



THE A_{FOR}A AGENDA

Appalachians for Appalachia (AforA) is a grassroots advocacy movement preparing the next generation of Appalachian leaders to drive progress in the Mountains. We develop research and policy recommendations that center justice, equity, resilience, and sustainability for our region. We recognize that there are historic institutions, movement builders, and champions of the region's cultural heritage that have paved the way for advancing equity and justice within the region, and we aim to pay homage, working in partnership with these legacy institutions. The work of these organizations over the last several decades created a strong foundation of organizing in the region, tilling the ground for new seeds to take root and for new leaders, new strategies, and new efforts to sprout. However, there is now a generational transition; young leaders who have been disconnected from the existing infrastructure are trying to find new ways to work together - that's where A for A comes in! A for A creates a new platform, brand, and voice to galvanize the next generation of young, hardworking, innovative, Appalachian leaders, AforA promotes and nurtures regional, grassroots progressivism that is by and for Appalachian folks.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is an existential threat to humanity, and Appalachia finds itself at the nexus of the climate crisis. On one hand, the minerals extracted from our region have directly contributed to the onset of the climate crisis, and on the other, rural communities like many within Appalachia are likely to face the brunt of the impacts of climate change. So the question is - how can we act today to secure Appalachia's future tomorrow?

We believe in:

- aligning with national strategies to address the existential crisis of climate change
- state and federal programs to fund large-scale infrastructure projects in Appalachia, ensuring our communities are more climate-resilient.
- continued funding for abandoned mine land projects, land reclamation, and waste-water management throughout the region.
- investing in Appalachia's agriculture sector from large-scale farms to family-operated farms to ensure robust and reliable food systems.
- technical assistance, research, and testing to develop drought-resistant crops, tools, and strategies for local and small-scale farmers to adapt to the changing climate.
- residential and commercial climate tax credits to incentivize folks to shift towards renewables.
- developing tools and resources to train our communities to mobilize a local resilient workforce to swiftly and strategically respond in moments of crisis.
- timely and sustained response from federal agencies like FEMA to climate-related disasters.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economy throughout central Appalachia has been tied to the booms and busts of the coal and timber industries for over 200 years. Due to a changing world, our region is plagued with poverty, high unemployment rates, devastating health statistics, and little hope for another economic boom in a single industry. So, how do we successfully revitalize the economy of Appalachia in a sustainable and just way?

We believe in:

- diversifying our economy in Appalachia to ensure more sustainable economic growth in the coming years.
- ensuring access to capital for entrepreneurs with a focus on BIPOC folks and women.
- investing in infrastructure to help transition our energy production to renewable energies, including through solar power.
- focusing on nurturing our agriculture industry, including building local food systems.
- addressing social issues and inequalities to ensure inclusivity in the region and make sure the region can reach its full potential.
- changing the narrative of the region and representing progressive ideas that will make our region open for business and economic transition for folks of all backgrounds.



IMMIGRATION

Migration has shaped every cultural and economic facet of Appalachia, and immigration continues to play a vital role in Appalachia's economic development at every job level. Economic booms that brought people to the region have regularly been followed by industry busts. Because of this, Appalachia is equally familiar with large waves of emigration. Appalachian diaspora communities are scattered throughout parts of the Midwest and most other parts of the country - hillbillies are everywhere. So, where do we see immigration playing into Appalachia's future?

We believe in:

- the idea that Appalachia's greatest asset is her people. In order to build a brighter Appalachia, we must reckon with the legacy of immigration in our own past and how that informs our future.
- an Appalachia that welcomes immigrants.
- communities that infuse culture and diversity in Appalachia.
- healthcare providers sponsoring visas to bring foreign doctors and medical professionals to move to the region, providing top-tier medical care to our communities.
- bolstering our economy and countering regional brain drain as we continue to pursue a just economic transition.
- increased incentives for immigration to our region, legal pathways to citizenship for Dreamers, avenues for employment for undocumented immigrants, increased international student visas, increased visas to support seasonal labor, and a federal immigration system that centers human rights and dignity.

