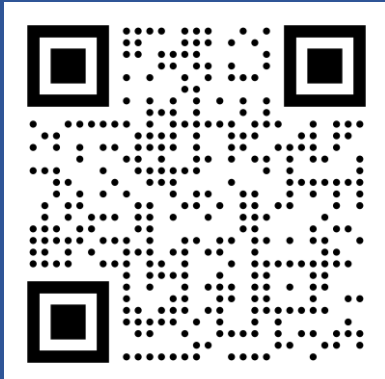




YOUR TOOLKIT FOR CHANGE



Take a picture of this QR code to view the online version of this packet, complete with links to online resources.

Dear Friend,

2020 has not been the year that any of us were expecting. The stresses imposed on our communities by the COVID-19 pandemic, the resultant economic downturn, widespread protests, and the presidential election are laying bare many of our society's oldest fault lines. Now more than ever it is critical that people of good faith step forward and do what they can to help renew America's promise.

The challenges we face are manifold and long-term in the making. But I suspect that you remain, as I do, optimistic that our best days are ahead. That is why we launched FixUS: we fundamentally believe that there is more that unites us than divides us. While the task of repairing our broken democracy may be daunting, it is one that we are obliged to undertake together. We owe it to past generations who made incredible sacrifices so we can be here today. We also owe it to future generations who are depending on us to ensure that the American Dream will still be available to them.

Again, I'd like to thank you for joining us in this incredibly important work. What follows in this toolkit is a set of resources that will be useful to you as you participate in our FixUS project. From background information on the project to an action checklist of tasks you can complete at home or in your local community, I hope that what follows will inspire you and remind you that we are all in this together.

Sincerely,

Michael Murphy  
Director, FixUS

# THE STATE OF OUR DEMOCRACY

Looking to start a conversation about FixUS? Here are some trends that are contributing to our current set of circumstances.

## DIVISION

In Congress, there is **less ideological overlap** between parties than ever before. This is because parties have become **more ideologically consistent than ever before**. Among the general public, age old struggles regarding equality, fairness, and justice continue to unfold. Political self-identification has become associated with highly personal characteristics. Some Americans view the **rise of group identity** as a positive development, while others express concern that it undermines our country's common sense of purpose. Under these circumstances electoral contests have grown increasingly bitter and have become a sort of team sport, with **both sides' visceral dislike for each other** rising in alarming ways.

## DISTRUST

As Americans have begun to feel they have less in common with their political opponents, they have started to **question not just the judgement but the motives of those on the other side of the aisle**. As such, data indicates that Americans' **trust in government, institutions, and each other is shrinking**.

## DYSFUNCTION

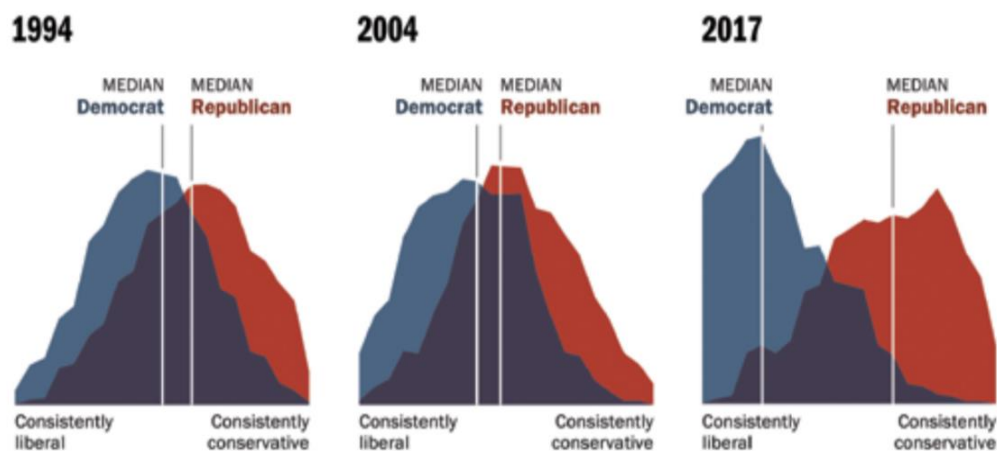
In many ways the **government has been unable to meet the needs of its citizens**. We often find ourselves governing from crisis to crisis without looking at long-term ways of solving problems. Political appointments often remain unconfirmed and pride in civil service continue to dwindle. Decades old problems like the cost of healthcare, growing national debt, immigration, climate change, aging infrastructure, and others continue to worsen as our leaders refuse to address them in a meaningful way.

# SOME KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

**FIGURE 4.1 GROWTH OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION, 1994–2017**

## Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

*Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values*



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: [www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-1-growing-ideological-consistency/pp-2014-06-12-polarization-1-01/](http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-1-growing-ideological-consistency/pp-2014-06-12-polarization-1-01/)

[\*Political Polarization in the American Public: How increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life.\*](#)

## Nearly two-thirds of adults find it hard to tell what's true when elected officials speak

*% of U.S. adults who say it is \_\_\_\_ to tell the difference between what's true and what's not true when ...*

	Very hard	Somewhat hard	NET
Listening to elected officials	25%	40%	64%
Using social media	16	31	48%
Watching cable television news	11	30	41%
Talking with people you know	4	27	30%

Note: Figures may not add up due to rounding. Respondents who gave other answers or no answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.

