

# COVID-19 AND THE UPCOMING RECESSION: SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

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The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated sufficient shocks to the U.S. economy to be the likely trigger of the next national recession. The progressive policy and messaging response will need to reflect a cohesive narrative about the root causes of the recession, while acknowledging the role of COVID-19 in creating uncertainty, instability, and misery for many Americans. Below are some do's and don'ts for progressives responding to the pandemic and planning for the next recession.

## Do:

- **Highlight the vulnerabilities in our economy that have eroded its stability and resilience for decades even before COVID-19's emergence.** The next recession will be spurred and deepened by extreme inequality, low-quality jobs and eroded worker protections, irresponsible austerity budgets, and deregulation -- all of which can be directly traced to conservative economic policymaking.
- **Advocate for swift, robust investments to help workers and consumers weather the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the next recession.** Outbreaks of communicable disease tend to highlight our common interest and spark more collective action -- even from staunchly individualistic conservatives. Progressives cannot afford to pass up the opportunity to push hard for economic policies that benefit us all, rather than the wealthy few. In the context of COVID-19 and the next recession, everything from universal health care and paid sick leave to criminal justice reform is on the table -- and we should fight hard for it all.
- **Center vulnerable communities in next recession advocacy, messaging, and policy response.** Black, brown, AAPI, immigrant, disabled, incarcerated, and low-income communities are likely to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the narrative surrounding it, and its adverse economic effects. The most effective economic response will focus on those that are most affected by the crisis.
- **Call out messaging and policy based in fear, xenophobia, racism, and misinformation for what it is: a tactic designed to distract from the real problem.** Conservatives and their allies have always used racist and xenophobic language to divide working people against each other -- while the rich amass even more wealth and power. Boldly push past conservatives' denials about whether their rhetoric is racist and call attention to the regressive effects of the policies it supports.
- **Vigorously oppose specious, regressive response policies like a payroll tax cut for wealthy corporations and Republican donors.** The Trump Administration is proposing tax cuts, including a payroll tax cut, that would disproportionately benefit large corporations and certain industries like Big Oil and the airlines. But the TCJA has shown us that corporations rarely use benefits from tax breaks to protect their workers -- and that [everyday people can be persuaded to oppose tax cuts for CEOs](#).
- **Confidently ignore accusations of "socialism" from conservative onlookers.** [Everyone is a socialist in a pandemic](#). In the context of COVID-19 and the next recession, progressives can afford to worry least about the popularity and appeal of ambitious response policies -- even when conservatives try to claim that they constitute "socialism."
- **Make direct, repeated connections between conservative hesitancy to take decisive action in the public interest and adverse effects on human life and livelihood.** In the context of COVID-19 and the next recession, swift and ambitious applications of public power toward public priorities is a matter of life and death -- progressives should be unafraid to leverage this fact and apply immense pressure to conservative lawmakers who [block or circumvent necessary action](#).

## Do's continued:

- **Anticipate and preempt conservative attempts to further privatize vital parts of our economy and government in response to COVID-19 and/or the next recession.** In the context of COVID-19 and the next recession, some conservatives will renew their calls to irresponsibly privatize even more of our economy and government. Progressives must strongly preempt these attempts by highlighting the failures of the “free market” and profit-seeking companies to adequately allocate everything from health care to fair wages to hand sanitizer, while also boosting the need for historic investments in public health solutions to support our economy.
- **Emphasize the fact that many so-called “emergency” response policies currently under consideration should be the norm -- and are part of preventing future crises.** In the context of this pandemic, so-called “radical” policies for which progressives have been advocating for decades are suddenly on the table -- as temporary measures. As we usher through these policies, we should clarify that they should be made permanent to strengthen and protect our economy from future disasters.

## Do NOT:

- **ONLY blame COVID-19 for the next recession. COVID-19 is a likely trigger for the next recession, but is not the cause.** The pandemic is prompting major disruptions and threatening human life and livelihood, but it did not have to lead to the extent of damage that is now likely -- decades of irresponsible neoliberal economic policy are undoubtedly to blame.
- **Conflate the stock market or corporate profits with the economy.** The economy is made up of the transactions and interactions between everyday people across the country. Therefore, attempts to shore up our ailing economy and prevent or mitigate the next recession should focus on supporting workers, consumers, and demand.
- **Capitulate to conservative assumptions that a recession response stimulus package must be “paid for.”** Conservatives are rarely asked to “pay for” tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, and our underperforming economy can only benefit from increased public investment. If we need to finance that investment with more revenue later, there are plenty of ways to tax the rich. Similarly, we do not need to pair any rescue efforts with long-term deficit reduction. To the extent that there is a long-term budget challenge, that can and should be addressed later and separately.
- **Repeat conservative anti-government talking points while fairly criticizing conservative lawmakers’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the next recession.** Although conservatives’ current control of many branches and levels of our government is proving especially disastrous in the context of COVID-19 and should be duly criticized, progressives should be especially careful not to traffic in tropes that erode the public’s confidence in government writ-large. Decades of conservative-led disinvestment and sabotage of government are to blame here -- not “red tape and regulations” or “government incompetence.”
- **Allow conservative lawmakers who take appropriate action in the public interest in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the next recession to take credit for what are fundamentally progressive ideas.** If conservative lawmakers move to take aggressive action in the public interest, progressives must ensure that the public knows that progressive activists, advocates, and policymakers are to be credited for conservative uptake of their ideas.