

Public Citizen's COVID-19 Crisis Response Campaign Plan



**Saving Lives, Fighting Corruption
and Protecting Democracy**



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Introduction

Our country is facing the worst public health emergency in a century, and the most devastating economic collapse since the Great Depression.

The dual nature of this unprecedented crisis poses a series of distinct, interconnected problems.

First, amidst a global health pandemic, millions of newly unemployed Americans are losing their access to health care, joining the 30 million Americans who entered the crisis uninsured.

Second, although everyone agrees the economy should be reopened as soon as possible, it will be impossible to do so responsibly or sustainably in the absence of widespread testing for COVID-19 and aggressive contact tracing of those found to be infected.

Third, while a vaccine is the absolute key to ending the crisis, neither the United States nor the world has anything like sufficient production capacity to manufacture sufficient quantities quickly. Without rapid action, we face the prospect of vaccine apartheid.

Fourth, the trillions in dollars being doled out as part of coronavirus relief programs would create enormous opportunities for cronyism and outright fraud under the best of circumstances. Under the most corrupt presidency in American history, the extent of the fraud will be staggering—especially in the Oval Office.

Fifth, the pandemic is being used as an excuse to pursue an outrageous deregulatory agenda, dangerously rolling back crucial protections for health, safety, the environment, workers and consumers.

Finally, the coronavirus has created an acute democracy crisis, as we face the very real prospect of a November 2020 election that cannot be held safely in person for all Americans.

Objectives

Public Citizen is meeting this unprecedented crisis with a bold, comprehensive **COVID-19 Crisis Response Campaign Plan** centered around these core objectives:

- 1. In this time of pandemic especially, every American should be guaranteed the health care they need.**
- 2. The United States should use its existing authority to procure a sufficient supply of coronavirus tests and deploy them throughout the country.** In addition, the federal government should provide tens of billions of dollars to fund state and local testing and tracing programs.
- 3. The intellectual property and know-how for a vaccine should be shared globally.** Any company patent, marketing exclusivity, trade secret or other monopoly claims on a vaccine should be licensed on a nonexclusive basis to all qualified manufacturers worldwide. The U.S. government itself should immediately undertake preparations to manufacture the vaccine, on a scale commensurate with national and global needs.
- 4. The use of bailout funds must be monitored to expose and curtail the ongoing corruption, conflicts of interest, ethics violations and undue corporate influence in the current administration.** In addition to curbing abuses, we aim to impose positive conditions on bailout funds, so that they benefit people, not just corporations and executives.
- 5. The regulatory system must be defended from industry-sponsored rollbacks and dangerous non-enforcement policies, and employers should not be able to escape liability from wrongdoing simply by invoking the pandemic.**
- 6. Congress should appropriate \$4 billion to fund vote by mail efforts in the states, and states should move quickly to implement systems that make it easy to vote by mail.**
- 7. Our Bright Lines Project will continue to promote a better definition of political activity at the IRS, preparing to win a new interpretive rule or legislation in 2021.**

Strategies

Access to Health Care

All Americans need guaranteed access to health care—especially during a global pandemic. But, instead of providing that care, our for-profit health insurance system is actually *reducing* access to care.

More than 36 million Americans filed for unemployment in the first two months of the crisis and the number will keep surging. In the process, many are also losing their access to health care.

Public Citizen has long led the national fight for an expanded and improved Medicare for All system that would guarantee everyone access to quality care, with no out-of-pocket costs. With your support, we have made enormous progress on that campaign, but to meet this public health crisis we need to take immediate, emergency action.

So, to respond to the urgent threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are joining with Rep. Pramila Jayapal, co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and other allies on Capitol Hill in fighting for an immediate three-part solution:

- 1. Temporarily enroll the newly unemployed in Medicare.**
- 2. Expand Medicaid to cover everyone else who is uninsured.**
- 3. Prohibit private insurers from imposing cost-sharing and co-pays for coronavirus-related treatment.**





Only Public Citizen has the credibility, national reach and wide-ranging expertise to deploy all of the following tactics in this critical campaign:

- Educating the public with blogs, social media, op-eds and other content.
- Mobilizing our members and supporters to urge their members of Congress to support the Medicare Crisis Program Act, which would codify the three-part solution outlined above.
- Lobbying Congress (including leadership) directly on the Medicare Crisis Program Act.
- Pulling together a coalition of dozens of organizations behind the Medicare Crisis Program Act.
- Calling out and directly campaigning against insurers who refuse to waive cost-sharing for coronavirus-related treatment.
- Publishing reports and research products on private insurance company coronavirus policy, the impacts of job loss on insurance coverage and more.