"Trust and Distrust in America"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[\*Trust and Distrust in America.\*](#)

**83%**  
BELIEVE THE  
TONE OF  
POLITICS IN  
WASHINGTON IS  
GETTING  
WORSE.

**80%**  
BELIEVE THAT  
THE INFLUENCE  
OF MONEY IN  
POLITICS IS  
GETTING  
WORSE.

**68%**  
BELIEVE THAT  
AMERICAN  
DEMOCRACY IS  
"GETTING  
WEAKER."

[\*The Democracy Project: Reversing a Crisis of Confidence.\*](#)

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

## FixUS MISSION

FixUS is committed to engaging fellow citizens to better understand and address our nation's growing divisions, dysfunction, and distrust in our political system. Through a number of research projects, public engagement efforts, and partnerships, we seek to bring attention and visibility to these issues, build support for necessary changes, and ultimately help to regain a sense of shared aspirations, values, and a belief that there is more that unites us than divides us.

## FixUS THEORY OF CHANGE

Sustainable public policy solutions to the challenges our nation faces will remain elusive until the country comes together to *address the underlying root causes* of hyper-partisanship and public distrust. The reasons how we got to this point are complex, integrated, and long-term in the making, and we must *confront these causes broadly and holistically* in order to bring about lasting change, with *deep and meaningful citizen engagement* required to guide necessary changes given to the declining trust of many with our political process.

## FixUS HISTORY

FixUS is housed within the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to educating the public on issues with significant fiscal policy impact. It has become increasingly clear to the leadership of the Committee that meaningful progress on a range of pressing policy issues will not be possible until the underlying division, dysfunction, and distrust in our politics are remedied. The political environment most conducive to enacting solutions—one that focuses on policy over politics, the long-term over the immediate, and a willingness to compromise and make hard choices—does not currently exist.

## FixUS ENGAGEMENT

Because there is no silver bullet to fix what ails our democracy, the FixUS solution rests on the idea that meaningful change will result from a critical mass of Americans who take responsibility for changing how we engage - with each other, within our community, and in service of our nation. FixUS provides citizens with opportunities to engage, and have developed resources for individuals looking to affect change at the individual, community, and national levels.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

This project cannot succeed without the help of people like you. Everyone has something unique to contribute to this cause!

## TAKE THESE SIMPLE STEPS THAT REQUIRE VERY LITTLE TIME...

*Get started with FixUS and take these simple steps that require very little time.*

- **Sign the civility pledge** on our website
  - **Follow us on Twitter** so you can share important information with your network
  - **Join a FixUS Facebook group** affiliated with your state's local chapter
  - **Share our content** on social media
  - **Register to vote** and have your voice heard
  - **Donate**—or encourage your employer to donate—to FixUS
- 

## TAKE STEPS TO EDUCATE YOURSELF AND HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD...

*Take steps to educate yourself and have your voice heard.*

- **Record a video profile** explaining why the FixUS mission matters to you
  - **Attend a virtual event**—be sure to keep an eye on your inbox for our event announcements
  - **Check out our research and publications** to learn about where we have made an impact
  - **Discuss** these issues with family and friends
  - **Check out the FixUS Landscape Review** to see which organizations are working near you
- 

## MAKE A COMMITMENT AND LEAD THE WAY IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY...

*That's great! Here are some ways to lead the way in your local community.*

- **Join or start a FixUS state chapter** to bolster FixUS programming in your region
  - **Pen a letter to the editor or an opinion piece** in your local newspaper
  - **Fill out our poll on American goals and values** to learn about commonality and division
  - **Sign up to participate** in our National Dialogue on Common Values, Goals, and Aspirations
  - **Host a focus group on American goals and values** to contribute to our national dialogue
  - **Write to or call your elected officials** to promote unity and civility
- 

## ABOVE ALL, WE MUST EACH TAKE TIME TO LOOK INWARD...

*None of us are perfect. Here are some ways you can make sure your attitudes and behavior are a part of the solution, not the problem.*

- **Engage with your neighbors** by introducing yourself, being kind to strangers on the street, and organizing community events to rebuild trusting and vibrant communities
- **Pay attention** to your local and state news, and treat those elections as equally important as federal elections
- **Observe your own reactions** when discussing political issues—are you processing the other person's views from a place of empathy and understanding?

