

EQUITY FOR ALL

The United States has a long history of racism, segregation, and legalized oppression based on skin color. The economic disadvantages associated with race are varied, and persist to this day. Any form of discrimination, either overt or covert, has no place in our state or country. We must ensure all people have access to quality education, a strong social safety net, family-sustaining jobs, and physical security. I am committed to working hand-in-hand with communities of color to design economically just reforms that make an impact on the legacy of inequality that has plagued our country for generations.

For the entirety of my career in public life, I have been committed to increasing the size of the table so that everyone has a seat. When I was mayor of Denver, nearly 60% of my cabinet appointments were women, and more than half were people of color. My predecessor, Mayor Wellington Webb, connected our team with leading organizations that became invaluable partners in supporting our agenda of diversity and inclusion. As governor, I put special effort into making sure that every state board and commission more accurately reflected the diversity of Colorado's population.

My Equity For All plan is a continuation of this work and a commitment to the people of Colorado. Every individual deserves to live in a country where biases against race do not determine their opportunity to succeed. Whether in health care, the economy, the legal system, the environment, or our democracy, greater equity is not optional — it is required. We have a moral imperative to do far better than we ever have before, and I am committed to being a fierce advocate in this fight.

INCREASING HEALTH EQUITY

Improve Access to Health Care: Health care is a right, not a privilege. As governor, I was proud to bring lawmakers together from both sides of the aisle to expand Medicaid for an additional 400,000 Coloradans. I also established our state exchange, Connect for Health Colorado, which allowed individuals to compare plans for quality and affordability. In the process, we cut the uninsured rate by nearly two-thirds.

We worked hard to reach everyone, but there is more work to be done. As of 2019, 361,000 Coloradans still lacked health insurance — a quarter of whom are eligible for coverage under Medicaid. And, as of 2015, the Latinx community in Colorado was uninsured at three times the rate of white Coloradans. The final steps to universal coverage are among the most difficult, and largely depend on the outcome of November's election. Senator Gardner and the Republican-led Senate have repeatedly voted to repeal the ACA and Medicaid expansion, and Gardner supports a lawsuit before the Supreme Court that could end protections for people with preexisting conditions — including 2.4 million Coloradans.

If elected, I am committed to working towards affordable, universal coverage by introducing a public option that can boost competition in the marketplace and lower prices. I will also fight to cut the cost of prescription drugs and ensure that our vital social safety net programs such as mental health and substance abuse recovery services, as well as CHIP, Medicare, and Medicaid, have Congress's full funding and support.

Address Systemic Racism: Health care outcomes diverge dramatically based on race. This reality is rooted in structural biases, systemic racism, and decades of underinvestment in communities of color. It is not enough to simply expand the scope of coverage, we must change the nature of how care is provided to ensure more equal treatment for all. No policy proposal will be a panacea — the factors that contribute to these health disparities are as varied as they are damaging — but dedicated resources will absolutely help. We must research diseases where divergent outcomes are pronounced — including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and infant mortality — to better understand their roots. Congress should appropriate funds for programs addressing the social determinants of health, including nutritious food, public transportation, and safe spaces for physical activity. Medical schools must play their part by prioritizing diversity and inclusion when recruiting the next generation of practitioners, and curriculums should provide thorough training in identifying and correcting biases in care. Finally, important bills such as the *Health Equity and Accountability Act*, a collaborative effort to reduce inequalities in health care that has been reintroduced each Congress for 13 years, should finally have the chance to become law.

Close Gaps in COVID-19 Outcomes: The coronavirus is highlighting the glaring inequalities in our healthcare system. Black Coloradans make up nearly 4% of the state’s population yet account for 7.6% of coronavirus cases. Latinx Coloradans are 22% of the population and make up 35% of the state’s positive cases. This is unacceptable. Coloradans of color are particularly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 because they are more likely to be essential workers in this pandemic, and it is vital that they have the protective equipment they need to do their jobs safely. Furthermore, study after study shows that Black and Latinx Americans are dying of coronavirus at significantly higher rates than white Americans. Adequate testing, robust contact tracing, and social distancing are essential components to address any outbreak, but to get to the source of these divergent outcomes, we also must address the structural inequities in our healthcare system. Rooting out biases can and should continue far beyond the search for a vaccine.