Our efforts to hold the private insurers accountable are already bearing fruit, with an increasing number agreeing to waive all co-pays during the pandemic.

Tracking and Tracing

There is no way to “open up” the economy responsibly or sustainably without nationwide adoption of a system of mass testing for the virus and contact tracing of those who have tested positive.

Although there is broad public health consensus on this basic truth, it has not sufficiently entered the policy debate. We are trying to bridge that gap.

With allied outside public health experts, we have developed our own succinct statement of what a tracking and tracing system should look like. We are now circulating this statement among public health school deans and other public health experts and luminaries to illustrate and project the consensus that exists among professionals.

At the same time, we are pressing Congress to appropriate the funds and create the decentralized structure for a tracking and tracing system. We envision a large appropriation to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which will then apportion funds to the states in order to carry out a robust system of tracking and tracing.

We also need a Congressional directive to use the Defense Production Act to ensure the manufacture of a sufficient number of test kits—the private sector is not going to meet this need on its own, because it does not make economic sense for individual companies to make capital investments to meet a one-time, time-limited need.



Altogether, we are seeking at least \$50 billion to cover the costs of testing and a minimum of 100,000 community health workers to do contact tracing.

Vaccines and Drug Treatments

There will be no real escape from the coronavirus crisis until we have a vaccine. But who will get access and when?

If a single company is permitted to maintain exclusive rights to manufacture a vaccine—



through patents, exclusive marketing rights, trade secrets or otherwise—then that company will have the power to impose charges that could put it out of reach for millions in the United States and billions worldwide. Or, if governments and donors agree to make the vaccine available for free, the company would have the ability to pillage public treasuries.

But as frightening as is that prospect, we face an even larger challenge:

No vaccine manufacturer has anywhere near the capacity to make a vaccine in the quantities needed to distribute it quickly to at-risk people around the world.

And none has the incentive to scale up with capital investments for what will effectively be one-time use.

If the world has a limited supply, then there will have to be rationing, likely for a period of many years, and almost certainly based on power and ability to pay. What we are staring at, in other words, is the prospect of a national and global vaccine apartheid.

To escape this dire scenario we need to move away from a monopolistic, proprietary and private sector model of development and manufacturing, and replace it with one relying on information sharing, cooperation, nonexclusive licensing and global solidarity.

We are, consequently, launching a COVID-19 Vaccine Action Plan that would:

- Override corporate claims to monopolies like patents, control over data and guarding know-how, to require nonexclusive licensing and information sharing,
- Require the U.S. government to begin investing in vaccine manufacturing capacity, and
- Support a WHO-led patent and knowledge-sharing pool, both to speed vaccine development and to ensure that all countries will have the ability to manufacture vaccines on their own, if necessary.

We are deploying the following tactics to win this crucial vaccine approach:

- Conducting intense research into the public share of investment into coronaviruses (our research shows that the vast bulk of work has been supported by the federal government since 2002).

- Developing specific legislative approaches, including, but not limited to, the COVID-19 Emergency Manufacturing Act, which would require government manufacturing of vaccines.
- Working to identify allies in the U.S. government who will support a global cooperative effort.
- Building a global civil society alliance around a knowledge-sharing approach. We are running the main coordinating listserv on the topic and getting hundreds of organizations around the world to sign on to a principles statement that prioritizes sharing over monopolies.
- Providing technical assistance to governments around the world on the knowledge-sharing approach.
- Running a full-fledged lobby and public education effort around this initiative.

Bailout Oversight

Two trillion dollars have already been allocated to provide economic relief, with trillions more in lending programs authorized by the Federal Reserve, and trillions more still to come.



Unfortunately, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and the Trump administration conspired to make sure these relief funds come with almost no conditions and too little transparency.

This is a recipe for disaster. Without urgent action, bailout funds that are intended to keep workers on the payroll and restore economic activity will instead intensify existing concentrations of wealth and power.

