal of Democracy, 31(3), 8-24. https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-enduring-vulnerability-of-liberal-democracy/

sources. Intensely partisan talk radio, cable TV, and internet-based enterprises have created their own information ecosystem that pushes conspiracy theories with an anti-government, libertarian, and racist bias. The resulting social tensions reached a breaking point in the aftermath of the 2020 election, in which a large portion of the American population refused to accept the results — and a particularly emboldened few attempted a coup.

If Americans can't come to a consensus on basic facts, and if some reject liberal democracy altogether, how can we claim that a president could build support for something as big as the Mission for America? We recognize that political polarization will pose a challenge to the Mission for America president. Yet, for the four reasons below, we're confident that a capable and determined president can successfully call our divided country to this national mission:

- A well-designed national mission can appeal to the interests of voters across the political spectrum.
- America's institutions can be reformed so that our proposals will need only a simple majority to pass.
- A national mission that delivers immediate and noticeable improvements to quality of life will create a lasting political coalition.
- As the dual crisis intensifies, the public will favor sincere and practical solutions over conspiracy theories if they are presented coherently by leaders determined to and capable of following through.

The Mission for America is designed to appeal deeply to both of America's political tribes. It calls for an economic renewal that delivers what voters on both sides have been asking for: real prosperity and security for all, and a restored position as a net-exporting economy that sets the pace for the world. It proposes to achieve that through a massive economic mobilization to replace our greenhouse-gas emitting industry, infrastructure, vehicles, and other equipment and machines with clean alternatives — and to establish the U.S. as the leading exporter of the most valuable goods and services the world will need to get off fossil fuels, to enable a faster global transition. We're under no illusion that America will easily unite around both of these goals as one happy family. But we believe it contains the ingredients an innovative presidential candidate could use to build a movement beyond their party's traditional base.

Given present political realities, the Mission for America president will almost certainly fail to win over the opposition party to join in making the mission a success. Given current senate rules, a supermajority of 60 votes is needed to pass comprehensive legislation, thanks to the filibuster.[88] The Senate filibuster is a procedural rule in the Senate that allows a single senator to extend debate on a piece of legislation until a supermajority of 60 senators votes to end debate. It is exceptionally rare in modern America for a party to have 60 or more seats in the Senate. Democrats and Republicans have both occasionally used an obscure process known as "budget reconciliation" to bypass the filibuster. However, the procedure applies only to budget-related bills that reduce the deficit, which will limit its usefulness in the Mission for America.

[88]Elving, R. (2022, January 17). Senate Democrats plan a vote to change the filibuster. So what is it?. National Public Radio. https://www.npr.org/2022/01/17/1072714887/filibuster-explained

[89]Reynold, M. (2020, September 9). What is the Senate filibuster, and what would it take to eliminate it? Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-the-senate-filibuster-and-what-would-it-take-to-eliminate-it/

Abolishing the filibuster can be done with only a simple majority in Congress.[89] This rule change will allow for the passage of the Mission for America's policy proposals with a simple majority, sidestepping the need for overwhelming bipartisan consensus or the confusing budget reconciliation process. The House of Representatives was also once hamstrung by a rule similar to the filibuster, but was abolished in 1890 by Republican House Speaker, Representative Thomas Brackett Reed Jr. of Maine.[90] It is time for this to happen in the Senate.

Ending the filibuster is already a mainstream idea within the Democratic Party and wider policy circles.[91] An attempt in 2021 fell short when two senators blocked it. Both are now gone.[92] The filibuster will have to be abolished on day one of the Mission for America presidency. Without it, there is no path to passing comprehensive legislation of this scale. The Mission for America president must make filibuster reform a central promise of their campaign — and be prepared to spend political capital on it before anything else.

The Mission for America is designed to become more popular over the course of the president's term. The Mission for America will win over voters initially skeptical of the mission by generating immediate and identifiable economic gains for a broad spectrum of Americans. Every national mission in the Mission for America will create tangible improvements in living standards, job creation, and environmental quality over a relatively short amount of time. The president must actively showcase the positive impacts of each mission in real time and draw a clear line between the national mission and America's newfound prosperity. Such visible progress can be a unifying force, creating a compelling narrative that transcends political divides. As people across the nation begin to experience the benefits firsthand, we anticipate a groundswell of support for the Mission for America.

How to read the Mission for America

The Mission for America contains more than a dozen component national missions, each corresponding to a major goal or sector of the economy. Most chapters following this one focus on a single national mission. After this general introduction, additional preliminary chapters will go into more depth on key concepts and new institutions critical for understanding how the Mission for America works. Grasping the core principles outlined in this introduction and initial chapters will be vital to fully appreciating the intricacies and interconnectedness of each specific national mission, making every subsequent chapter more accessible and meaningful.

The Mission for America can be fully understood only as a whole because each national mission relies on virtually all the others. When complete, the Mission for America will be published as a print and electronic book and available in PDF form for free. For convenience, each chapter will be available for download as a separate PDF. There is a danger, however, that if a reader studies one national mission chapter in isolation, it could appear to have many missing pieces. We understand that many will read only the missions corresponding to their areas of interest. For example, those interested in the auto industry will probably read the electrical vehicle (EV) chapter but possibly not the other chapters. We have tried

[90] Tuchman, B. (1966). The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914. Macmillan. ISBN: 0026203006.

[91] Zhou, L. (2022, January 19). Democrats' failure on filibuster reform will haunt them. Vox. https://www.vox.com/2022/1/19/22881837/senate-filibuster-vote-voting-rights-joe-manchin-kyrsten-sinema

[92] Ibid.

to prevent any misunderstandings by including information in each national mission chapter on how they are enabled by the other missions and the general tools and strategies of the Mission for America.

The comprehensiveness of the Mission for America is what makes it so unusual and tricky to understand from a traditional policy perspective. Each national mission is more difficult and less beneficial on its own than as part of the whole. Combined, however, they all make each other practical and wholly beneficial. Moreover, every mission is possible only with the coordination and financing of investment provided by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and with a revival of the kind of presidential leadership that has led economic mobilizations in the past.

The national mission for EVs is an excellent case study for why the Mission for America must be viewed as a comprehensive whole. In isolation, the mission to achieve nearly 100% electric vehicles on U.S. roads would not be achievable or even beneficial. Retiring gas-powered cars and trucks makes no sense if the EVs replacing them are powered by fossil-fuel electricity generation and if the steel and other materials required are manufactured using coal and gas. Moreover, if the bulk of that manufacturing happens overseas, switching to EVs would eliminate many of our remaining auto jobs — and be even more counterproductive with regard to reducing emissions.

Viewed comprehensively with several other national missions and with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, however, the EV mission looks completely different. First, thanks to the national mission for clean power, the grid will provide 100% clean energy in 10 years, the same target date for getting to 99% EVs. The U.S. steel industry will produce steel using clean technologies and expand total production volumes to meet the needs of an expanding auto industry.

The Tools

The federal government will make the Mission for America happen using a variety of strategies, institutions, and other tactics. We will refer to these collectively as "the tools." They are ways of mobilizing federal agencies and institutions as well as spurring the private sector, communities, and state and local governments into action. One category of tools can be challenging to write about in ways that fit into a typical policy paper because they are simply ways of behaving, speaking, and campaigning that politicians have forgotten — for example, what we call "mission leadership."

Another category includes types of programs familiar in policy circles, such as tax credits, which are legislated into existence and administered by federal agencies. Usually, the Mission for America deploys these programs on a far greater scale than other climate proposals.

The final category of tools includes institutions that the Mission for America must create, such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, or existing institutions that must be used in new ways and usually massively scaled up from what they are today.

Each national mission within the Mission for America relies on a combination of this same set of tools, combined and configured in different ways. Policy writers often work to make their proposed solutions sound unique and original. We are intentionally doing the opposite, and this is a key feature that makes the Mission for America feasible. Repetition and reuse of the tools create a modularity that increases efficiency and the chance of success. Experience gained with a tool in one place will pay off everywhere

else it is at work. Leaders and civil servants will encounter similar dynamics as they move around to work on different areas of the Mission for America. It will also make it easier for the president and top administration officials to hold leaders and civil servants accountable for success because the dynamics of the tools will be similar across all areas. Likewise, citizens, journalists, and watchdog groups will more easily be able to follow the action and provide accountability.

We explain the foundations of each tool below.

Overview of the tools

Mission Leadership. The Mission for America requires a mode of leadership we haven't witnessed since Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. We will enumerate some of the forgotten tactics of what we call "mission leadership" that must return to American politics, including the following elements:

- Using the presidential campaign as a tool to build an understanding of the Mission for America among the public and win a mandate to accomplish it
- Committing to mobilize the nation's economy on the scale of a world war to fully accomplish the goals of the Mission for America
- Building a movement beyond the president's party to ensure it fully supports the Mission for America
- Personally recruiting leaders from the ranks of industry who are qualified to accomplish the Mission for America
- Charging individual leaders with the responsibility for each national mission, and making them household names, thereby increasing both their sense of authority and their pressure to succeed
- Relentlessly holding those leaders accountable for results over time
- Pushing to the limits of presidential power with executive orders and emergency powers
- Breaking through the noise to capture the people's attention using frequent and urgent public addresses, generating conflict and controversy, and making patriotic appeals to join something greater than oneself: the Mission for America

Institutions. These are the organizations that convert ideas, policies, and political slogans into action in the real world. Our recommendations call for using existing institutions more aggressively and creating new institutions where necessary, such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC).

Spending. The government can spend money directly to make things happen, such as building infrastructure or creating new government services.

Investment. Government agencies and other institutions, such as the RFC, can invest in activities and enterprises that create value. Investment differs from spending in that it is structured to earn a return for the government. Government investments are common in most industrialized nations and used to be common in the United States as well. Over the past century, the U.S. has forgone trillions of dollars in revenue that it could have earned if it had structured grants and loans to companies as investments. In the RFC's first incarnation during the Depression and World War II, it earned a profit for the federal government every year that it operated.

Carrots. The federal government can set up incentives that encourage specific favorable outcomes. These often take the form of tax credits or grants.

Sticks. The federal government can set up disincentives in the form of taxes, regulations, and outright bans on products or types of corporate behavior.

The Mission for America uses all of these tools in combination — because different problems call for different tools. Is the barrier a capital problem? That's an RFC loan. A high operating cost? A production tax credit. No buyers yet? Federal procurement. No one willing to build? The RFC builds it directly. This systematic approach — diagnosing the specific barrier and deploying the right tool — is what makes the Mission for America's solutions coherent rather than a grab bag of programs.

Presidential mission leadership

Leadership is the most intangible tool in the Mission for America's toolbox — and the most important. It is the tool that makes all the others possible. We're aware that advice on leadership is not usually the domain of economic and environmental policy proposals. But we can no longer leave leadership solely up to the leaders.

Though full-mobilization mission leadership could have and should have been used many other times in U.S. history, only two presidents took the nation fully into mission mode: Lincoln, with the Civil War, and Franklin Roosevelt, with the New Deal and World War II. There have been many other transformational presidents (for better or for worse), such as Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Reagan. But only Lincoln and Roosevelt took America into a total industrial mobilization that transformed and massively scaled up our national economy, creating a step change in prosperity for most Americans.

