

# GRAND BARGAIN

## PROJECT

The Practical Steps Necessary Now to Resolve America's Critical Problems  
and Preserve Our Democracy

March 8, 2024

The Center for Collaborative Democracy works with experienced practitioners in conflict resolution, behavioral economics and game theory in order to develop innovative methods for resolving societal ills that established institutions are failing to remedy.

## The Steps Necessary for Our Democracy and the American People to Thrive

Our political system has become so polarizing that, whomever we elect, there is no scenario in which the president, the House and 60 senators could agree on practical solutions for our long-term fiscal, economic or environmental problems.

**To overcome this political paralysis, the Center for Collaborative Democracy, working with the Consensus Building Institute, has launched the Grand Bargain Project.** It is designed to develop — and build wide public support for — a package of common-sense reforms that would improve nearly every family's quality of life. To get there in 2024, the project is unfolding in five phases:

### Phase 1: Proof of Concept — Completed in December

To start, we commissioned a team of 13 prominent former policymakers and think tank leaders across the spectrum (listed in Appendix I) to work out a practical plan for simultaneously:

- Increasing economic mobility, productivity, and growth
- Fostering an educational system that enables students to reach their potential
- Making healthcare more effective and less costly
- Stabilizing the global climate
- Shrinking the national debt as a percentage of GDP
- Making the tax code fairer and simpler

To reach that outcome, the expert team agreed with our research that the above issues cannot be resolved one at a time, because any practical solution for each issue will face relentless opposition from various interest groups and blocs of voters that prefer the status quo.

Yet by combining common sense reforms for all six issues, the team was able to produce an overall plan that would significantly increase the total benefits to society while reducing the total costs, so that nearly everyone would be far ahead of where they are now.

While each person who has seen the experts' report has found parts they would ordinarily oppose, all have agreed that the total package would be far better for their families and the rest of the country than the direction we are now headed.

### Phase 2: Enlist 100 Leaders and Influencers — Begun in March

**To generate a more detailed plan that all sectors of the public could support,** we are drawing on our experience with over 200 controversies in which groups clashing over multiple issues agreed on outcomes that benefited all. Years ago, for example, 25 advocates for the various sides on environmental policy met to break a long-standing stalemate. They included top executives from General Motors, Dow Chemical and Chevron Oil; leaders of the Sierra Club, the World Resources Institute and the Environmental Defense Fund; the chair of the African American Leadership Summit; the director of the EPA; and the president of the AFL-CIO.

In six meetings, the 25 advocates hashed out a plan for significantly advancing each side's top priorities: "reducing pollution, waste and poverty," while increasing "jobs, productivity, wages, savings and capital."<sup>1</sup>

Each CEO then won over their industry association; the labor leader enlisted the major unions; the EPA got buy in from other regulatory agencies; and the environmentalists won over others in their community.

As one advocate put it, "Each of us had earned the trust and respect of our own community, which is how we won each community's full support."

By contrast, congressional leaders from both parties admitted that lawmakers could not sell such a complex agreement, despite all its benefits, to their diverse voters.

This is just one of 200+ cases in which trusted spokespeople resolved conflicts politicians could not.

**Our conclusion: If we identify the 100 people outside government whom citizens in each sector of society would most trust to speak for them, those 100 would be the Americans best equipped to unite all sectors around common sense solutions for the six issues listed on the previous page.**

To that end, we are working with APCO Worldwide and Mercury LLC to enlist 50 top influencers from the media, arts, business, government and popular culture who have earned trust and respect from the various sectors of the public. We are making a case to the 50 that participating in the Grand Bargain Project as the public's "champions" is the most practical way to help the people they care about fare far better than now.

We will also invite participation from leaders of the 50 organizations most politically active on the six issues. Likely participants include representatives from the AFL-CIO, National Federation of Independent Business, AARP, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, NAACP, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the National Wildlife Federation.

We expect even traditional adversaries to accept our offer to negotiate toward a deal that benefits all sides rather than sit on the sidelines as 100 other leaders and influencers strive toward that goal.

We will ask the 100 to accept the experts' report as a starting point for their negotiations. Given that people who have seen the report have all agreed it would be far better for their families and the entire country than the direction we are now headed, we expect nearly all the 100 to accept. Once the convening begins, those who declined will likely change their minds, preferring to be at the table than not.