We'd like to recognize that Appalachia belonged to the Cherokee, Shawnee, and other tribes that first called these mountains their home.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Appalachia faces a field of unique challenges when it comes to criminal justice, including impacts of the opioid epidemic, rural incarceration rates, and the construction of for-profit jails and prisons in the region. However, there are also common challenges that we face along with the rest of the nation, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, cannabis legalization, and community harm-reduction efforts. With so many issues plaguing the criminal justice system in Appalachia, what are the key areas for policy improvement?

We believe in:

- challenging and dismantling the “school-to-prison pipeline,” otherwise known as the practice of pushing kids out of school and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems.
- the legalization and decriminalization of cannabis as a means to decrease racial injustice for the people of Appalachia and a pathway for economic prosperity in Appalachia. Cannabis can be a cash crop for the region with a wide variety of applications outside of the sale of medical and recreational marijuana. Hemp is a sustainable alternative to wood for creating paper products amongst a variety of other practical applications including building materials, biofuels, beauty products, food & beverages.
- providing treatment for individuals with substance use disorders rather than incrimination.
- the legalization and decriminalization of cannabis as a means of economic development for our region as well as a form of restorative justice for communities of color who have been disproportionately incarcerated for cannabis-related drug charges.
- programs and policies to help previously incarcerated individuals successfully reenter society through training, information sharing on job opportunities, and providing the resources necessary for their success. These investments will lead to lower incarceration and recidivism rates.
- correctional interventions that follow the principles of evidence-based practices promote positive change in the defendant and reduce the probability of recidivism.
- support for harm-reduction efforts and other evidence-based approaches to combat the epidemic of substance use disorder in our communities.
- making any changes to cannabis laws retroactive to expunge the records of individuals incarcerated for possession or use of cannabis.



HEALTH CARE

Health care can be a touchy subject in Appalachia. We have $\frac{1}{3}$ fewer primary care providers, almost 50% fewer dentists, more than 50% fewer mental health providers, and 65+% fewer specialized physicians as compared to the rest of the US. Central Appalachians have higher rates of obesity, smoking, and physical inactivity, as well as higher rates of death due to heart disease, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), injury, stroke, and diabetes. Central Appalachians are 25.5% more likely to be depressed and 36.6% more likely to die by suicide, compared to the non-Appalachian U.S. With so many needs to address, how can we improve access to health care for all Appalachians?

We believe in:

- doing everything we can, from lawsuits to legislation, to address the opioid crisis and make the folks who caused it, like the Sacklers, pay reparations to our communities.
- removing barriers to accessing healthcare within the narrative of the region, such as, lower-income, increased poverty, access to high-speed Internet (for telehealth purposes), and higher rates of stigma around mental health (which is common in rural areas).
- forging trust in healthcare providers. Some Appalachians are hesitant to seek physical and mental healthcare because of the difficulty to build trust with providers who are not from the Appalachian region and who do not stay in the area for long periods of time (i.e., high turnover rates). Additionally, Appalachians report a fear that providers would prescribe addictive medications, which is a fear that is, unfortunately, not unfounded.
- healthcare policies that are accessible, affordable, and available to everyone.
- efforts to increase access to care and decrease barriers are essential to improving healthcare in our region.



- increasing access to healthcare and mental healthcare begins with recruiting and retaining providers across the region.
- increasing healthcare literacy in our region, increasing public transportation and availability of high-speed Internet access, and improving cultural competency for providers.
- centering disabled voices within Appalachia to make improvements to our system based on their needs, not just the needs of able-bodied people.