Fight for Reproductive Rights: The Affordable Care Act (ACA) marked a dramatic advancement for reproductive rights in this country, with childbirth no longer classified as a “pre-existing condition” and significantly reducing or eliminating out-of-pocket expenses for birth control. Yet gaps in coverage and access persist in communities of color, particularly during pregnancy. The United States has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the industrialized world, and Black women die three to four times more often than white women when giving birth. Women of color deserve equal access to high-quality, patient-centered care, both of which I am committed to fighting for as senator. This means gathering data about maternal mortality, investing in culturally-sensitive perinatal care and doula training, extending Medicaid coverage for new mothers to one year, and using innovative payment models to incentivize improved outcomes. As senator, I pledge to protect the right to choose, fully fund critical government programs for reproductive health such as Title X, and work to reduce racial disparities across the spectrum of reproductive care.

EXPANDING ECONOMIC EQUITY

Strengthen the Safety Net for Workers: Persistent efforts to weaken the social safety net — too often led, unfortunately, by Republicans in Congress — have contributed to the chronically high levels of poverty in our nation. These trends have only worsened as workers grapple with low hourly wages, lack of health insurance, and few workforce protections.

The economic gap across racial lines is a constant reminder of the work that must be done to address poverty and support equality nationwide. Unions have been critical partners in this regard, nearly doubling wealth for union members as compared to nonmembers — particularly members of color. Workers cannot get ahead without affordable childcare, paid family leave, and fair compensation, including raising the minimum wage to \$15. For individuals of color with disabilities, the barriers to economic opportunity can be even steeper, and tailored career, education, and financial support is necessary to foster more equal outcomes.

Outside of the workplace, investments in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are critical, to keep working families healthy and fed. Our nation's public transportation system, which many workers rely on to reach their jobs, is in dire need of repair. Finally, we should use the opportunity zone framework to prioritize federal investment in marginalized communities that face maintenance, safety, and water challenges. We must collectively fight for a future where all people have access to economic opportunities. A strong safety net helps bring those opportunities closer.

Invest in Education: Education is one of the best investments we can make in our kids. As a public school parent, I am keenly aware of the particular power that public schools have to equalize opportunity for all students. As mayor of Denver, I helped lead the successful effort to establish the Denver Preschool Program, which provides free early childhood education to Denver families. As senator, I will work to ensure every student can benefit from the foundation for future success that education provides.

This includes closing the achievement gap by expanding literacy opportunities, promoting STEM learning for students of color, funding Head Start and full-day kindergarten, supporting the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), recruiting and retaining teachers of color, and so much more. We must also end the “school-to-prison pipeline,” in which students — sometimes as young as three — are disciplined under “zero tolerance policies” and suspended or expelled. Our public education system needs adequate funding to provide the type of enriching academic environment that is so vital to eliminate this practice.

College affordability is another major hurdle for students. Expanded loan repayment and forgiveness programs, tuition-free community college, and investment in minority-serving scholarship programs such as TRIO and Gear Up are a big step in the right direction. For students who go to college but are unable to complete their degree, we must collect quality data on racial disparities in graduation rates as well as policy interventions that work best to address these gaps. Historically Black colleges and universities and native, tribal and indigenous educational institutions do important work to address discrimination in education, and I am committed to making sure they have the funding they need to continue their vital missions.

Boost Skills Training: Apprenticeships are a great tool for equalizing access to employment for all Americans. Currently, only 37% of young people in the United States complete a four-year degree. Apprenticeships offer an attractive bridge — or alternative — to postsecondary education. As governor, I helped establish CareerWise in Colorado, a job training program that works to provide students with valuable work experience, a paycheck in the tens of thousands, and free college credit—all while still in high school. As senator, I will fight to close employment gaps for communities of color by providing

diverse cohorts of students the on-the-job skills training they need to succeed in the economy of the future.

