

# Democracy at Work

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For many people, August brings the dog days of summer, with last-minute trips, barbecues and downtime. But for educators and support staff from pre-K through college, the end of summer is a whirl of activity and anticipation as they prepare for a new school year laser-focused on students' recovery. And educators aren't the only ones working on overdrive to deliver for our families. President Joe Biden and congressional leaders like Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi are steadily making government work for working people. Despite razor-thin margins in Congress, they have been passing and signing legislation that helps solve Americans' biggest challenges.

Take the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed into law this week. It makes the largest investment any country has made to address the climate crisis, creating millions of good jobs in clean energy, reducing carbon emissions by up to 40 percent, lowering families' energy bills and helping the hardest-hit communities. The act will lower the cost of healthcare premiums and prescription drugs by finally allowing the government to negotiate prices, including reducing the cost of insulin for seniors to \$35 a month and capping prescription drug prices at \$2,000 per year for Americans with Medicare Part D.

The Inflation Reduction Act pays for these transformations with a fairer tax code by requiring a minimum corporate tax. It will reduce the federal deficit by more than \$300 billion over the next decade. Many economists expect the effects of this legislation to help arrest inflation, hopefully continuing the trend of zero inflation and falling gas prices.

And then there is the CHIPS and Science Act, the country's first reboot of industrial policy and labor standards in generations. This law will bring home the production of semiconductors, which were invented in the United States but today are mostly produced elsewhere: 75 percent of the global supply currently is produced in East Asia. The CHIPS Act will expand educational and job opportunities in science and technology, investing in regional innovation hubs across the country and ensuring the U.S. advances its scientific and technological edge.

The PACT Act will enhance healthcare and disability benefits for millions of veterans who were exposed to toxic burn pits while fighting our wars overseas, so they will no longer have to fight at home for the healthcare they need.

One wonders what would have happened if Biden and his allies in Congress had not passed the American Rescue Plan, which got COVID-19 shots in arms, put checks in pockets and led to what experts estimate will be the lowest child poverty rate on record. It stabilized communities, led to a record-breaking jobs comeback and helped schools plan and reopen safely.

## Despite razor-thin margins in Congress, leaders are making government work for working people.

After four years of start-and-stop "Infrastructure Weeks" during the last administration, Biden helped broker a deal and then signed the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act into law last November. Americans already are benefiting from the reconstruction and improvement of roads, bridges, transit, broadband and drinking water—as well as from the hundreds of thousands of well-paying union jobs it is creating.

For nearly three decades, the federal government did little to counter the gun violence that has shattered countless lives. Finally, this summer Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. It provides billions in funding for mental health services, state red-flag laws and crisis intervention

programs, community violence prevention and school safety, and includes provisions related to who can purchase firearms.

And then there are the executive actions: After the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Biden issued an executive order securing access to reproductive and other healthcare services. And the Biden administration is working to change the student loan system that has saddled millions of Americans with crushing debt. It has provided more debt relief than any other administration to more than 640,000 borrowers through Public Service Loan Forgiveness, extended the pause on federal student loan payments and helped borrowers defrauded by higher education institutions.

Normally, I wouldn't focus on a laundry list of laws and executive actions, but in this age of extreme divisiveness and partisanship, it's important to lift up the fact that democracy is working. With the slimmest governing majority, Biden is fighting for and delivering for Americans, even though too many people don't connect him with these accomplishments. There's no shortage of theories for why: messaging that doesn't break through, headwinds from the pandemic and inflation, and simply bad luck. Then there's the incessant drubbing from Biden's predecessor and from Fox News, which now is complaining that the price of gas is falling too *fast*.

There is much more to do to protect our freedoms and create a better life for all. But let's give credit for what has been done to address the climate crisis, protect our rights and help everyone—from young people to seniors to veterans—have a better life.



Weingarten, left, with Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden in Houston on May 28, 2019.

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