It is difficult to find examples in domestic and international history where national mobilizations took place without a president, prime minister, or monarch willing to use the tools of mission leadership that we elaborate here. Legislatures and cabinets are generally unable to act as decisively as is required to lead a national mobilization. Mission-mode leaders don't act alone, of course, and are supported by movements and parties, public institutions, and parts of the private sector.

Successful leaders of national mobilizations use extraordinary leadership tools that we will cover below, and they must use them skillfully, creatively, persistently, and determinedly until success is achieved.

One of the most frequent criticisms of the Mission for America approach is that mission leadership is possible only in wartime. That is not, however, supported by the record of history. As we've said, most national economic mobilizations of the 20th century were initiated during peacetime by leaders and movements that proactively proposed to raise living standards, safeguard national independence, and ensure the success of democracy. Moreover, war does not automatically trigger a national mobilization. The U.S. failed to fully mobilize its economy around the War of 1812, World War I, where it failed to deliver the majority of its war material before the end of the war, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the "forever wars" in the Middle East from 1991 to the present. Lacking the transformational growth of a full mobilization, all U.S. wars except for World War II and the Civil War were drags on American prosperity because they subtracted from a zero-sum economy, taking away from other national priorities and adding debt that would not be paid off by increased tax revenues. The Civil War and World War II,

however, permanently increased the living standards of Americans by massively increasing the country's total stock of productive capital.

There was nothing about the Civil War or World War II that forced a full economic mobilization. In each case, the president made a brave decision to mobilize, and he used or created all the tools necessary to accomplish that. Mobilization would have failed or never even started if they had not exercised a different kind of leadership that would accept nothing less than full-scale mobilization.

Using the presidential campaign as a tool to build an understanding of the Mission for America among the public and win a mandate to accomplish it

The Mission for America president must begin practicing mission leadership from the first days of their presidential campaign. The campaign must be centered around explaining the Mission for America and pitching it to the public from the start. Often, a political crisis turns an otherwise ordinary leader unexpectedly into a mission leader when they are already in office. This was the case with both Lincoln and Roosevelt. Post-war world history, however, has many cases of political movements coming to power by pitching their nations on missions in election campaigns. The unusually long and involved U.S. presidential campaign system is perfectly suited for pitching the American people on a national mission. Candidates in the U.S. have never taken this opportunity except in the vaguest of terms. When they clearly campaign in that direction, however, they often win big. Barack Obama, for example, came from virtually out of nowhere, as a Black man in America with an unusual name, and won a decisive victory against a well-known and respected war hero — and he did that by campaigning passionately for transformational change.

Committing to mobilize the nation's economy on the scale of a world war to fully accomplish the goals of the Mission for America

The president must commit to a full-scale mobilization and accept nothing less. They must be willing to have a full-blown conflict with Congress, including members of their own party, to clear the way for the Mission for America, enlisting and mobilizing popular support. As explained above, half-measures cannot move an economy from decline mode to mission mode. Achieving a full-scale mobilization is the only way to break out of the cycle of disappointment and disillusionment that sends voters endlessly bouncing back and forth between parties, achieving little progress as each side undoes the other's limited accomplishments. If the Mission for America president accepts a major compromise in a conflict with Congress, the opposition party, or the courts, then they will not only be accepting failure for their presidency but also for America's last chance to repair the economy and do what's needed to stop global warming in time.

By demanding a full-scale mobilization using all the tactics described here, the president will give the people a chance to insist on change in a constructive way. If voters elected the president on a promise to accomplish the Mission for America, and the president puts up a loud and public fight to get it going, they will support it.

Voters are used to politicians making promises that are forgotten the moment they are spoken. The president must tell the people what they are trying to accomplish and then show that they are fighting to make it happen every day. And if necessary they must be willing to pick public fights with anyone

who stands in the way. When Congressional leaders oppose what the president is trying to do, that is not the end, but the beginning of a fight that the media will love to cover and that the public will enjoy watching.

The president's commitment to a full-scale economic mobilization will involve a commitment to navigating such public conflicts, even if it means losing some rounds initially. The president must not be embarrassed to initially lose some rounds in this public fight. The voters will give the president credit for going to the mat for them. But also, presidents who fight hard often surprise themselves by winning. When Joe Manchin was blocking Biden's industrial policy agenda, the Biden administration almost threw in the towel. Third-party lobbying efforts revealed that Manchin was willing to strike a deal for relatively small concessions. Biden succeeded in passing the Inflation Reduction Act — far beyond what anyone expected was possible when he took office. The IRA triggered $470 billion in private investment and over 330,000 jobs before Trump killed its key provisions in 2025. The lesson is twofold: conflict, handled artfully, can produce breakthroughs. But victories built on fragile legislative foundations can be undone by the next president — which is why the Mission for America must be built on durable institutions, not just tax credits.

Take the movement beyond one's own party

The ultimate tool for prevailing in the inevitable fight with Congress is challenging members of the president's own party in midterm primaries. The Mission for America president and their movement must be willing to campaign against members of their own party. Without this, there will be no hope of accomplishing a full-scale economic mobilization. Given the political polarization of American politics, of course, the opposition party will fight against anything the president attempts. This is why the filibuster will have to be eliminated, as we discussed above. But the president will also face opposition from conservative, corrupt, and complacent members of their own party.

Donald Trump showed that it is possible for a president to bring their party into total alignment, in part by rallying the party base in support of their program and, critically, to be willing to primary party members who oppose the presidential electoral mandate. We also have an example of this working in the Democratic party. In 2018, after Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez came from out of nowhere to defeat one of the most powerful Democrats in Congress in his primary, other entrenched Democrats felt suddenly vulnerable. When she introduced the Green New Deal in the first days of the 116th Congress, more than 100 Democrats shocked their colleagues by endorsing it. They believed that supporting the Green New Deal would insulate them from whatever insurgent movement had toppled one of their leaders. Later that year, Senator Ed Markey, who was facing a primary challenge by a young scion of the Kennedy family, cosponsored a formal Green New Deal resolution with Ocasio-Cortez.

Personally recruiting leaders qualified to rebuild the economy from the ranks of industry

The Mission for America president must recruit the country's most qualified people to lead the national missions making up the Mission for America. These figures will lead teams at the RFC corresponding to each national mission. They cannot be politicians or political operatives. They need to come from the industries they will be transforming, and they need to be leaders with track records and networks that qualify them to carry out those transformations.

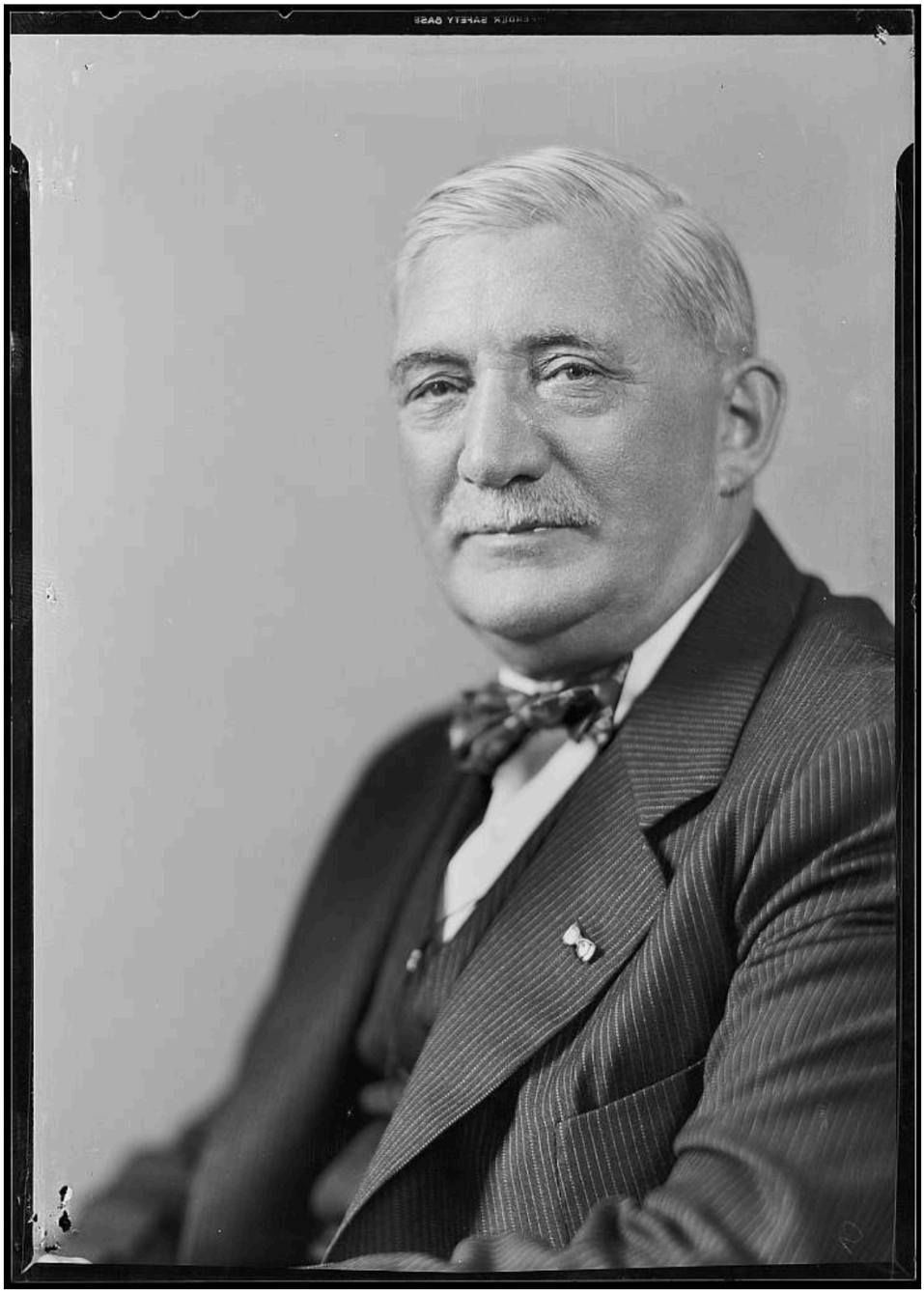


Figure 2: William S. Knudsen, director-general of the Office of Production Management.

Source: Library of Congress. (1940). Knudsen, William S., director-general, Office of Production Management (OPM) and member of the Supply Priorities and Allocations Board. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017700576/

We need figures like Bill Knudsen to lead the Mission for America. Roosevelt persuaded Bill Knudsen, the president of General Motors — the largest corporation in the world at the time — to quit his job and lead the World War II economic mobilization.[93] The World War I mobilization had been led by the banker Bernard Baruch and had failed to empower the U.S. economy to reach its full potential. As it happened,

[93]Herman, A. (2012). Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II. Random House. ISBN: 978-0812982046.