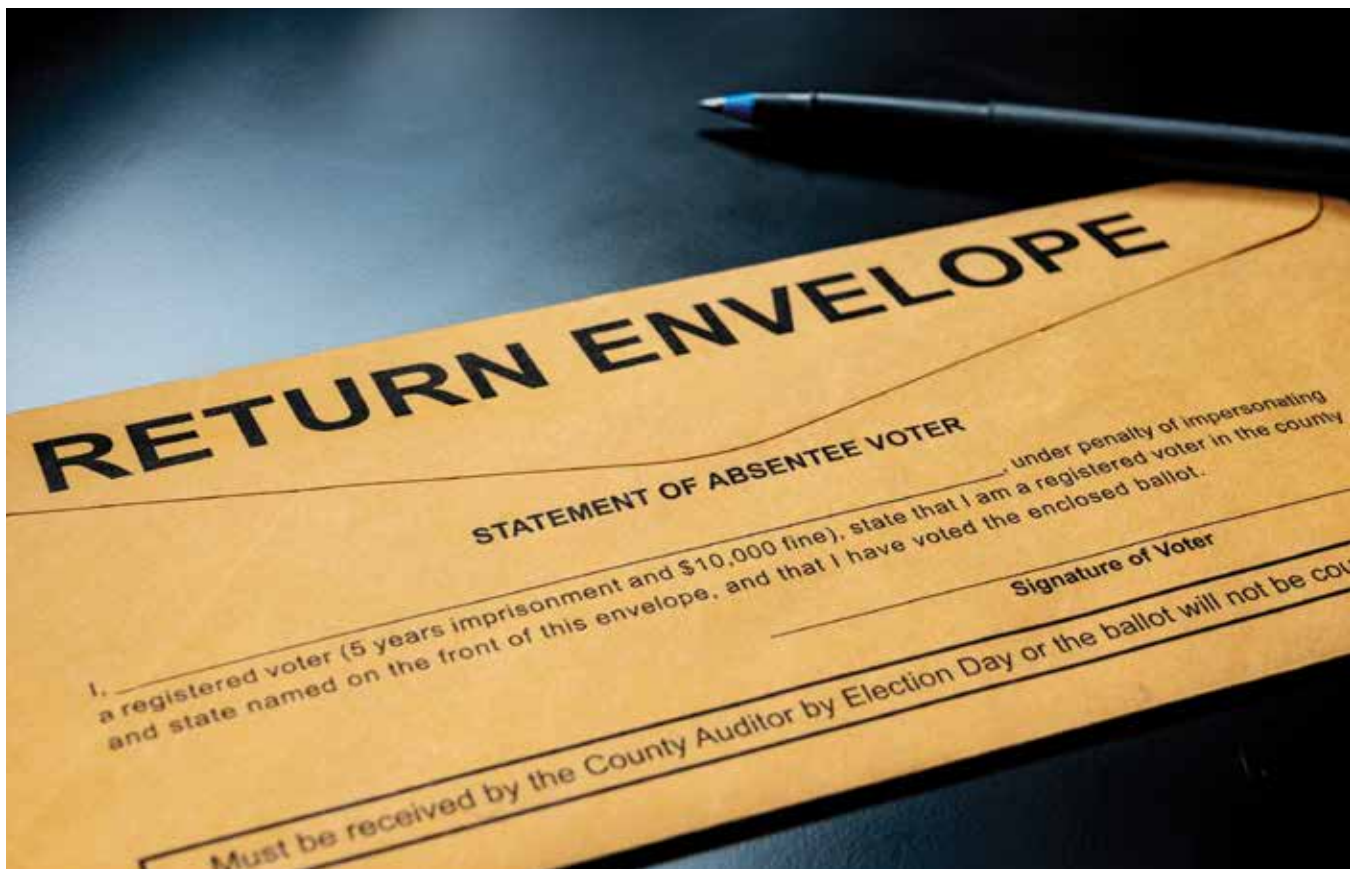


Public Citizen is mobilizing to avert that scenario:

- **Collaboration:** We are working at scale to monitor the bailout, hold bailout recipients accountable and fight for binding conditions on bailout monies.
- **Research:** We will document and critique how bailout funds are spent as a means to hold government and corporate actors accountable.
- **Corporate Campaigning:** We are collaborating with our investor allies and working within the coalitions we run on shareholder engagement (Environmental, Social and Governance disclosure [ESG] coalition, Corporate Reform Coalition) to hold companies receiving bailouts accountable.

We will look at how companies are doing on CEO pay, political engagement, dividends, stock buybacks, staff retention and sick leave. We will focus on specific company bad actors and/or industry leaders. We are initially engaging around this spring's shareholder season, but will then build out additional tactics and actions once we get past the shareholder meetings. We'll create pressure by doing digital actions and stunts and creating shareable content, explore high-impact digital collaborations with celebrities, maintain a list of reporters we can share exposés with, and will consider running ads if we see significant bad behavior that can be best highlighted in that manner.

- **Policy advocacy:** In addition to collaborating with and monitoring the official bailout oversight mechanisms, we are campaigning for strict conditions on any new bailout funds, focusing on limits for CEO pay, dividend payments and stock buybacks, while, critically, keeping workers on the payroll.



Preserving Democracy in 2020: **Vote by Mail**

The coronavirus crisis makes it highly likely that some or all states will be unable to conduct in-person elections safely in November. This portends election chaos. Many people may be scared to, or simply unable to, cast their ballots.