### Phase 3: Convene the 100 Leaders and Influencers Online — Target Date: Early May

To help the 100 hash out a detailed agreement, they will form a separate working group for each of the six issues, exploring changes to the original proposal that could appeal to the greatest number of participants. Each working group will have an experienced facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute to help bridge differences, and two policy experts to help with the details.

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<sup>1</sup> See "A New Consensus for Prosperity, Opportunity and a Healthy Environment," U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996

Each working group will choose two co-leaders who, once a month, will meet as a Group of 12 to integrate agreed-upon changes into a package encompassing all six issues.

Our expectation is that each month, more of the 100 will strongly support the emerging agreement.

#### Phase 4: Messaging

We will widely publicize the initial convening, making the case that whatever emerges will be far better for every family than what our hyperpolarized political system can produce.

We expect that message to especially motivate citizens who deplore today's hyper-partisan politics, the "exhausted majority," to vote in record numbers in 2024.

In June, with negotiations still in progress, we will help each of the 100 who supports the emerging agreement to tailor a multi-media message to the people he/she represents, showing them how the pact's key provisions would improve the quality of their lives — much more than our broken political system seems capable of.

#### Phase 5: Mobilizing Public Support

When the advocates first convene, our affiliated Grand Bargain Action Network and other 501(c)4s will begin to mobilize the exhausted majority of voters with messages such as:

*The people you most trust are working out a grand bargain that will create far more opportunities for your family to thrive. If you want that pact to make a real difference, you need to vote.*

We expect that most organizations promoting democracy, the environment, economic mobility or fiscal responsibility will join in spreading that message.

We will also seek support for the grand bargain from local civic groups, political commentators, media figures, good government organizations, and on appropriate social media.

As the number of Americans supporting the grand bargain increases, a growing number of politicians and candidates would see it as being in their self-interest to publicly pledge to use the pact as the roadmap for navigating our country's biggest challenges.

### Obstacles to Success and Our Plans to Overcome Them

*Various media will misrepresent the project's purpose and distort the advocates' recommendations.*

Media spreading disinformation will keep undermining our society unless Americans who have earned the trust of voters across the spectrum get an opportunity to work together on bridging differences. Those trusted individuals, and they alone, could persuade most voters to ignore the lies and distortions.

*The project is unlikely to change the minds of voters who embrace tribalism, nihilism or extremism.*

Our objective is to offer Americans a policy agenda that the vast majority will see as being in their best interests. That strikes us as the strongest way to motivate most citizens to reject tribalism and extremism.

*The project is far more ambitious than any other endeavor of its kind.*

In hundreds of conversations with political activists, academics and think tank leaders, no one has offered us an alternative way to resolve our nation's differences on critical issues.

Indeed, pro-democracy organizations have spent billions of dollars in recent years trying to bridge those divisions, yet our country keeps growing more divided. And the \$30+ billion that will be spent on the coming election campaign will further stoke Americans' animosity toward one another.

By contrast, this project — which will cost under \$10 million — is designed to overcome fundamental flaws in our political system and could have a far greater impact than any recent endeavor we know of.

## Expected Outcomes and Measures of Success in 2024

- Vast majority of stakeholders and public influencers will agree on optimal solutions for the six issues
- Record numbers of the exhausted majority will become far more informed and politically active
- As much of society as feasible will unite around a positive agenda
- Constructive debate over public policy will become far more dominant in our political discourse

## Management Team

To move the project forward, we have enlisted a Board of Advisors (see Appendix II); and formed a Project Steering Committee that we are still expanding. Its current members are:

- **Sol Erdman**, founder and president of the Center for Collaborative Democracy
- **David Fairman**, managing director of the Consensus Building Institute
- **Travis Robinson**, managing director of the Center for Collaborative Democracy
- **Richard Eidlin**, co-founder of the American Sustainable Business Council
- **Rob Fersh**, founder and former president of Convergence Center for Policy Resolution
- **Malka Ranjana Kopell**, co-founder and CEO of Civity
- **Kabrina Bass**, chair of the National Association for Community Mediation
- **Paul Kramer**, founder and former president of Youth in Policy

## Project Organizers

The Center for Collaborative Democracy (CCD) and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) are engaged in resolving issues that have long been intractable. CCD's founder, Sol Erdman, took on that mission after working with three founders of Harvard's Program on Negotiation: Larry Susskind, Frank Sander and Howard Raiffa. Larry Susskind also founded CBI. His successor, David Fairman, is a key partner in the project and will be the lead facilitator.