FDR lucked into hiring William Knudsen. He initially had invited Bernard Baruch to reprise his role, but Baruch insisted that FDR hire Knudsen, who had reinvented American manufacturing in the years between the wars.

Knudsen brought three key qualities that made him the perfect person for the job. First, he had enormous determination to succeed, driven in part by his love for his sisters who were stuck in Nazi-occupied Denmark, from which Knudsen had immigrated at the age of 17.[94] Second, he understood how to plan and execute a rapid industrial transformation. Years earlier, as the head of Chevrolet, he had developed a flexible mode of manufacturing that allowed Chevrolet to release new models of cars every year — something viewed as impossible before he did it.[95] This art of building new kinds of complex vehicles in a short period was essential to the success of the World War II mobilization. Third, his experience as the president of GM gave him a network of close personal relationships with countless manufacturers across the country. His track record as a trustworthy partner to those manufacturers enabled him to mobilize that network on a handshake basis even before Congress and the military authorized contracts. From his experience quickly rolling out new models of vehicles at GM, Knudsen understood all the steps required to take place before anyone started placing orders for munitions, vehicles, tanks, aircraft, and ships. Political and military leaders knew nothing of this. He got it all moving on his own, with little support from the White House or the military, almost without them even noticing. In hindsight, they would see that what he accomplished in the early months of the mobilization enabled an industrial miracle that would eventually completely overwhelm the Axis powers with a torrent of military-industrial output.

Leaders of the caliber of Bill Knudsen won't always quit their jobs and join the RFC the minute they're asked. To recruit them, the president will have to put in a lot of personal time and effort. This will be one of the president's most important jobs in accomplishing the Mission for America.

Charging leaders publicly with responsibility for the success of national missions, and relentlessly holding those leaders accountable for success over time

Another mode of leadership that America experiences usually only in wartime, but that will be needed in the Mission for America, is delegating powers to responsible leaders and holding those leaders publicly accountable for results. In a war, generals become famous for their victories and failures. Presidents demonstrate their leadership in war primarily through choosing these generals and in making the high-stakes decisions about where to deploy them, when to support them, and when to replace them.

In the Mission for America, the national mission leaders should become as famous as World War II generals. They should be appointed with great fanfare so that they become, as much as possible, household names, with the public knowing what they are responsible for accomplishing. This is important for several reasons. First, it obviously increases the pressure on the leaders to do whatever it takes to succeed in accomplishing their missions. Second, it creates a public mandate that will help the leader push through obstacles thrown up by other leaders in Congress, industry, and state and local government. Third, if the leader ultimately fails, the president can then show the public that the mission is still on track by relieving the leader of their duties and putting a new leader in place.

[94]Ibid.
[95]Ibid.

Historically, this approach is not unprecedented. In the World War II military and industrial mobilization, for instance, the public was well aware of the roles of generals and industrial leaders alike. President Roosevelt maintained the confidence of the public through the war by actively deploying, promoting, and demoting famous leaders. Even on the industrial side, leaders like Bill Knudsen, Henry Kaiser, and others were regularly celebrated — and berated — on the covers of national magazines and newspapers, in the headlines of news radio, and on the big screen in cinema newsreels.

When national mission leaders succeed at achieving important milestones (e.g., opening new EV and battery factories), the president must celebrate those achievements as publicly as possible. When the national mission / RFC team leaders fail to meet benchmarks, the president must apply pressure. But it's critical that the president also apply pressure to all the other leaders, institutions, and companies the RFC team leaders need things from to accomplish their mission. When the president is yelling about lack of progress on a mission on TV, this should make it easier for the mission leader to win cooperation from necessary participants even without the president needing to apply pressure on them directly.

Again, we see the revealing parody of this kind of leadership in Donald Trump's presidency every time he criticizes or even attacks one of his cabinet members in the media or on social media. Though it is completely counterproductive for Trump's presidency because he lacks any kind of plan or clear objective and attacks his own staff arbitrarily with no relationship to performance, it does create a tremendous amount of energy inside his administration. Though all that energy is wasted because it essentially powers a circular firing squad, it does show how motivating external public pressure from a president can be.

Breaking through the noise to capture the people's attention

To launch and accomplish the Mission for America, a president will need to rally public opinion in a way not seen since FDR. Because it's been so long since we've seen that kind of leadership succeed, it can be difficult for Americans to imagine. It may be especially difficult for progressives. President Biden, for example, shied away from holding national addresses in what appeared to be a conscious decision to bring politics "back to normal" after the Trump years of frequent, absurd press conferences. Biden did half as many press events as Trump per year, on average.[96] For whatever reason, it appears to be easier for conservatives to imagine moving public opinion. George W. Bush and his cabinet worked aggressively to scare Americans into supporting an unprovoked war against Saddam Hussein. They moved public opinion from widespread skepticism to majority support for the war by making strong arguments repeatedly and passionately in the national media and in emergency Oval Office addresses. For his part, Donald Trump radically changed the minds of conservatives and Republicans: from supporting free-trade policies to opposing them, and from viewing Russia and Vladimir Putin as enemies to viewing them as friends.

Presidents have many tools available to them for changing and rallying public opinion, including public addresses, appearing on the news, initiating controversies and conflicts to generate news, running advertising campaigns, holding mass rallies, pushing messages through their parties' national and local

[96]Peters, G., & Wooley, J. T. (2023, December 25). Presidential News Conferences. The American Presidency Project. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-news-conferences; Lerer, L. (2021, January 20). How Joe Biden Became a Steady Hand Amid So Much Chaos. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/us/politics/president-joe-biden.html

organizations, and many others. There is no set formula. Mission leadership cannot be practiced by hiring a PR firm or campaign consultants. Something new and unique is needed to capture the public attention. Quantity and intensity matter. President Biden and his administration, for example, complained that voters were unaware of his formidable accomplishments. But Biden used only a few of the tools we are discussing here and used them quietly and infrequently.

The presidential address is only one tool for changing public opinion and rallying the public around a cause, but it can be a powerful one. Around the world, populist leaders have built and mobilized strong political bases in part by holding frequent national addresses. Mexico's president, Claudia Sheinbaum, starts every day with a press conference that often lasts several hours. In early 2025, it was the most-watched livestream on YouTube in Mexico, and ranked among the top 10 most-watched non-gaming livestreams globally.[97] These public addresses are part of the formula that has kept Sheinbaum's approval rating above 70% throughout her presidency.

The one glimpse America has had in recent times of this kind of presidential communication was Donald Trump's daily emergency COVID-19 briefings. While these press conferences were an unmitigated disaster from a public health perspective, they were incredibly powerful at shaping the views of nearly half the population, turning millions against mask-wearing and social distancing, and promoting miracle cures in the form of untested drugs and even injecting bleach.[98] Trump squandered the opportunity to inform Americans about the real threats and solutions of the pandemic, but there's no question the briefings were effective in shaping public opinion — albeit in all the wrong ways. Fortunately, unlike Trump's divisive briefings, U.S. history offers examples of presidential communications that unified and positively impacted the nation.

Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, is famous in part for pioneering this approach at the dawn of the radio era with his "fireside chats." These chats had a huge impact on public opinion and behavior. In the first days of his presidency, FDR stopped a nationwide bank run by convincing Americans that if everyone stopped withdrawing funds out of panic, that everyone's money would be safe — and it was. He didn't only use his voice to convince people to stop taking their money out of local banks, he empowered the RFC to recapitalize the banks and closed all banks to give the public a moment to calm down. Those actions proved that Roosevelt's words could be trusted and amplified their power.

Artfully using conflict, when necessary

Politicians often complain that the media will not carry their voice to the people. But under certain circumstances, the media will deliver billions of dollars worth of free media coverage. A capitalist free press loves to cover ongoing, dramatic conflicts, especially when the outcome is uncertain. This is a key dynamic in a liberal democracy. Donald Trump showed this effectively. He used conflict to gain extensive media attention, demonstrating that despite the unpleasant and sometimes unfair nature of such coverage, it can be immensely powerful.

[97] Marcos, A. S. (2023, September 21). President of Mexico with the most hours viewed out of all Spanish-speaking streamers in August. Newsendip. https://www.newsendip.com/president-of-mexico-with-the-most-hours-viewed-out-of-all-spanish-speaking-streamers-in-august/

[98] Berenson, T. (2020, March 20). 'He's Walking the Tightrope.' How Donald Trump Is Getting Out His Message on Coronavirus. Time. https://time.com/5812588/donald-trump-coronavirus-briefings-message-campaign/

Playing to the media's hunger for drama is not as cynical as it sounds. After all, fighting to launch and accomplish something as big and disruptive as the Mission for America will necessarily involve drama, conflict, and constant battles with uncertain outcomes that the media will love to cover.

This strategy isn't exclusive to American politics. Right-wing authoritarian leaders around the world build support among and communicate their intentions to their people by getting into entertaining conflicts with their opponents, the media, corporations, and entire industries. Almost always, these right-wing leaders stand for positions — sometimes bizarre ones — that only a minority of the people support. Yet they often win elections by solidifying their base while the rest of the people are unenthused or split among many weak alternatives. Imagine if progressive politicians fought for majoritarian positions as passionately and skillfully as Republicans fight for minority positions! The Mission for America president needs to embrace these political dynamics and make a big show of it. That's how connecting with the public in a liberal democracy works, and it always has. Picking an explosive and drawn-out fight can generate news coverage and show voters what a president stands for.

Using all available presidential powers

The Mission for America president, once elected on the promise of national renewal, must not hesitate to use executive orders and emergency powers to set key parts of the Mission for America in motion, even before Congress acts. This is vital, especially considering that it may be America's last chance to reverse its systemic social and economic decline. America fully joining the fight against climate change to its maximum ability and leading that fight if necessary because no other country does, may be humanity's last chance to prevent or at least reverse catastrophic global warming. The American political system contains provisions for such a dire moment of truth in the way presidential power has been designed.

This urgent need for presidential action becomes even more pronounced when considering the current state of Congress. If Congress is too divided, corrupt, and complacent to navigate the country out of the crises we face, then it will also be powerless not only in supporting positive change but also in preventing detrimental outcomes. In such a scenario, the same congressional inaction that necessitates the use of presidential powers for good could also leave the nation vulnerable to authoritarian, destroyer movements that will gradually continue tearing down our democracy as long as our economy disappoints workers. These movements, if unchecked and allowed to take the White House, would likely exploit emergency powers and executive orders not for national renewal, but to further their own agendas, potentially leading to the destruction of our democracy and economic turmoil. The inability of a divided Congress to act decisively in times of crisis thus presents a double-edged sword: it hinders positive progress while enabling the rise of harmful authoritarian forces.

Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of a president, elected on a promise to accomplish something like the Mission for America, to judiciously use those same powers to push past Congress's inaction as much as is necessary without breaking our constitutional order. The key will be to use executive orders and emergency powers to set developments in motion that will not only get the Mission for America up and running as fast as possible but that will also provide direct benefits to tens of millions of people and an indisputable rise in overall prosperity for the country. That is part of what will ensure that Congress eventually comes around to wholeheartedly supporting the Mission for America. In other parts of this

introduction, we discuss other strategies that will also be necessary such as working to replace obstinate members of Congress, including those of the president's own party.