Wisconsin gave us a glimpse of that chaos in April, when the legislature refused to delay the state's primary, or extend absentee voting. So right when the state government was urging people to fight the spread of COVID-19 by staying home, it was also forcing voters and poll workers to needlessly risk their lives to cast their ballots.

Voters stood in line for hours, trying to stay six feet apart. Many wore face masks, others did not. Milwaukee, which usually has 180 polling locations, was able to open only five because of a shortage of poll workers. Green Bay was down from 31 to two when voters turned out on Election Day.

Fortunately, there is an easy solution: universal vote by mail. There are a lot of details that matter to getting vote by mail right, including ensuring that there are still some in-person voting sites, but the most important factor is acting early. Setting up a voting by mail system, or even an absentee system that will handle the majority of ballots, requires



working out arrangements with printers, obtaining a sufficient number of scanning machines and scaling up staffing in central election offices. All these steps, along with postage for each ballot, requires money.

Public Citizen is leading the fight for \$4 billion in federal funding for state efforts to make voting by mail easy for every person in America, and to get states to act quickly to implement voting by mail systems.

- We are coordinating with a host of other organizations and driving work through the coalition we spearhead, the Declaration for American Democracy (DFAD).
- Through DFAD and allied efforts, we will bring major public pressure on Congress to provide significant additional funding to state and local governments to expand vote by mail, curbside voting and early voting. Tactics may include web townhalls, petitions, letters to the editor, in-district lobbying and days of action with coordinated email blasts, social media posts and calls.
- We are lobbying Congress hard on the central importance of including state election support in future COVID relief legislation. We are also working to recruit elected officials who have delayed elections and relied on the mail historically to win their seats to lobby for vote by mail and early voting.
- We are doing systematic outreach to state and local election officials to advocate for mail-in voting, early voting and for election integrity best practices. This would strengthen election official advocacy for funding, improve adherence to security and access best practices in key states.

In addition to lobbying at the federal level, we are mobilizing a multi-state grassroots advocacy campaign for voting by mail. Public Citizen will push across several coalitions in around 35 states to follow best practices for voter access during the pandemic.



Outcomes and Evaluation



At Public Citizen, we rigorously examine all of our work on an ongoing basis—everything from our written material and our public and media presentations to our online work, our performance in meetings, and the efficacy of our overall strategy and implementation.

One benefit of having a diverse organization is that we have skilled people who can offer valuable feedback on issues from a range of different perspectives.

Public Citizen will evaluate our **COVID-19 Crisis Response Campaign Plan** according to these and other criteria:

- Are we responding effectively to unanticipated opportunities?
- Have concepts provided by the Campaign Plan filtered into partner group advocacy, messaging and analyses?
- How effectively are we shaping policy debates?
- How effectively are we affecting policy outcomes, or are processes underway expected to lead to concrete policy outcomes?

The ultimate benchmark for our policy advocacy is, of course, whether we succeed in changing policy.

Along the way, we will make interim assessments based on the robustness, coherence and commitment of the coalitions we bring together; how often our champions in Congress speak or make commitments on our issues; the op-eds and reports we publish and their pickup, distribution and impact; the testimony, comments and drafting assistance we provide to advance our agenda; and other measures.

Your Crucial Role

We are facing an unprecedented dual crisis that threatens not just the health, lives and financial well-being of millions of Americans but the very nature of our country for generations to come.

This is no time for compromise or half-measures. We must mobilize all of our resources to meet this crisis with the bold, comprehensive response it demands.

Public Citizen is the one organization that combines expertise in all the core policy areas that response must include—from ensuring health care to protecting our democracy to fighting corruption—with a national grassroots reach and an unmatched public service lobbying team.

But all of our capabilities grow out of the extraordinary commitment of supporters like you.

I hope you're able to extend your commitment at this pivotal moment by making a generous investment-level contribution to Public Citizen today. **As detailed in the enclosed budget, we urgently need to raise \$2.18 million in the next 30 days**, and I'm hopeful I can count on you once again.

Thank you again for all that you do in support of our mission.



COVID-19 Crisis Response Campaign Plan Budget

LINE ITEM	AMOUNT
Personnel	
Leadership	\$318,620
Communications and Online	151,607
Democracy Organizers	240,218
Regulations and Policy Team	476,192
Researchers	231,228
Other Staffers	8,800
Fringe Benefits (28% of Salaries)	399,466
Personnel Subtotal	1,826,131
Other Costs	
Media and Polling	50,000
Meetings and Conferences	10,000
Miscellaneous	3,250
Other Costs Subtotal	63,250
Overhead	
General and Administrative (15% of Personnel)	273,920
Overhead Subtotal	273,920

GRAND TOTAL **\$2,163,301**





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