

Joe Biden's potential to bring the country together

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Americans came out, in the middle of a pandemic, and voted in record numbers to elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Despite this decisive result, the country is bitterly divided over social issues, race and gender. Fully 56 percent of Trump voters said they support him because he “stands up for America’s values, history and culture.” That is incomprehensible to those of us who both love America and fight to make it fairer and more just. But our divisions mask an important commonality: We all want to feel safe—economically, emotionally and physically. In the midst of overlapping crises—a pandemic, a recession, a climate emergency and a reckoning with racial injustice—most of us don’t feel secure. President-elect Biden will not only confront these crises, he will work to make the country more united, just and secure.

The unrelenting march of the coronavirus pandemic—from early outbreaks on the coasts to nearly every state being in the red zone—has blanketed the country in fear.

The economic downturn has cast 8 million more people into poverty. Even before the pandemic, 40 percent of Americans said they couldn’t cover a \$400 emergency. Many people who never worried about their financial security feel very vulnerable now.

The murders of innocent Black Americans, the peaceful protests in response, and the false characterizations of those protests as “mobs” reveal we have much hard work and healing to do. Racism—in law enforcement, healthcare, education and the environment—is so pervasive that public health experts say simply being Black can be harmful for your health. Race played a role in the elections, from dog-whistle warnings of voter fraud to outright voter suppression and disenfranchisement.

The thing that families place so much hope in—their children’s education—now causes so much angst. We worry that children will contract the virus at school or unknowingly bring it home; we see our children losing out academically with remote learning and growing isolated and depressed as the months drag on.

Healthcare workers are exhausted, angry and, yes, very afraid. Many still lack necessary protective equipment as infections rage. Hospitals across the country are reaching capacity and face dire staff shortages, leading North Dakota’s governor to make the outrageous declaration that healthcare workers who test positive for COVID-19 can continue working.

President-elect Biden knows that to revive our economy and achieve any of our priorities, the United States must get the coronavirus under control. Experts on the Biden COVID-19 task force are already at work on plans to reduce the spread of the virus, ensure vaccines are safe and implement basic virus control measures scientists have long begged for: a national system for testing and contact tracing, targeted closures when necessary, and promoting mask-wearing as both a safeguard and a patriotic act.

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Protecting Americans from the coronavirus will make it possible to pursue other priorities, such as in education. This has been the most challenging school year most of us have ever experienced—from the lack of consistent safety guardrails and guidance, to the shortage of resources, to the limitations of hybrid and remote learning, despite educators working harder than ever.

President-elect Biden is committed to working with Congress to pass a COVID-19 relief package with robust aid to schools, towns, cities and states, so they can invest in safeguards to reopen schools safely. In addition to public health components, the relief package will provide crucial funding to help schools recover from the devastating

academic, social, health and nutrition effects of the pandemic on children.

The Biden-Harris education plan fulfills the promise and purpose of our public schools as agents of opportunity and anchors of our communities by pledging to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and triple funding for Title I to help low-income students. It will provide high-quality universal prekindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds. It will expand community schools, which is vital to help a generation of students recover from the effects of COVID-19 and this recession. It will restore the mission of the Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights. And Biden and Harris have pledged to provide much-needed relief to borrowers crushed by student loan debt.

Their economic recovery plan will create millions of jobs in manufacturing, innovation, infrastructure, clean energy and education. These are jobs you can support a family on, jobs that will help restore hope that there is a better future ahead.

The Biden administration will protect and build on the Affordable Care Act, giving Americans more choice, reducing healthcare costs, protecting those with pre-existing conditions and expanding coverage.

The American people have spoken. We want leaders who care about our well-being and will unify all Americans with better leadership, honesty and integrity, justice and equality, caring and respect. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are the leaders we need.



Joe Biden joins Weingarten, AFT members and students at an AFT Votes town hall in Houston on May 28, 2019.

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