Executive orders are a vital instrument in the U.S. presidential toolbox, enabling the chief executive to direct government operations and implement policy. Rooted in Article II of the Constitution, which outlines the powers and responsibilities of the executive branch, these orders allow the president to manage federal operations and enact policy decisions without the need for legislative action by Congress. Executive orders can cover a wide range of issues, from internal administrative procedures to significant policy changes on national security, environmental regulations, and immigration. This tool is essential for the president to address issues promptly and to ensure the federal government operates in line with the executive's policy objectives, especially in situations where legislative action is slow or politically unfeasible.

However, executive orders have legal and constitutional limitations. While they have the force of law, they cannot contradict existing federal laws or the Constitution. The scope of executive orders is primarily confined to directing the operations of the federal government and its agencies, not creating new laws or rights, which is the prerogative of Congress.[99] The judiciary also plays a crucial role in overseeing the legality of executive orders. Federal courts, including the Supreme Court, can strike down executive orders if they are found to overstep legal or constitutional bounds.[100] This judicial oversight is a key aspect of the system of checks and balances, ensuring that the president's executive authority is exercised within the framework of the law.

The emergency powers of the president of the United States are a set of special authorities granted to the president, typically during times of national crisis. These powers are derived from both constitutional provisions and statutory delegations by Congress. The Constitution implicitly provides the president with broad powers to respond to national emergencies, including military and foreign affairs authority. Congress has passed numerous statutes, such as the National Emergencies Act of 1976, that clearly define and codify specific emergency powers to the president.[101] These powers can be expansive, allowing the president to take actions that might normally be outside the scope of executive authority, such as reallocating funds for emergency needs, suspending select laws or regulations, and mobilizing the military.[102]

The phrase national emergency carries stark connotations, but national emergency declarations are surprisingly common. President Biden declared 11 national emergencies during his presidency, most of which have been related to sanctions on foreign individuals.

There are many constitutional checks on a president's use of emergency powers. Any exercise of emergency powers must still adhere to constitutional protections like those found in the Bill of Rights. National emergency declarations are still subject to judicial review, and courts can deem specific actions taken under emergency powers as unconstitutional. Furthermore, Congress retains the authority to revoke or

[99]Graber, A. (2021, March 29). Executive Orders: An Introduction. (CRS Report No. R46738). https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46738

[100]Ibid.

[101]Elsea, J., & Sykes, J., Lampe, J., Lewis, K., & Adkins, B. (2020, July 14). Emergency Authorities Under the National Emergencies Act, Stafford Act, and Public Health Service Act.

[102]Ibid.

modify the emergency powers it has delegated. The National Emergencies Act requires the president to formally declare a national emergency and allows Congress to terminate the emergency status through a joint resolution.[103] This ensures that the president's emergency powers, while necessary in certain situations, are subject to oversight and review.

Leadership from those reporting to the president throughout the administration

The president must model bold leadership for all members of their administration, from the cabinet down to the lowest level of political appointee and civil servant. The president will need to accomplish a sort of cultural transformation among the ranks of federal workers and leaders in which it comes to be culturally acceptable and expected to break through bureaucratic boundaries, solve problems creatively, overturn institutional norms that are blocking progress, and so on.

The president can talk explicitly about this and should make national public examples out of leaders who make positive breakthroughs in this culture change as well as those who stand in the way of common-sense progress.

The COVID-19 crisis has many examples of actions that could have been celebrated or punished to promote this kind of culture change. During the pandemic, CDC Director Robert R. Redfield forbade labs from making their own COVID-19 tests while failing to supply a working test until it was too late.[104] A mission-mode president would have fired Redfield, taken public responsibility for the failure, and used it as an example of the culture change needed across federal agencies. At the same time, the president could have celebrated local labs that had risked punishment by offering COVID-19 tests against CDC rules.

During the pandemic, an innovative school testing program was practiced in the suburbs of Chicago. This program did mass-testing using a creative and efficient method and kept schools open while protecting students and their families from infection.[105] This program should have been publicly celebrated as an example of local, outside-the-box problem solving that any community could have replicated.

Politicians tend to fear doing that kind of thing lest they be exposed for publicly supporting something that turns out to be problematic. It's true that leaders will have to do some due diligence and evaluate their examples carefully. But again, look at Trump: He did zero due diligence on the COVID-19 remedies he recommended. He got credit from half the country for simply trying, speaking in specifics, and offering some solutions. Just imagine how powerful it would be if a president practiced the same kind of personally engaged leadership around well-thought-out solutions.

By practicing this kind of personal leadership that both sets an example for the rest of the administration, lauds specific examples of good leadership, and punishes examples of obstructionism, a president can create a sea change in the culture of their administration and government itself. This is one of the most important steps needed to restore state capacity.

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[103] Ibid.

[104] Ortega, B., Bronstein, S., & Griffin, D. (2020, April 9). How the government delayed coronavirus testing. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/09/politics/coronavirus-testing-cdc-fda-red-tape-invs/index.html

[105] Tatum, S. (2021, January 17). How 1 Chicago school district got kids back in the classroom during COVID-19. ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/chicago-school-district-kids-back-classroom-covid-19/story?id=75202341

Institutions

Institutions are the brains and muscles of societies that allow them to make decisions and transform themselves. They include national government agencies; local government, publicly owned businesses, banks, and social service organizations; corporations; courts; universities and private policy and research organizations; the military and countless other types of organizations. Accomplishing the Mission for America will require existing institutions to take bold and sometimes unprecedented action and to go through deep transformations. It will also require some new institutions to be created, first among them a large and empowered public investment corporation.

The Reconstruction Finance Corporation

The United States is virtually alone among rich industrialized nations in lacking a robust network of public institutions that finance and coordinate investments in industries and infrastructure where private capital fears to tread. These areas include industries and projects that could be very profitable but are too new, unfamiliar, or risky for private capital to bet on.

Throughout U.S. history, financing and coordination institutions have been developed during times of need and then dismantled as soon as the political winds changed, in a destructive game of tug of war between the Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian tendencies within American politics.[106] This has created a pattern where one large, hastily created institution tends to carry much of the burden of public investment and coordination in the economy rather than a diversified network of institutions. We have now reached the moment when we must build another strong financing and coordination institution. The Mission for America proposes a simple and proven solution: resurrecting the World War II era Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC).

The RFC was the world's largest corporation for more than a decade.[107] Its most important role was not financing but coordination — convening entire industries, identifying the specific bottleneck blocking transformation in each sector, and designing bespoke solutions to break through it. A steel industry can't decarbonize without green hydrogen. A hydrogen industry can't scale without clean power. The RFC's job is to see the whole board and make all the pieces move at once. To do that, the RFC also mobilized billions of dollars through multiple financial roles: as a development bank making loans of all sizes where private banks were unwilling to lend;[108] as a public venture capital investor that launched entire new industries when private capital judged them too risky;[109] and as a sort of reverse private equity firm that restructured and upgraded companies across the economy — the opposite of typical private equity, which consolidates and strips down.[110] Industries that the RFC launched or massively scaled up include aerospace, aluminum, chemicals, plastics, synthetic rubber, and many others.[111]

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[106]Nester, W. R. (1998). A Short History of American Industrial Policies. St. Martin's Press. ISBN: 978-0-312-21102-8.; Green, R. T. (1990). Alexander Hamilton and the Study of Public Administration. Public Administration Quarterly, 13(4), 494-519. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40862260

[107]Butkiewicz, J. (n.d.). Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Economic History Association. https://eh.net/encyclopedia/reconstruction-finance-corporation/

[108]Wheelock, D. C. (2022, January). Reconstruction Finance Corporation Act. Federal Reserve History. https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/reconstruction-finance-corporation

[109]Secretary of the Treasury. (1959). Final Report on the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Office of the Treasury. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/rcf/rfc_19590506_finalreport.pdf

[110]Butkiewicz. (n.d.).

[111]Fenberg, S. (2011). Unprecedented Power: Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and the Common Good. Houston Endowment, Inc.

Courts

The Courts are another institution that will almost certainly require reform. For decades, the courts have been politicized by a relentless and highly successful campaign by a certain brand of "free market" conservatives who oppose any role for the state in the economy.[112] Through decades of partisan rulings, right-wing judges have slowly and methodically limited our economy's ability to function in a healthy way. Centrists and progressives in power have allowed this to happen through a combination of blindness and timidity, as Republicans have blocked judicial Democratic appointments and appointed progressively more extreme right-wing judges, which Democrats lack the resolve to block in return.

As a result, the state in America is constrained in how it can regulate and invest in the economy. Ironically, during the rise of the conservative judicial movement, the arbitrary power of the state to tax, fine, and prosecute citizens and businesses has only increased.[113] Its ability to do things as straightforward and obviously necessary as regulating industrial pollution, however, have been gutted.[114] Many aspects of the Mission for America, especially in climate and industrial policy, will certainly be challenged by conservative activist judges. One defense against this is for Congress to pass laws specifying what the Mission for America must do. This approach is crucial because it strengthens the legal foundation of these initiatives, which have previously been vulnerable to being overturned when they were based only on administrative decisions without explicit legal backing.[115]

But the court also has power to rule that acts of Congress are unconstitutional. Ideologically driven, conservative, activist judges will no doubt use that power to thwart many commonsense and constitutional actions needed to accomplish the Mission for America. The Constitution did not make courts the supreme power of the land. Courts are one of three equal branches of government. Congress and the president have the power to enlarge the Supreme Court, and in fact have done so many times.[116] This power was made taboo by Franklin Roosevelt's clumsy attempt to use it when an ideologically conservative court was working to block the New Deal.

The arguments for enlarging the court have multiplied over the decades and especially in recent years:

It's time to forget the post-Roosevelt taboo. Enlarging the court should not be seen as unconstitutional or political. The Constitution does not specify the number of justices, nor does it explicitly assign to Congress authority to set the court's size, though this has become a customary role for them. Congress has changed the size of the Supreme Court multiple times in history.[117]

The present court is too small to handle the caseload of a nation of 342 million people and the largest economy in the world.

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[112]Righsmith, B., & Thelen, K. (2022, July 2). The Role of Courts in American Political Economy. The Law and Political Economy Project. https://lpeproject.org/blog/the-role-of-courts-in-american-political-economy/.

[113]Olinsky, B., & Oyenubi, G. (2022, June 13). The Supreme Court's Extreme Majority Risks Turning Back the Clock on Decades of Progress and Undermining Our Democracy. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-supreme-courts-extreme-majority-risks-turning-back-the-clock-on-decades-of-progress/

[114]Davenport, C. (2022, June 19). Republican Drive to Tilt Courts Against Climate Action Reaches a Crucial Moment. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/19/climate/supreme-court-climate-epa.html

[115]Ibid.

[116]Lamp, J. (2020, July 14). "Court Packing": Legislative Control over the Size of the Supreme Court. (CRS Report No. LSB10562) https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10562

[117]Ibid.

The present court is ill-equipped to handle many of the complex legal issues coming to it, such as those relating to the Internet, artificial intelligence, climate change, and other areas. Adding judges with expertise in these areas would greatly improve the court's ability to do its work.