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VOTING RIGHTS

In Appalachia, we know the power of a single person's voice thanks to the Appalachian heroes we were raised on like Dolly Parton, John Henry, Hazel Dickens, and Sequoia. And because we know the power of one voice, we know how important it is to cast a vote. The right to vote is fundamental to our American democracy, but as it stands, it isn't easy to access - or even available - to everyone in Appalachia. How can we ensure that voting rights are protected for all Appalachians and that we are welcoming in a new generation of voters?

We believe in:

- standing firmly against regressive voter ID laws, restrictions of early voting, and broad voter roll purges.
- that automatic voter registration (AVR) is step one on the road to equal voting rights.
- putting a stop to partisan gerrymandering. We are proud to push for independent redistricting commissions in every state with legal protections against partisan gerrymandering.
- early voting, including weekend and evening voting. It's flexible and convenient, and it means fewer hours-long wait times or administrative burdens on poll workers.
- giving back the right to vote to formerly incarcerated folks who have paid their debt to society. These laws are direct descendants of the era of Jim Crow, and BIPOC folks, specifically Black folks, have suffered disproportionately because of them.
- restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act (VRA) by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. It ensures that every citizen has an opportunity to take part in this American experiment by casting their vote.



EDUCATION

Teachers are not only your educators, but our friends, mentors, coaches (debate or basketball!), and our biggest advocates. They invest their energy and time in their students to ensure their success in the future and through K-12, and over the last several years, Appalachia's rate of high school completion has steadily increased, landing at 87.2% for Appalachians 25 and older, almost level with the national average of 88%. How can we ensure that Appalachian children have the tools necessary to succeed?

We believe in:

- creating multiple prosperous paths after high school and taking a hard look at our educational investments, reimagining what it means to be successful in the region.
- the fact that college education is not - and should not be - the only way to success in our region.
- the need to invest in broadening the types of courses in high schools to agree with this model.
- investing in creating entrepreneurial programs and education in Appalachian high schools.
- fostering good English Spanish Learning (ESL) courses to ensure inclusivity of a growing population in America. Additionally, learning a second language has proven to increase problem-solving abilities and a greater understanding of how language works and is used.
- incentivizing good teaching opportunities to encourage teachers from within the region to stay and invite those from outside the region in.
- building up our teaching infrastructure by investing in the industry in order to provide quality education to our future Appalachian generations.
- advocating for more investment in apprenticeship programs in Appalachia.
- pushing Congress to make college more affordable for all students by incentivizing low tuition, investing in free community college, and through pilot programs to show colleges how to utilize technologies to lower tuition costs.



FOLKWAYS

Arts and culture have been less-than-a-priority in DC for generations, but we are out to change that. One of the most beautiful parts of the Appalachian region is the folkways of our people, and Appalachia has long been a rich arts and cultural hub. From basket weaving to bluegrass, from quilting to canning, there are so many arts and traditions we hold dear and hope to pass along to the generations that follow us. So, how can we protect this “natural resource” of culture, and get legislators in Congress to support that mission?

We believe in:

- Congress increasing funding for public radio and public television. Public television and radio enrich millions of folks' lives and produce valuable investigative journalism, and we stand firm in our belief that protecting these programs is essential.
- National Parks. They are a vital resource for the region and should be budget priorities in Congress. Not only do they bring visitors to our beautiful mountains, they also provide enrichment for the lives of the folks that live here and protect our extraordinary land.
- cultural exchanges in the region through programs with the State Department that allow folks around the world to experience Appalachian culture and folkways.
- preserving and protecting Appalachian art, craft, and music.
- breaking down harmful stereotypes of Appalachia.
- incorporating folkways into K-12 education, whether that be in after-school programs or within state curricula. Arts education is vital to children, and no exception should be made for Appalachian arts and culture education.
- working toward solutions for folks around the country who have been directly impacted by the prolonged shutdowns due to COVID-19 and deemed “non-essential.” We fully believe that our artists and artisans of the Appalachian region are essential to our identity, our shared beliefs, and the safekeeping of them.