Support Entrepreneurs of Color: Minority-owned small businesses are engines of employment and powerful agents of economic growth in their communities. Yet access to capital, which is a big challenge for any small business owner, is particularly difficult for entrepreneurs of color. Minority entrepreneurs are less likely to be approved for business loans or to receive investment than firms owned by white Americans. Community development financial institutions (CDFIs) step in to fill these gaps, and should receive full financial support from Congress. The economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic has made funding particularly challenging to access these days, and by and large, relief efforts have not been designed with minority-owned small businesses in mind. I proposed a COVID-19 recovery plan that would set aside funding, including for businesses with 20 or fewer employees, which represent 88% of all small businesses, and give priority to minority- and women-owned businesses in particular. We must do all we can to make sure that minority entrepreneurs have the support they need to weather this crisis.

Address Housing Inequality: Affordable housing is a fundamental necessity. Yet decades of segregationist and racist housing policies have left communities of color more housing insecure than their white peers. Expansion of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and compliance with the 1968 Fair Housing Act are critical steps towards reducing this disparity. If elected senator, I will also push for the inclusion of affordable housing in any major infrastructure package we consider, and hold lenders accountable for predatory housing loans.

SECURING LEGAL EQUITY

Overhaul the Immigration System: Our immigration system is a mess. Children have been held in cages at the southern border, the future of DACA recipients hangs in the balance, and President Trump is using the coronavirus as an excuse to turn away anyone seeking to immigrate. Many of these stories are wrenching. The last time Congress came close to passing comprehensive immigration reform was 2013, when then-Representative Gardner opposed the bill and helped block its passage in the House of Representatives. Our country cannot afford to wait any longer for the Republican-led Senate to find its conscience. Change needs to come now. Change needs to come for the one million pending immigration cases languishing in our underfunded courts system. Change needs to come for the businesses and farmers who depend on consistency yet receive none from our current visa program. And change needs to come for the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants and 700,000 Dreamers whose lives are being upended by this administration. These individuals are enmeshed in our communities, they have families and pay taxes, and they deserve a pathway to citizenship. If we can invite this change by passing comprehensive immigration reform, we can do justice to our legacy as a nation of immigrants.

Addressing Police Brutality: Videos of Black and Brown Americans being shot and brutalized should awaken outrage in every individual. I stand in solidarity with those who seek justice. In communities of color, playing in the park, asking for roadside assistance, relaxing at home, or even reporting on live television—raises the specter of discrimination and violence at the hands of police in a way it never does for other Americans. As mayor of Denver, police reform was one of our central priorities. Ten years before Ferguson, we initiated efforts to reduce lethal force in policing, requiring all officers to go through

crisis de-escalation training. For the first time in the history of the Denver Police Department, we hired a minority recruiter and established the Office of Independent Monitor to investigate allegations of police misconduct. We created the Civilian Oversight Commission to give communities direct input on how their own neighborhoods are policed, and we made it easier to discipline officers who use excessive force. What we did wasn't perfect and there is so much more work to be done, locally and nationally, but we listened to communities of color. We tried to gain a greater understanding of the challenges they face, and we worked together towards a common goal. All of this needs to be done on a much larger scale today as the use of deadly force against Black and Brown Americans by police continues to be an epidemic in our country. There are tangible steps Congress can and must take to stop the violence, including requiring body cameras for all police officers, swiftly disciplining officers who use excessive force, increasing transparency in policing data, and funding programs to heal the trauma of communities living in fear. As senator, I am committed to working with communities of color to address the fear and mistrust of law enforcement, to fiercely advocate for proper police training, and to increase accountability and oversight. People have a right to be safe, unafraid, and secure in their communities. And people have a right to not be victimized in their day-to-day lives or when they peacefully protest injustice. As a country, we have *tolerated* systemic racism and a broken criminal justice system for far too long. Now more than ever, we must listen to one another and ask ourselves what we can do to be a part of the solution. I pledge to do my part.

Reforming our Criminal Justice System: Our country incarcerates 22% of the world's prisoners—the highest rate in the world, and disproportionately incarcerates people of color. 23% of all inmates in the state or federal prison system are Latinx, and 33% are African American. For too many, the criminal justice system is anything but just. As senator, I will work to address these disparities by supporting legislation such as Bobby Scott's *SAFE Justice Act*, which offers an evidence-based prevention approach alongside tangible proposals to reduce recidivism and increase sentencing alternatives, including restorative justice. In addition, physical and verbal harassment against people of color, particularly LGBTQ individuals and, more recently, members of the AAPI community, are a form of overt discrimination that should never be tolerated. We must partner with police departments to close gaps that prevent the reporting and enforcement of existing bias crime laws, such as strengthening the tracking and reporting of hate crimes. Reform at all levels will be essential to ensuring that both public safety and social equality are protected.