Through aggressive politicization by one party, the court is ideologically and morally far out of step with the American people. The mere necessity of aligning the court with the contemporary values and realities of the 21st century justifies the addition of new justices.

Too many of the current justices are serving under a cloud of corruption. Adding new justices to the court will help restore public trust that the court is impartial and operating with integrity.

There is already a strong and growing grassroots movement and among Democratic members of Congress to add seats to the court, and a bill is circulating that would do this.[118] The Mission for America will make this movement more important than ever.

Federal agencies

Restoring the functional capacity of federal agencies is essential for completing the Mission for America successfully. For decades, the capacity of the federal government to operate effectively has been degraded — sometimes through neglect, sometimes through deliberate sabotage. Conservative activist Grover Norquist's famous goal of shrinking the government "down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub" was not a metaphor — it was a program.[119][120] In 2025, that program reached its logical conclusion. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) imposed hiring freezes across all agencies, authorized mass reductions in force, gutted USAID, and eliminated DEI infrastructure government-wide. Experienced civil servants were purged. Agency capacity was degraded across the board. The next president inherits a federal government with diminished ability to execute anything — which is precisely why the Mission for America's approach of building new, purpose-built institutions like the RFC is more important than ever.[121] You cannot easily repair what has been systematically destroyed. But you can build something new.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, highlighted many dire problems of state capacity across many agencies.[122] For example, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) displayed incompetence in both planning and execution when it first forbade anyone but itself to test for COVID-19 or even to produce testing kits. Then they produced faulty kits that delayed prevention efforts for months.[123] In the beginning of the pandemic, the CDC completely failed to carry out basic testing and monitoring of people entering the U.S. from COVID-19 hot zones.[124] Errors included things as unthinkable as failing even to gather

[118]Moskowitz, P. (2023, May 16). Democrats Reintroduce Bill To Expand U.S. Supreme Court. Democracy Docket. https://www.democracydocket.com/news-alerts/democrats-introduce-bill-to-expand-u-s-supreme-court/

[119]Brink, L (2021, November 18). State capacity: what is it, how we lost it, and how to get it back. Niskanen Center. https://www.niskanencenter.org/state-capacity-what-is-it-how-we-lost-it-and-how-to-get-it-back/

[120]Peters, J. (2012, November 19). For Tax Pledge and Its Author, a Test of Time. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/us/politics/grover-norquist-author-of-antitax-pledge-faces-big-test.html

[121]Pogue, J. (2022, April 20). Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel Is Placing His Biggest Bets. Vanity Fair. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets

[122]Lewis, D. (2021, Summer). Is the Failed Pandemic Response a Symptom of a Diseased Administrative State? American Academy of Arts & Sciences. https://www.amacad.org/publication/failed-pandemic-response-symptom-diseased-administrative-state

[123]Lipton, E. et al. (2020, August 4). The C.D.C. Waited 'Its Entire Existence for This Moment.' What Went Wrong? The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/us/cdc-coronavirus.html

[124]Ibid.

contact information for people known to be entering the country with COVID-19.[125] Similarly, simple and avoidable errors were happening across federal agencies during the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, these kinds of failures are happening all the time, but they don't get attention outside of a major crisis that brings widespread scrutiny and publicity.

Restoring state capacity and the capacity of federal agencies in particular requires a thoughtful approach. A seminal paper from the Niskanen center on state capacity advocates for picking one agency, or even one part of an agency, and attempting to set an example of renewal that can be replicated across the government.[126] History offers few examples, however, where a piecemeal approach to fixing a declining state succeeded. Instead, history shows that state capacity is almost always repaired only in sweeping national restoration efforts. Only something on that scale can create adequate momentum and transformed incentives for change among individuals and groups across the state.

The Mission for America is designed to be an effort great enough to hit the reset button on federal agencies and state capacity in general. In the context of the Mission for America, the president and their administration will need to pull off an administrative revolution that dismantles counterproductive bureaucratic roadblocks, removes checked-out and incompetent leaders and workers, and recruits qualified workers and leaders. The administration will have to set a new ethic across the federal government that prioritizes proactivity and problem-solving over inaction and fear. Such a serious breach with existing bureaucratic norms can come only in a fundamentally disruptive movement of national restoration. In isolation, no agency head would ever be able to muster the power and mandate to make the kinds of changes necessary.

Equally as important, the Mission for America is needed to draw in the kind of high-level talent required to fully restore state capacity across all federal agencies. The center of gravity of talent and accomplishment must shift from Wall Street and Silicon Valley to the offices of the RFC as well as federal agencies. If the president succeeds at recruiting the most intelligent and innovative leaders in manufacturing, Silicon Valley, and Wall Street to run the RFC mission teams and federal agencies, this could become a reality.

Reorienting the military

The U.S. military is a colossal part of our society, consuming well over 15% of the annual national budget, employing 1.4 million people directly and at least several million more indirectly.[127] After World War II, instead of shrinking the military back to its prewar role and size, the U.S. began to fight a series of expensive and disastrous wars, starting with the Korean War. Today, both political parties generally recognize that these foreign wars were not good for America. The country is in a good position to begin to finally turn back from imperial ambitions. If it does, however, the military will need a new mission.

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Brink, L (2021, November 18). State capacity: what is it, how we lost it, and how to get it back. Niskanen Center. https://www.niskanencenter.org/state-capacity-what-is-it-how-we-lost-it-and-how-to-get-it-back/

[127] Fiscal Data. (2023). How much has the U.S. government spent this year? Department of the Treasury. https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/federal-spending/; Statista Research Department. (2023, November 3). Armed forces of the United States — Statistics & Facts. Statista. https://www.statista.com/topics/2171/armed-forces-of-the-united-states/#topicOverview; Department of Defense. (2021, September 23). Department of Defense Civilian Employment Opportunities. https://www.defense.gov/Contact/Help-Center/Article/Article/2742213/department-of-defense-civilian-employment-opportunities/

Our military and its associated industries are a highly effective and capable part of our society. Each branch of the military and many programs within each branch are capable of coordinating larger projects more effectively than any other organization in America. As America focuses back on itself, it would be a great waste and missed opportunity if the capabilities of the military dissolved away. The Mission for America has several roles for the military and will not be feasible without its expertise, infrastructure, and organization.



Figure 3: A Civilian Conservation Corps crew at the Jolley Wash camp while building the East Rim Trail, 1936.

Source: National Parks Gallery. (1936). The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) trail construction crew assembled in front of a tent at the Jolley Wash spike camp (temporary camp sometimes referred to as the stub camp) Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers constructing the East Rim Trail. https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/80ab7faa-c30c-4563-a55c-3ea1842f7c82

The pandemic provided a glimpse into how the military can help to make big things happen in our society by participating in civilian projects. In Operation Warp Speed, in order to quickly produce a COVID vaccine, General Gustave F. Perna was assigned to ensure that everyone in the project got the supplies, equipment, and regulatory approvals they needed, when they were needed.[128] Army officers placed throughout the operation used their logistics expertise and the military's transportation and logistics capacity to ensure that bottlenecks were instantly cleared. All of that, combined with the uniquely effective and efficient communication and reporting practices of military officers engaged in an urgent mission, made all the difference in the world.[129]

It's clear that military involvement can significantly enhance large-scale civilian projects, so the Mission for America proposes several specific roles for the military. The first involves reviving the Civilian Conservation Corps, with military officers leading and organizing, reminiscent of their roles in the New

[128]Judson, J. (2022, March 13). What the Army can learn from Operation Warp Speed. Defense News. https://www.defensenews.com/interviews/2022/03/13/what-the-army-can-learn-from-operation-warp-speed/

[129]Ibid.

Deal. Additionally, the military can be called into any other project to help with execution through invocation of the Defense Production Act, as it was in Operation Warp Speed.[130]

Furthermore, the military has a role to play in the ambitious workforce development mission that must bring millions of new people into productive employment, including many with little or no experience. All branches of the military are already experts in activating and training Americans who have been left out of or not yet entered the workforce.

Lastly, one more important role of the military in the Mission for America is to build nuclear power plants on military bases. The Navy already has a program that makes and maintains nuclear reactors, manages and reuses nuclear waste, procures uranium, and manages security around the entire nuclear power supply chain.[131] This program operates outside of the broken U.S. nuclear regulatory system. We propose that using the military to build nuclear power on military bases is the fastest, safest, and most secure way to kickstart nuclear power in America.

Government spending

The Mission for America is essentially a massive investment program. In most cases, investment is financed by a mix of public and private capital that will be expected to earn a return — which is the core mechanism that makes the Mission for America feasible.

Investments that cannot earn a direct economic return, however, must be funded by direct spending by Congress. This kind of spending is generally focused on infrastructure, Social Security, research and development, and expanding capacities in education, healthcare, and other public services. Because these kinds of costs cannot be recovered directly through business revenues, funding for these initiatives should come from regular appropriations from the treasury, unlike investments that are expected to earn a financial return.

This tool doesn't need much introduction because it is today the primary way that the government makes things happen. In the Mission for America, this tool is notable primarily for all the places we do not recommend it to be used, but instead recommend investments.

Investment

The Mission for America creates several programs and institutions for making investments that will create new industries, scale up and upgrade old ones, improve infrastructure, and mobilize private capital to follow by covering startup costs and reducing risk.

Investing means building up capacities — adding to what a society can do. Typically we think of this as being achieved through injecting money into projects, but that leaves out the other side of the investment equation. Money works only if there is a functioning operation to use it effectively. Moreover, only certain kinds of investments are beneficial. Others can harm.

The RFC and federal agencies can use several types of investment modes. These investment tools in the Mission for America include the following:

[130] Ibid.

[131] Department of Energy. (2023). Powering the Navy. https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/powering-navy

Equity investments. The Mission for America calls for investments to be made in existing companies to enable them to scale up existing capacities or add new capacities. These investments should generally be made in exchange for equity stakes. Entities like the Federal Reserve Bank and potentially new financial institutions, including a resurrected Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), are poised to make such transactions. This strategy echoes the Fed's approach during the 2009 financial crisis and the subsequent quantitative easing program, where it purchased billions of dollars worth of junk assets from private corporations.[132] In that case, the Fed gave money to private companies in exchange for assets of uncertain value. That maneuver was a gamble that after a successful rescue of the economy, the junk assets would be worth at least what the Fed paid for them. As it happened, the gamble paid off. This mode of financing allowed the public to make massive expenditures on the rescue of the financial system without running up the national debt.[133] (However, other parts of the rescue did add to the debt.)

The reason for taking an equity stake is simply so that the public can earn a return on its investment. This was once a huge taboo. But President Trump helped to get our society over that, taking direct equity stakes in over 10 companies — including Intel and several critical mineral firms.[134] When profits start rising as a result of the investments made by the public, companies can buy out the government if they wish, returning a profit on the government's investment.