# FIXUS IN THE MEDIA

FixUS



## REBUILDING TRUST IN OUR LEADERSHIP

**John Brackney** and **Paul Jacobson**, FixUS Colorado  
Colorado Politics – August 26, 2020

*“The communities best positioned to recover from our present crises are ones in which governments and their leaders have earned the confidence of their constituents.”*

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## HOW TO FIX DEMOCRACY

**Maya MacGuineas**, founding member of FixUS  
How to Fix Democracy podcast – August 4, 2020

*“The threats to democracy are coming at us from kind of all sides right now, and if you look at how we got to this moment which is just filled with massive levels of division, dysfunction, and distrust in our country, I think they came from a number of factors.”*

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## PRACTICING CIVILITY IS THE ONLY WAY TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**William Hurst**, FixUS Michigan and **Michael Murphy**, Director of FixUS  
Lansing State Journal – July 24, 2020

*“It is in our nature as Michiganders, and Americans, to pull together during difficult times. That is why I am not surprised that polling from More in Common at the onset of the pandemic indicated that 90 percent of Americans agree with the phrase, ‘We’re all in it together.’”*

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## FORMER WORLD FUEL SERVICES CEO PAUL STEBBINS LEFT RACE TO FOCUS ON CIVIC DUTIES

**Paul Stebbins**, founding member of FixUS  
Chicago Business Journal – July 16, 2020

*“...George Washington was right when he warned in his farewell address in 1796 of four key things that would threaten the American Project. These include hyper partisanship, foreign intervention, fiscal responsibility, and the absence of civic education.”*

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## WE OWE IT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS TO WORK TOGETHER

**Ellen King** and **Brad Keithley**, FixUS Alaska  
Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman— May 29, 2020

*“The solutions to what’s dividing us are not easy — partisan divides didn’t start overnight nor is there a silver bullet. But the first step in this effort is to ensure, going forward, that we discuss the issues confronting us at all governmental levels in a respectful and constructive manner.”*



# OUR TEAM



## MICHAEL MURPHY | *Director of FixUS*

Mike Murphy is Director of FixUS. He is also Chief of Staff for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, where he manages policy research and analysis on a variety of topics related to fiscal policy and the federal budget, as well as coordinates a wide array of projects related to advancing the Committee's policy related initiatives. Prior to joining the Committee and FixUS, Mike worked for the Comeback America Initiative, a non-profit founded by David Walker, Former Comptroller General of the United States, whose mission is to educate and engage the public about federal, state and local fiscal issues. Previously, Mike also worked as a Senior Transportation Program Analyst for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, as well as in legislative affairs for the American Cancer Society and on Capitol Hill. Mike received his bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from the State University of New York at Albany, and a Masters of Public Administration and a Certificate of Health Services Management and Policy from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Contact him at [murphy@crfb.org](mailto:murphy@crfb.org).

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## COLIN ACHILLES | *Program Associate and Assistant to the Chief of Staff*

Colin Achilles is a Program Associate and Assistant to the Chief of Staff for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and FixUS, where he works on various projects and initiatives, primarily focusing on the political process behind fiscal policy. Prior to joining the Committee, he worked for federal and state officeholders from Virginia, as well as a nonprofit organization specialized in tax and spending issues. Colin received his bachelor's degree in Political Science from Flagler College, and his master's degree in Political Management from The George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. He is originally from Flint Hill, Virginia. Contact him at [achilles@crfb.org](mailto:achilles@crfb.org).

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## RACHAEL HEISLER | *Senior Advisor for State Engagement*

Rachael Heisler is the Senior Advisor for State Engagement at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and FixUS. She has worked in different capacities at CRFB since 2013 handling external affairs, partnerships, surrogate management, and state-based outreach. She previously served on the staff of U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire for six years and worked for U.S. Senator Bob Casey in 2005-2006. She serves on the board of both her local food pantry and her local YMCA. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Pittsburgh and is currently pursuing a graduate degree at Penn State University. Contact her at [heisler@crfb.org](mailto:heisler@crfb.org).

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## AARON KAHN | *Special Projects Manager*

Aaron Kahn serves as Special Projects Manager at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, where he is responsible for advancing the Committee's FixUS initiative and its related events, research projects, publications, and coalitions. His work is aimed at identifying and promoting ways to bridge the political, economic, and social divides in America that stifle effective policymaking. Prior to joining the Committee, Aaron gained experience as a Legislative Analyst with the firm Williams & Jensen, PLLC. He also completed internships with Representative Anthony Gonzalez and Senator Rob Portman. Aaron received his Bachelor of Arts from Northwestern University and his Master of Public Administration from Cleveland State University. Contact him at [kahn@crfb.org](mailto:kahn@crfb.org).



# FixUS

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*It is not the critic who counts; not the man  
who points out how the strong man  
stumbles, or where the doer of deeds  
could have done them better. The credit  
belongs to the man who is actually in the  
arena, whose face is marred by dust and  
sweat and blood; who strives valiantly;  
who errs, who comes short again and  
again, because there is no effort without  
error and shortcoming; but who does  
actually strive to do the deeds; who  
knows great enthusiasms, the great  
devotions; who spends himself in a  
worthy cause; who at the best knows in  
the end the triumph of high achievement,  
and who at the worst, if he fails, at least  
fails while daring greatly, so that his place  
shall never be with those cold and timid  
souls who neither know victory nor  
defeat.*

**Theodore Roosevelt, 1910**

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