



# Introduction

## Senator Elizabeth Warren

Ideas matter.

Eight years ago, the United States was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Wall Street firms had gambled away the hard-earned savings of hard-working Americans and sent the stock market into a tailspin. Ordinary folks who were conned into purchasing homes they could not afford saw their homeownership dreams slip away. College graduates ready to enter the workforce were stranded with mountains of debt and no meaningful job prospects.

There's no question that the Obama Administration had its work cut out for it. And it took some big ideas to make real change. A record stimulus pumped money—and jobs—into an imploding economy. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act helped reel in some of the shadiest Wall Street practices and created a new consumer watchdog, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The Affordable Care Act expanded health insurance coverage to over 11 million Americans.

The country stepped back from the brink, but the problems were bigger and more systemic — and the continued attachment to the ideas born of trickle-down economics cramped our response and prevented full recovery.

Now, as the country continues to wrestle with pressing questions that will define this generation and the next, the need for big ideas is clearer than ever. The next administration must confront a tangle of interwoven problems. How will we address the growing income and wealth gap between the top 1% and everybody else? How will we rethink and rebuild a broken criminal justice system that disproportionately locks up and disenfranchises black and brown Americans? How will we ensure that the water our kids drink and the air they breathe are clean and safe? How will we expand and defend gender equity and LGBTQ rights? How will we ensure that non-citizens are treated fairly and humanely? How will we make our government work to advance the interests of all Americans, not just those with the deepest pockets and the highest-paid lobbyists?

ACS convened some of the nation's leading experts to explore these and other questions facing our nation. In this "Big Idea" report, experts tackle issues from voting to privacy, and each discusses three top recommendations for the next administration. These recommendations are intended to expand horizons for the next administration as it determines how to protect the gains of the last administration and double down on the fight for transformative change.

Big ideas will face fierce opposition. The wealthy and well-connected will not simply give up their massive influence in Washington. If the next administration refuses to do their bidding and their Republican friends in Congress fail to crush those big ideas, then billionaires and big businesses have already set up the mechanism to turn to another ally — the judiciary. Over the last few decades, powerful interests have worked to tilt the scales of justice to favor the wealthy and well-connected, undoing some of the greatest gains in the last half century. Recent judicial decisions have opened the floodgates to secret political spending; allowed giant corporations to squirm out of their responsibilities to provide contraceptive care to their female employees; and permitted corporations to slip mandatory arbitration clauses and class action bans into consumer contracts. Decisions like these push the promise of equality, opportunity, and justice further and further out of the reach of American families, workers, students, small businesses, and entrepreneurs.

Powerful interests know that the key to maintaining their stranglehold on the judiciary is appointing judges sympathetic to their interests and alien to the struggles of ordinary Americans. Senate Republicans have demonstrated that they will do whatever it takes — even grinding the judicial nominations process to a halt — to ensure that the judiciary works only for them and their wealthy friends. Since the start of the Obama Administration, they have led a campaign to hamstring the judicial nominations process in an effort to preserve the corporate tilt of the judiciary. The way Senate Republicans see it, if the judiciary won't work for them and their big business friends, they will make sure it doesn't work at all.

But they're not going to win — not if everyone else has something to say about it. ACS has been on the front lines of the battle for our courts, shining light on the ways that justice is skewed in favor of the very rich and blind to the plight of ordinary Americans. ACS has been in the lead, but we all have a stake in this fight. We must demand that the next administration adopt big ideas that will make real change, but we must work just as hard for a fully-functioning judiciary that dispenses equal justice under law.

I am glad to have this chance to help ACS introduce new ideas into a public debate about how our country can address some of the most significant problems we face. In a proud tradition that upholds the vision of a truly fair and just society as our north star, ACS challenges each of us to engage with those ideas and to fight for a future that lives up to our ideals.