Venture investments. Some parts of the Mission for America require that new companies be started from scratch, or that new start-ups be given assistance to take off to the next level. As with equity investments, the government — whether investing through the RFC or another program — should earn an investment stake just like any other venture capitalist. Failing to operate in this way has cost the government hundreds of billions of dollars in lost revenue only in recent times.

For example, the Department of Energy gave Tesla a $465 million loan in 2010 which saved the company in a desperate moment.[135] At around the same time, the original Daimler AG (now Mercedes-Benz Group AG) made a $50 million investment for a 10% equity stake in the company.[136] If the government had insisted that its loan should be an investment, it could have taken a significant stake in the company which could have been sold in the future at a huge multiple and reinvested back into the American economy.

Loans. The Mission for America calls for the RFC to loan hundreds of billions of dollars over the course of the effort, just as it did through the Great Depression and World War II. As it did then, the new RFC will make loans of all sizes, including programs for small, medium, and large businesses, as well as farmers, local governments, and other entities. Loans should be made for the purpose of enabling new profitable capacities to be added to the economy.

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[132] Congressional Budget Office. (2021, July). Report on the Troubled Asset Relief Program. https://www.cbo.gov/publication/57361#footnote-014

[133] Kiel, P. (2019, October 3). The Bailout Was 11 Years Ago. We're Still Tracking Every Penny. ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/the-bailout-was-11-years-ago-were-still-tracking-every-penny

[134] Alper, A. (2020, March 19). Trump says he would support government taking stake in certain companies. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-companies/trump-says-he-would-support-government-taking-stake-in-certain-companies-idUSKBN21634i/?edition=redirect=en

[135] Overly, S. (2017, March 16). This government loan program helped Tesla at a critical time. Trump wants to cut it. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2017/03/16/this-government-loan-program-helped-tesla-at-a-critical-time-trump-wants-to-cut-it/

[136] Squatriglia, C. (2009, May 19). Daimler Takes 10 Percent Stake in Tesla. Wired. https://www.wired.com/2009/05/daimler-tesla/

To perform this function, the RFC will need to have a large staff to manage the process of making and monitoring loans. The RFC gradually scaled up to a staff of several thousand people. Under the Mission for America, we need the loans to be flowing immediately. One way to accomplish this could be having the RFC acquire some struggling regional and community banks that have the capacity to manage lending across many sectors of the economy. Money, as it turns out, is not the bottleneck that prevents lending. The Department of Energy's huge loan program has over $400 billion to lend, but cannot move loans fast enough due to lacking the staff to manage and monitor its own program.[137] Similarly, we saw in the COVID-19 pandemic's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) that even the Small Business Administration did not have the capacity to manage that loan program well.[138]

Directly building capacity for lease, and state-owned enterprises. These last two investment tools stray into the realm of the unfamiliar for most Americans today, but both were major pieces of the World War II mobilization story, and they played a big role in all the successful 20th-century economic mobilizations in other countries.

In World War II, companies often refused to build new capacity to produce goods and materials needed for the war even when the government was guaranteed to buy everything they would produce. This was because they were afraid that when demand dried up after the war, they would be stuck with worthless production capacity. To overcome these hesitations, the RFC and other war mobilization agencies built publicly owned factories which they leased to corporations to operate. These facilities were known as Government-Owned Contractor-Operated (GOCO) sites.[139] GOCO facilities were an incredibly important tool in the organizational arsenal for getting big things done fast. Following the war, many of these industries and factories did end up becoming sustainable after all, as industries like plastics, chemicals, and machine tools found they could easily adapt and grow in the booming post-war economy.

In some cases, however, it seemed impossible to find private companies willing or able to manage these government-owned facilities, even with the promise of profit. This was either because suitable companies didn't exist in the necessary locations or because the work was too sensitive to entrust to a private company. An example from the first category was tin smelting, where the RFC formed publicly owned enterprises to overcome the shortage of the important metal that had been only imported for decades.[140] At the other end of the spectrum were the efforts by the RFC spinoff Metals Reserve Company to acquire and process uranium for use in the Manhattan project.[141]

Both of these modes of making things happen will be required with the Mission for America.

Carrots

Every economy relies on subsidies and other incentives to encourage certain kinds of economic activity. For decades, the United States economy has provided vast subsidies and other financial incentives for

[137]Fourgurean, R. (2023, May 4). Financing the Clean Energy Revolution. Third Way. https://www.thirdway.org/memo/financing-the-clean-energy-revolution

[138]Sraders, A. (2020, April 29). 14 years in 14 days: Inside the chaotic rollout of the SBA's PPP loan plan to save America's small businesses. Fortune. https://fortune.com/2020/04/29/sba-ppp-paycheck-protection-program-loans-small-business-administration-inside-chaos/

[139]Emmons, W. & Dahl, D. (2022, July 6). Was the Paycheck Protection Program Effective? Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional-economist/2022/jul/was-paycheck-protection-program-effective

[140]Secretary of the Treasury. (1959). Final Report on the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

[141]Herman, Arthur. Freedom's Forge, pp. 74

activities and industries that harm or distort our society. By offering free or cheap money to big banks, shadow banks, and other financial institutions, we encouraged the wholesale financialization of our economy at the expense of both industry and public services. For example, by subsidizing fossil fuels for decades, we delayed the development of unsubsidized renewable energy. Our society, however, has also provided "carrots" to incentivize beneficial outcomes, such as for clean energy alternatives in recent decades.

Incentives come in several forms, all of which are utilized in the Mission for America:

Tax credits are one of the Mission for America's most important incentive tools — but they are tools, not the strategy. The Inflation Reduction Act proved that well-designed tax credits can trigger massive private investment: hundreds of billions of dollars flowed into clean energy manufacturing in under three years. The IRA also proved their fatal weakness: Trump killed the key credits in 2025, and the investment pipeline died with them.[142] Credits are effective but politically fragile. That is why the Mission for America pairs them with durable institutions like the RFC.

Every tax credit in the Mission for America must be fully refundable — meaning the government pays the full credit amount regardless of the recipient's tax liability.[143] Non-refundable credits are useless for startups, new entrants, and small businesses that don't yet owe enough taxes to benefit.[144] The IRA's direct pay provisions are the model. This is non-negotiable.

The Mission for America deploys both consumer credits (making clean products affordable for buyers) and production credits (making clean manufacturing profitable for producers).[145] In many national missions, both are paired: consumer credits drive demand while production credits drive supply, jumpstarting new industries at maximum speed. Credits are designed to phase down as industries mature and become profitable on their own — temporary accelerants, not permanent life support.

Below-market loans. Below-market loans, often referred to as subsidized loans, are another effective tool in the arsenal of economic incentives. In the context of the Mission for America, these would primarily be provided through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). These loans are offered at interest rates below those available through the commercial banking sector, making them an attractive financing option for businesses, especially those in emerging or strategically important industries. The purpose of offering below-market loans is to lower the cost of capital for businesses undertaking significant investments, such as in infrastructure, technology, or green-energy projects. By reducing financial barriers, these loans can encourage companies to embark on projects that might otherwise be deemed too risky or expensive. This can be particularly impactful in fostering innovation and supporting sectors critical for national development and economic growth. Additionally, below-market loans can be tailored with favorable terms, like longer repayment periods or grace periods, further easing the financial burden on businesses and enabling long-term planning and investment. As a policy tool, these loans not

[142]Segal, T. (2023, February 12). Tax Credit: What It Is, How It Works, What Qualifies, 3 Types. Investopedia. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/taxcredit.asp

[143]Ibid.

[144]Ibid.

[145]Vincent, J. & Threewitt, C. (2023, October 5). How Does the Electric Car Tax Credit Work? U.S. News and World Report. https://cars.usnews.com/cars-trucks/advice/how-does-the-electric-car-tax-credit-work

only provide direct financial support but also signal governmental commitment to specific industries, potentially attracting further private investment.

Grants. Grants provide direct financial support without repayment. In the Mission for America, they are reserved for activities that serve the public interest but cannot earn a financial return: basic research, workforce training, community planning, and public goods. Where an activity can generate revenue, the Mission for America uses loans or equity investments instead — so the public earns a return. Grants are the tool of last resort, not first resort.

Sticks

Every society uses a combination of "sticks" to discourage or forbid economic activities that are harmful. We have tried to design the Mission for America to rely primarily on carrots instead of sticks. In the transition away from fossil fuels, for instance, the core strategy is to build the alternative, and to make it so convenient and affordable that people will choose it on their own.

Nevertheless, in some national missions, it will be necessary to impose regulations, disincentives, and outright bans. The most important use of these tools comes with the Clean Energy Standard (CES) set out in the clean power mission. It requires that America's thousands of large and small utilities stop using fossil fuels and start using renewable energy. The CES includes many carrots that ensure utilities get all the financial and technical support they need to make the switch. However, it also includes serious consequences for utilities that fail — including losing their licenses and being reorganized under new leadership or being folded into a neighboring utility.

The full range of "sticks" used in the Mission for America include taxes, regulations, standards, fines and penalties, withdrawal of licensing and permits, and trade barriers.

Taxes. In general, the Mission for America does not call for imposing taxes to discourage harmful products or activities, such as gas-powered cars. This approach is chosen for several reasons: the mission will be feasible only if it's popular, those kinds of taxes are regressive and usually hurt working- and middle-class people the hardest, and there are ample "carrots" to incentivize individuals and businesses to choose better alternatives. Nevertheless, in some cases, it may be appropriate to impose taxes, and this tool is available in the Mission for America.

Regulations. Regulations are essential in every society for ensuring that business operations are conducted in a manner that upholds public safety, environmental protection, and fair market practices. Regulatory frameworks are also used to safeguard workers' rights and ensure ethical business practices, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable economy.

We believe that our society currently has a problem with regulations. Too many regulations have been written in careless or short-sighted ways that make compliance difficult and often wind up having the opposite effects than were intended. Moreover, complex bodies of regulations tend to favor large businesses over small. Big businesses have the economies of scale to comply while small businesses often can't keep up. Large businesses that dominate their sector dedicate a significant amount of resources to influencing the regulatory environment to their benefit and their competitors' detriment.

The Mission for America president must find ways to reset regulations across federal agencies, removing and changing those that are counterproductive. This is a complex subject, and the Mission for America doesn't have a comprehensive set of answers for how to approach it except in cases where changing regulations is at the heart of the mission, for example in the national mission to upgrade buildings and homes. That said, there are some places throughout the Mission for America that call for adding new regulations.

Standards. As mentioned, the Clean Energy Standard in the mission for clean power plays a critical role in the Mission for America. Standards set specific benchmarks that industries must meet, such as a minimum percentage of energy from renewable sources or emission caps for vehicles. By setting clear and enforceable benchmarks, the government can steer industries toward cleaner and more sustainable practices, fostering innovation and technological advancement in environmentally friendly sectors.

Fines and Penalties. Fines and other penalties are essential for enforcing these regulations and standards. They serve as a deterrent against non-compliance and ensure that violations of laws and guidelines are met with appropriate consequences. These punitive measures can range from monetary fines for minor infractions to significant legal penalties for major violations, such as causing substantial environmental harm or engaging in fraudulent activities.