Decriminalize Marijuana: The movement for legalization gained steam across the country after Coloradans took decisive action to legalize marijuana in 2012. The implications for the justice system are massive. We know that African American men have been disproportionately imprisoned for nonviolent marijuana crimes. That's one of the many reasons why I believe we must decriminalize marijuana at the federal level, with the flexibility for states to determine whether or not to legalize it. We should not be putting people in jail for nonviolent marijuana crimes, and we should evaluate sentences for those who were incarcerated prior to legalization. And in states like Colorado where marijuana is legal, we should work to level the playing field with regards to access to capital for entrepreneurs of color in the cannabis industry. All aspiring business owners should be able to take advantage of the economic opportunity this burgeoning industry presents, should they choose to do so.

Promote Gun Safety: Over the past decade, more than 1.2 million Americans have been shot and millions more traumatized by gun violence. It is a national crisis, and one that disproportionately impacts

communities of color. Latinx Americans are nearly twice as likely to die from gun violence as white Americans, while Black Americans are ten times as likely. We can and must take action by implementing universal background checks, passing red flag laws, banning assault weapons, and funding gun violence prevention research. Federal action on this front is astonishingly overdue and will make all communities safer.

GROWING ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

Support Environmental Justice: Climate change and environmental pollution affect all Americans, but they impact people of color and indigenous communities in an outsized way. According to the NAACP, “race – even more than class – is the number one indicator for the placement of toxic facilities in this country.” Air and water pollution cause higher rates of associated illnesses. The need to ensure that communities can rely on a clean water supply was devastatingly apparent in the failure of government in Flint, Michigan and is playing out again amidst the novel coronavirus pandemic. Fighting for a cleaner planet is irrevocably intertwined with racial justice. As senator, I will approach any climate or environmental policy from the perspective of civil rights and look forward to working with communities of color to design more inclusive, equitable solutions.

Expand Access to Public Lands: Colorado is defined by our wild places. In the Senate, I’ll fight to make sure that federal agencies are working with local agencies and the outdoor sports and recreation industry to invest in innovative projects that increase access to and equity in the outdoors. In addition, I will support initiatives to promote hiring a diverse workforce within the National Park Service and associated agencies. By breaking down the barriers that prevent entry to the outdoors for communities of color, we can all share the amazing benefits of time spent exploring the landscapes that make our state unique.

PROTECTING DEMOCRATIC EQUITY

Reduce Barriers to the Political Process: Voting is the backbone of our democracy. When I was governor, I worked with the legislature to make sure that every eligible registered voter in Colorado gets a mail-in ballot, and we made it so that voters can register to vote online, and at any time — even on Election Day. Automatic voter registration, mail-in ballots, and fixing the Voting Rights Act — which has been gutted of its protections for communities of color by the Supreme Court — will work to make voter suppression a relic of the past and hold our leaders accountable. It is also essential that every resident gets counted by the U.S. Census. In 2010, 2.1% of Black Americans and 1.5% of Latinx Americans were not counted, which impacted how federal dollars were spent and congressional seats apportioned. In 2020, Colorado is at risk of losing \$48–\$193 million in federal spending if significant undercounting occurs. We can close this gap by providing more funding for the census to reach as many residents as possible. Policies that promote civic engagement help everyone participate in our democracy, and lead to political outcomes that address injustice by genuinely reflecting the will of the people.

Pledge Continued Engagement: Collaboration with, and leadership from, communities of color will be essential to achieving any of the policy objectives I have mentioned. Throughout my tenure as mayor of Denver and governor of Colorado, I relied heavily on advocates in communities of color to develop and implement our agenda to build a more welcoming and diverse state. We must not only fight for

legislation that creates a fairer America, we should also lift up and celebrate the arts and traditions of communities of color that intertwine to form America's cultural fabric. If elected to the U.S. Senate, I hope to continue this collaborative working relationship, maintaining open lines of communication to craft policies that will help make America a more equitable place to live.