## Budget

Phase 2 expected costs: \$675,000. Phase 3: \$1,800,000. Phase 4: \$2,600,000. Details available on request. Phase 5, open-ended, most to be borne by affiliated 501(c)4.

*For more information, please  
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Center for  
Collaborative Democracy



**Eric Hanushek.** Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution (Stanford), specializing in economic analysis of educational issues. Won the Yidan Prize for research

**Bill Hoagland.** Senior Vice President, Bipartisan Policy Center. Former Director of the Senate Budget Committee. Participated in major federal budget negotiations throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

**Douglas Holtz-Eakin.** Founder and President, American Action Forum. Former Director of the Congressional Budget Office. Former senior economist on the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

**Glenn Hubbard.** Dean Emeritus of Columbia Business School. Former Deputy Secretary at Treasury. Former Chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

**Maya MacGuineas.** President, Committee for a Responsible Federal Government. Specializes in budget, tax, and economic policies. Serves as a consistent resource on Capitol Hill and international media outlets.

**Richard V. Reeves.** Senior Fellow, Brookings. Specializes in economic studies. Former European Business Speaker of the Year. Former principal policy advisor to the Minister of Welfare Reform in Great Britain.

**Robert Reischauer.** President Emeritus, Urban Institute. Former director of the Congressional Budget Office. Former trustee of Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds.

**Gerard Robinson.** Fellow of Practice, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (UVA). Former Secretary of Education in Virginia. Former Commissioner of Education in Florida.

**Isabel Sawhill (Team Co-Leader).** Senior Fellow and former Director of Economic Studies at Brookings. Former Associate Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

**Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach.** Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern. Former Director of the Hamilton Project at Brookings. Scholar at Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

**Richard Schmalensee.** Former Dean of Sloan School of Management, MIT. Former Director of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Former member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

**Eugene Steuerle.** Fellow, Urban Institute. Former Deputy Secretary for Treasury. Co-founder and former President of National Tax Association. One of the chief architects of the 1986 Tax Reform Act.

**Michael Strain (Team Co-Leader).** Director of Economic Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute. Member of Aspen Economic Strategy Group. Research fellow at Germany's IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

## APPENDIX II: Grand Bargain Project Board of Advisors

**LAWRENCE SUSSKIND** vice chair and co-founder, Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School

**LARRY DIAMOND** senior fellow, Hoover Institution; founding co-editor, Journal of Democracy

**FRANCIS FUKUYAMA** professor, Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law

**JOHN STEINER** co-founder of the Bridge Alliance and the Social Venture Network

**MARGO KING** collaborator, Threshold Foundation, Integral Institute, Mediators Foundation

**JERRY TAYLOR** co-founder and former president of the Niskanen Center

**EUGENE STEUERLE** Richard Fischer chair at the Urban Institute; co-founder, Tax Policy Center

**HAHRIE HAN** inaugural director, SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University

**BARRY ANDERSON** former acting director, Congressional Budget Office

**NEALIN PARKER** executive director, Common Ground USA

**FRANCIS JOHNSON** president, Take Back Our Republic

**CHARLES WHEELAN** founder and co-chair, Unite America

**KELLY JOHNSTON** former Secretary of the U.S. Senate

**ADI IGNATIUS** editor, Harvard Business Review

**THOMAS KAHN** distinguished fellow, Center for Congressional & Presidential Studies, American University

**JAKE HARRIMAN** founder and CEO, More Perfect Union

**URIEL EPHSTEIN** executive director, Renew Democracy Initiative

**DAVID LEVINE** president and co-founder, American Sustainable Business Council

**BRANDON ARNOLD** executive vice president, National Taxpayers Union

**JOHN PASSACANTANDO** former executive director, Greenpeace

**WILLIAM CYRUS GARRETT** senior policy advisor, America Achieves

**ROB RICHIE** founder and president, FairVote

**LARRY SPEARS** co-founder, Policy Consensus Initiative