In our economy today, it's very common for federal and state agencies to levy fines in response to harmful actions that are far too small to act as a deterrent for companies. The Mission for America calls for using fines and penalties only in cases where it is absolutely necessary and only in the context of offering businesses ample technical support and financing to make compliance easy and profitable.

Licensing and Permits. The withdrawal of licensing and permits is a powerful tool to enforce compliance with regulations. Businesses that fail to adhere to legal and regulatory requirements risk losing their operational licenses or permits. This measure ensures that only businesses compliant with regulations can operate, thereby maintaining industry standards and protecting public interests.

Trade Barriers. Lastly, trade barriers, such as tariffs and quotas, can be strategically used to protect domestic industries and promote sustainable practices. By imposing barriers on imports that do not meet certain environmental or ethical standards, the government can encourage foreign producers to adopt more sustainable practices and level the playing field for domestic producers adhering to higher standards. This approach not only supports domestic industries but also promotes global environmental and social responsibility.

In implementing these "sticks," the Mission for America must balance strict enforcement with the need for economic flexibility and innovation. The objective is to create a regulatory environment that protects public interests and aligns with broader policy goals while also fostering a dynamic, competitive, and sustainable economy. This balanced approach ensures that the economy does not just grow, but grows in a direction that is beneficial for society as a whole, adhering to principles of environmental sustainability, social equity, and long-term economic health. By effectively utilizing these regulatory tools, the Mission for America can steer economic activities toward outcomes that are not only economically beneficial but also socially and environmentally responsible.

The tools we have just elaborated are used across the Mission for America's component national missions. They are deployed differently in different contexts. Understanding the full set of tools makes navigating and understanding the solution sections of each national mission straightforward. These tools are ready to be used by any leader who is willing to wield them.

Can we afford the Mission for America?

Why do American leaders so often throw up their hands and say the nation can't afford robust public spending?

To answer, it's worth traveling back to the aftermath of the Second World War in the United Kingdom. Economist John Maynard Keynes toured the bombed ruins of London with a treasury official who explained that the government was unable to rebuild.[146]

"Haven't you got the bricks?" asked Keynes.

"Oh yes, we have plenty of them," the official responded.

"You haven't got the wood, the fittings, the machinery?"

"No, that's not the problem."

"You haven't got the labor?"

"Oh, there are plenty of people coming out of the forces."

"You must mean that you haven't got the architects?"

"Of course not. The real problem is that we haven't got the money."

Keynes told this story on a BBC radio program to illustrate the difference between money and ability. He was speaking to a nation that stood on the precipice of a totally unnecessary post-war depression and that desperately needed to learn the difference.

Then, as now, in liberal capitalist democracies, money is the primary mechanism for mobilizing resources, machines, and labor to build and operate industry and infrastructure. Britain was one of the first countries to do this successfully. For centuries, it freely created money in the form of debt to expand its economy and empire, conquering the world and transforming its economic system in the process. After World War II, with most of its empire lost and its domestic economy in ruins, it found itself unable to borrow affordably. At the same time, it stubbornly tied its currency back to gold — at a high rate out of a devotion to a strong British pound.[147] This caused money to be extremely scarce, which stymied Britain's ability to mobilize its resources, as Keynes' conversation with the treasury official illustrated.

The world finally got over the taboo against fiat money, currency backed by the authority of the government rather than by gold or silver, in the 20th century. We are still in a strange transitional phase in our understanding and use of money, however. Though our societies accept fiat money as legitimate and safe, they still treat it as a dangerous spell that could wreak havoc if used improperly. And while it's

[146]DeLong, B. (2020, May 30). John Maynard Keynes: How Much Does Finance Matter? BradfordDeLong.com. https://www.bradford-delong.com/

[147]Kitson, M. (2012, June). End of an Epoch: Britain's Withdrawal from the Gold Standard. University of Cambridge. https://michaelkitson.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/kitson-gold-standard

true that fiat money can become destructive if used badly, our societies' panic about it clouds our ability to use it well.

The timeless fear about fiat currency is that governments will be tempted to print excess money to pay for whatever they think they need, and that this will lead to inflation. And that fear is valid: If a government creates and distributes too much money in an otherwise static economy, prices will rise. But this fear has led modern governments to refrain from using monetary expansion to fuel investments in critical sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, and green energy where doing so would be perfectly safe and appropriate.

For several reasons, some sensible and some disingenuous, the managers of national economies today refuse to create money for ordinary improvements to the economy and, in practice, reserve money creation for emergencies such as war or financial crises.

Our problem is not that we have a taboo against creating money, but that we have been unwilling to use our money-creating power to build our real economy and instead almost exclusively use it only to bail out financial speculators.[148]

To understand how the U.S. can afford the Mission for America, we need to step back and ask what it means for a society to be able to afford to do anything — for example, building a bridge, providing quality healthcare, or carrying out a massive upgrade to its entire economy.

What makes this question tricky is that the way a society affords things is totally different from how an individual does. For an individual, affording something just means having the money to pay for it. If someone doesn't have enough money to buy a coat, for example, they can't afford it. Moreover, individuals can't easily produce complex items like coats with their own hands from scratch; often, they lack the materials, tools, or perhaps the skills required. That's why people go to work in the economy to earn money, which they use to buy what they need.

A nation, on the other hand, with the power to create (and destroy) money, doesn't go to work in an economy to earn money. Especially if it's blessed with a large and diverse economy, it has the resources, talent, and technology to make many — if not all — the things its people need. In no country is this more true than in the United States, which contains not only abundant resources but a highly advanced industrial economy as well. Nevertheless, our politicians constantly say we can't afford to do even small things like fixing our roads or subway stations.[149] They say that because they are missing this difference between how individual people and whole societies afford things.

[148]U.S. Bank. (2023, November 17). Understanding the federal budget impasse and potential government shutdown. https://www.usbank.com/investing/financial-perspectives/market-news/federal-budget-impasse-and-potential-government-shutdown.html; Jackson, E. (2023, November 13). Timeline: Notable government bailout, relief programs in U.S. history. USA Today. https://www.usatoday.com/money/blueprint/personal-finance/government-bailout-relief-programs/

[149]Kapur, S. (2021, July 22). Transit money emerges as a last major obstacle to bipartisan Senate infrastructure deal. NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/transit-money-emerges-last-major-obstacle-bipartisan-senate-infrastructure-deal-n1274788; The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2015, February 24). Funding Challenges in Highway and Transit. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2015/02/24/funding-challenges-in-highway-and-transit-a-federal-state-local-analysis

[150]Online Etymology Dictionary. (2022, September 16). Afford (v.). https://www.etymonline.com/word/afford

The word "afford" comes from Old English where it originally meant, "To be able to do something."[150] Not pay for something, do something. When a society talks about what it can afford, it's using the word in that original sense, even when it thinks it's talking about money.

If the U.S. wants to build a bridge or provide better healthcare, it should not ask, "Do we have the money?" Instead, it should ask, "Do we have people who can do the work? Do we know how to do it? Do we have the equipment and the resources? Do we have companies ready to do the work?"

In our society, money is the means to organize all those people, equipment, resources, and companies to get the bridge built. But here again, money on the scale of a society is totally different from money that is earned and spent by individuals. People can't create their own money. Societies, however, are literally the source of money. They print it, key it into existence electronically, and authorize banks to create it via lending.

Societies creating money — as the means to organize labor, capital, and resources — is, in fact, the primary way that nations have stepped up from one level of economic development to the next. This process is often driven in wars, where nations create money in various forms to mobilize soldiers, acquire raw materials, and build weapons. Money is used in this way to take on many national challenges and ambitions outside of war.

Fears that "printing money" will cause inflation are misguided. Yes, printing tons of money, and giving it out to people, especially in a stagnating or shrinking economy, will cause inflation. That is part of what finally caused inflation at the tail end of the pandemic. But this must be kept in perspective: The U.S. and other industrialized nations have been creating and handing out trillions upon trillions of dollars to financial speculators and other corporations and wealthy people for decades. For example, during the 2008 financial crisis, most rich countries created substantial amounts of money to cover the gambling losses of insolvent banks and insurance companies. Yet, the only inflation that all this free money caused came in financial assets that those big spenders competed over, such as stocks, bonds, and real estate.[151] The principle was the same as with consumer inflation: an increasing money supply chasing a fixed pool of stuff. But in this case, the stuff — financial assets — is regarded as a store of wealth. Therefore, when the prices of those assets soared, it was not called inflation but economic growth.

When free money was given out to consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamic was much the same: more money was chasing a limited quantity of stuff. But in this case, that stuff included things like eggs, meat, clothing, cars, and gasoline. When those prices go up, it hurts. And when supply chains returned to normal, inflation began to drop very quickly.

The healthy alternative to those two misguided practices, and one that is absolutely essential for a healthy economy, is to borrow (create) money to expand employment in a way that also increases the quantity of stuff available for workers to buy. In this scenario, the money supply will increase, but rather than dropping money into a static economy, the money supply is simply increasing with the size of the economy.

[151] Schenker, J. (2021, February 24). The Fate of Asset Inflation After COVID. The Bretton Woods Committee. https://www.brettonwoods.org/article/the-fate-of-asset-inflation-after-covid

The Mission for America is carefully designed to do exactly that. By building and scaling industries that make everything from electric vehicles to microchips, and from locally sourced food to sustainable textiles, inflation will not be a problem. Handing out money for nothing, whether to large financial institutions to cover their gambling losses or to needy workers in the pandemic, does not grow the real economy. Making loans and investments to grow the productive economy by employing people is simply how economies grow. It makes no difference whether that borrowing is done by private entrepreneurs and investors, federal agencies, the RFC, or all of the above.

A large or rich country that controls its own currency has the freedom to take on and complete investments in huge projects to raise living standards, promote equality and opportunity, and build a sustainable economy. This autonomy and capacity enable such a nation to effectively leverage its financial and material resources, setting a foundation for long-term prosperity and societal well-being.

As Keynes said, "Anything we can actually do, we can afford." With 342 million people, half a continent of resources, and the largest, most advanced stock of capital of any country in the world, America can do anything.

How can the Mission for America be possible in 10 years?

The Mission for America is designed to be accomplished in 10 years for several reasons:

Ten years allows for both the planning and the building of industrial projects of virtually any scale. We understand that many will take issue with that statement, and we will argue for it below.

It will allow a president to create an adequate sense of urgency in a way that is simply impossible with more traditional 50-year or 100-year timelines for getting to net-zero emissions.

Ten years, instead of eight, allows the movement around the Mission for America to continue past a single presidency. Ideally, a successful Mission for America presidency will turn into a permanent state of investment, innovation, and transformation for America. Even if the Mission for America president is succeeded by someone uninterested in continuing the mission, most of it will have been accomplished and the rest will be almost inevitable to follow, even if more slowly or a bit incompletely.

It is close to the shortest period of time for which we can confidently say accomplishing all the necessary work of the Mission for America is physically and organizationally possible.

It is of course partially arbitrary. It could be nine or even eight. It could be 11 or 12. Part of the rationale for 10 years is that it is a unit of time that a nation and its people, politicians, and press can relate to. A decade is a psychologically significant period of time in individual lives and in the history of a nation.

But how can we know that completing something as huge as the Mission for America is possible in 10 years? Skeptics will argue that 10 years is impossible, as many did with the Green New Deal, whose timeline was also 10 years. They point to bridge and tunnel projects that could not be completed in that duration. They can point to mere permitting processes for power plants or public housing that took much longer than 10 years. They can reference climate experts and economists who swear that 10 years is impossible.

Nevertheless, we see many reasons to believe that 10 years is more than enough time to complete the Mission for America, which includes bringing the U.S. very close to net-zero emissions and building a powerful new clean economy capable of greatly accelerating the global transition off of fossil fuels.

Pointing to relatively small projects that take a very long time is not a valid argument because it is just as easy to point to similar projects that were accomplished in very short periods of time. But the argument about experts declaring 10 years to be impossible is more compelling and must be dealt with in more depth.

First, we counter that those experts would nearly all admit that when they claim 10 years is impossible, they are talking about what's possible given our present mode of operating in our economy and society. Any expert who has studied America's World War II mobilization carefully would see we did even more in less time. Back then, with the urgency of war and the resources we had, we achieved something bigger than what we're aiming for now, and it took us less than 10 years. If experts argue that 10 years is impossible, they would likely acknowledge that they are not considering the possibility of a switch to an entirely different way of operating a society — from decline mode to mission mode — as mentioned at the beginning of this introduction.

When it comes to the question of whether a switch to mission mode is possible in America, we are leaving the realm of economics or engineering and entering the realm of predicting political futures, which is known to be impossible. The fact is, when experts are making predictions about how long a set of engineering feats must take, or the possibility of a political transformation, they should know that no one can predict the future accurately. And we should know better than to listen to experts who make such predictions.[152] Extensive research into expert predictions of the future — regardless of domain — demonstrate that experts have a terrible record of predicting events in their own fields. In fact, in many cases, they are even worse than amateurs. Some studies have shown that the more famous and respected the expert, the less likely they are to be correct.[153]

Part of the problem is that while we are correct to trust that the scientific method, as practiced by experts, is reliable and trustworthy, there is no way to apply the scientific method to making predictions of the future. There is simply no way to apply the scientific method to human and social events that haven't happened yet. Predicting the next move in a simple mechanical system can be possible thanks to our understanding of the laws of physics — but only if every detail of the physical system is understood. A single human being is far beyond the ability of science to understand as a physical system, and we have nothing approaching any kind of laws that can accurately predict human behavior. When you add millions of humans into a complex social and economic system, we are even further away from fully understanding and being able to predict its development.

So what are experts doing when they make predictions about the future of societies, industries, and economics? When experts predict the future, they are telling stories within their circles. In order to be taken seriously, these stories must align with the prevailing views of the experts' communities.

[152]Epstein, D. (2019, June). The Peculiar Blindness of Experts. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/how-to-predict-the-future/588040/

[153]Ibid.

But empirical research into expert predictions shows that experts often get stuck in groupthink about probabilities and possibilities for the future.[154] These predictions assume that things will largely stay the same or continue on present trends. The reason expert predictions tend to be wrong is that the world is constantly changing in profound ways that confound prediction.

Despite abundant evidence of expert predictions being more wrong than right, it has not been generally accepted that expert predictions are unreliable. Humans find it comforting to believe that experts can tell us what is possible, impossible, likely, and unlikely. Expert predictions remove responsibility from laypeople and journalists, and anyone without a PhD, for taking bold risks to attempt to achieve something big and risky.

History is full of examples of expert predictions about the future being wildly inaccurate. Over the past decade, for example, the adoption rate of solar energy has far exceeded expectations, challenging the predictions of many industry experts. Initially, experts forecasted a steady but slow shift toward solar energy, citing factors like high installation costs, technological limitations, and infrastructural challenges. However, these predictions did not fully account for the rapid advancements in solar technology, significant decreases in costs, and the growing public and governmental support for renewable energy. These factors all contributed to what turned out to be a remarkable surge in solar adoption,

both in residential and commercial sectors, outpacing even the most optimistic forecasts.[155] This underestimation has highlighted the dynamic nature of renewable energy trends and the difficulty of predicting the pace of technological adoption and market transformation.

Similarly, the adoption and production of electric vehicles (EVs) have dramatically surpassed expert predictions, mirroring the trajectory of solar energy.[156] Not long ago, analysts projected a slow transition to EVs, hindered by high costs, range anxiety, and insufficient charging infrastructure. However, the reality has been a swift and growing embrace of EVs globally. This surge is driven by rapid advancements in battery technology, significant reductions in production costs, and an increasing number of government incentives promoting green transportation. Automotive giants, once hesitant, have now committed to electrifying their fleets, further fueling this growth. The speed at which consumers and manufacturers have shifted toward EVs has outstripped forecasts, underscoring a global trend toward sustainability that is moving faster than many had anticipated.

In World War II, Roosevelt was told that his plans for wartime mobilization were unachievable. Harboring a lifelong distrust of expert opinion, stemming from his experience of unsuccessfully attempting to treat polio, he disregarded advice from generals and economics and publicly committed the United States to enormous production targets. His numbers were not only huge but covered many things that the United States had never produced or mass-produced before. Roosevelt proved the experts wrong as U.S. war production blew past his outrageous targets.

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Jaeger, J. (2021, September 20). Explaining the Exponential Growth of Renewable Energy. World Resource Institute. https://www.wri.org/insights/growth-renewable-energy-sector-explained

[156] Micek, K. & Coyne, J. (2023, October 6). IRA impacts expected to drive up EV sales more than double global forecast. S&P Global. https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/electric-power/100623-ira-impacts-expected-to-drive-up-ev-sales-more-than-double-previous-forecast

Throughout world history, there have been numerous examples of entire economies blowing past targets equally as outrageous. Park Chung Hee, for example, set a goal when he took power in South Korea to make his country as wealthy as Japan in his lifetime.[157] South Korea surpassed Japan in PPP per capita GDP in 2018.[158] Park Chung Hee would have been 100 years old, but was assassinated in 1979. So, almost!

In what sense, or on what basis, can experts argue that achieving the goals of the Mission for America is impossible? They do not argue that it's impossible physically. We have all the technology we need to build a prosperous economy powered by zero-emissions energy sources. They do not argue that it's impossible economically. Collectively, the world's industrial economies regularly spend more money than would be needed by the Mission for America on wars and financial bailouts.

Rather, critics say that something on the scale of the Mission for America is impossible politically. We grant that it is politically impossible right now, with the current Congress and current presidential administration — neither of which are interested in attempting something as big as the Mission for America. Our argument for the possibility of the Mission for America is that only a few things must change for it to become a reality:

The House and Senate each need a majority who can be organized to support a president who proposes the Mission for America. Using all the tactics described above in the tools section, achieving this is entirely conceivable in a 2028 election.

The majority party must be willing to wield power by ending the filibuster and reforming the Supreme Court.

A president and administration must be willing to call for the Mission for America and use some assortment of the tools outlined above to get it going. As we've argued above, this could become a reality due to the consequences of extreme global warming, a financial crash, AI-driven unemployment, or a combination of all three. We believe that no crisis is necessary for a president to mobilize the country around a great mission, and that the country is undoubtedly yearning for this. The 2024 election did not produce such a candidate. But the 2028 primary is already taking shape, and we believe it is reasonable to expect that some candidates in that race will want to run on a national mission on the scale of what we are proposing.

Our appeal to those who hope for the success of the Mission for America yet doubt its feasibility is this: Remember, the only thing that is certainly impossible is accurately predicting the future. We urge skeptics to note the factors we've outlined will need to change for the Mission for America to become possible. Please view the Mission for America for what it seeks to be: a plan for transforming the economy and the world if and only if those political changes come to pass.

We believe that developing the Mission for America in this detailed way will make the political developments we need more likely, because leaders will be able to picture it. And a person can't fight for something they can't yet picture.

[157] Kim, B.-K., & Vogel, E. F. (Eds.). (2011). The Park Chung Hee Era. Harvard University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hjkq

[158] Katz, R. (2022, April 1). South Korea surpasses Japan in real GDP per capita. East Asia Forum. https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/04/01/south-korea-surpasses-japan-in-real-gdp-per-capita/

Moreover, just as the Green New Deal moved the goal posts for the entire progressive and climate movements, at the very least, the Mission for America could do the same. There is a place for plans that set very aggressive ambitions, because they then become the outer bounds for negotiations. For example, some journalists were fiercely critical of the 10-year timeline. Later, however, some credited the GND in part for pushing the mainstream Democratic Party position to make the breakthrough of embracing net zero by 2050 as a concrete goal.[159] We hope that people who agree with the goals of the Mission for America can learn from that experience and allow our work to expand the realms of political possibility.

Conclusion

The urgency of the dual crises of global warming and the social and economic decline experienced by a large share of U.S. workers cannot be overstated. The Mission for America's comprehensive approach solves both these crises together. At its foundation, the Mission for America is a plan to build new capacities for accomplishing national-scale social and economic tasks. That happens to be the basis for building the "means of making a living" — or means of making wealth to put it another way — capable of providing prosperity for a nation as large as the United States.

In the coming decades, the world economy will transition away from technology that emits greenhouse gasses for a variety of reasons. This is happening globally regardless of which political movements succeed in any country. This transition creates an enormous business opportunity for all industrialized and industrializing nations. Unfortunately, the pace at which nations and global industries are competing for that opportunity is too slow to stop global warming in time to avert catastrophe. At the same time, the slow pace of investment and change in the U.S. will allow other industrialized nations to capture the lion's share of the income opportunities that will exist in the future clean global economy.

By investing to build the industries capable of supplying a greatly accelerated global transition, the Mission for America seizes the lucrative business opportunities that we need to create tens of millions of new high-wage jobs, so that we can ensure a just transition for all — while allowing the world to transition in time to avoid disaster. The Mission for America lays the groundwork for a future where economic prosperity and the clean transition are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing.

Success of the Mission for America hinges on bold and visionary leadership by a president and their team. It will require that millions of people spanning every sector and role of our society lend it their support. For it to become real, many things will need to happen that may seem unthinkable at the present moment. Before dismissing it for that reason, we beg readers to consider how many unthinkable developments in politics and economics have crowded the past several years.

We recognize the significant obstacles that lie ahead. The climate keeps warming whether or not it is on the front page. The institutions Americans once relied on are being systematically dismantled. And the political polarization makes large-scale action seem impossible. The Mission for America is designed with those challenges in mind — and with durable institutions, starting with the RFC, built to survive changes in political leadership.

[159]Roberts, D. (2020, July 9). At last, a climate policy platform that can unite the left. Vox. https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/21252892/climate-change-democrats-joe-biden-renewable-energy-unions-environmental-justice

The IRA proved that industrial policy works. Its destruction proved that legislation alone is not enough. The chapters that follow lay out, sector by sector, how the Mission for America builds a movement that will be harder to kill and too valuable to let die. We welcome all feedback, including suggestions and criticism, on our website, NewConsensus.com.