NO SOFTBALLS

Hard Questions

Every platform gets attacked from both flanks. These are the toughest questions we expect, from the right and from the left, answered directly, with the same pinned evidence as everything else on this site.

FROM THE RIGHT

How will you pay for all of this?

With scored revenue first, and named taxes second, in that order of honesty. The Ledger's scorekeeper-anchored rows: lifting the Social Security cap raises roughly $1.2 trillion over a decade, a pollution price at CBO's own scored option roughly $865 billion gross before dividends, expanded drug-price negotiation roughly $456 billion, and rebuilt IRS enforcement roughly $127 billion net per funding tranche. Where more is needed, the platform names real taxes as taxes, FDR-era progressivity included, rather than hiding behind found money. And the famous big pots are cited for what they prove, not what they fund: $696 billion a year goes legally owed but unpaid and $2.2 trillion flows through unreviewed tax preferences, which is evidence the system leaks and favors, not a recoverable pool, and the Ledger says so in print. The full accounting, including the gap it has not yet closed, is in The Ledger, unbalanced on purpose rather than balanced by pretending.

Is Medicare for All not just unaffordable socialized medicine?

The unaffordable system is the current one. America spends $4.9 trillion a year on healthcare, roughly double comparable countries per person, and ranks last of ten wealthy nations in the Commonwealth Fund's comparison while leaving 27 million people uninsured and 100 million adults holding medical debt. The Congressional Budget Office's own analysis found single-payer designs cover everyone while total national health spending stays roughly flat or falls. It is a shift from premiums to taxes, not a pile of new spending. And the household promise is stated the honest way: the financing design is required to make most working families' new contributions smaller than their current premiums plus out-of-pocket costs, a requirement to be demonstrated in independently reviewed household tables (version zero is published in The Ledger), not a result anyone can claim as proven before the rates exist.

A carbon price will crush working families.

Not designed our way. The proposal is fee-and-dividend: polluters pay at the benchmark of the EPA's own $190-per-ton damage estimate, and the revenue goes back to households, and the distributional promise is stated as a requirement rather than a result: the design must show, in household-incidence tables published before the proposal advances, that most lower- and middle-income households receive at least as much in dividends as they bear in higher prices. The reason to expect that outcome is real, pollution-heavy consumption is concentrated at the top, but whether it holds depends on the fee level, the dividend formula, household size, geography, and pass-through, which is exactly what the tables must demonstrate. The alternative is not a free lunch. Families already pay the full cost of pollution in hospital bills and disaster losses, just invisibly and unfairly.

Is this open borders?

No. It is the opposite of the current chaos: build the legal front door and make the rules real. That means clearing the 3.2 million-case immigration court backlog so decisions take months instead of years, verified legal channels sized to the labor market, and enforcement aimed where it works. Swing-state majorities prefer exactly this combination, a path to citizenship plus a stronger border, over mass deportation.

Soft on crime?

Judge it by results, not posture. The prevention agenda funds what randomized trials show actually cuts crime: street lighting cut index crimes 36 percent, summer jobs cut violent-crime arrests 43 percent, greening vacant lots cut gun violence 29 percent, and focused deterrence cut violence about 26 percent. Pair that with raising clearance rates so serious crimes actually get solved. Tough talk that leaves murders unsolved is the soft position.

Universal service is forced labor and a backdoor draft.

It is a paid civic duty with a menu of civilian tracks, education benefits like the G.I. Bill, a path to citizenship, and accommodation for conscience and circumstance, far closer to jury duty than conscription. Military service is one option, never the default. The precedent is the Civilian Conservation Corps, paid and popular across party lines, and the modern randomized evidence shows structured service raises earnings and credentials for the young people who need it most.

Government cannot build anything. Why give it more to do?

Often true, and this platform says so by name: California's high-speed rail costs exploding while the trains do not run, permitting that takes longer than construction, work requirements that spent more on paperwork than care. But the record cuts both ways. The Montreal Protocol fixed the ozone hole, and Operation Warp Speed, started under one party and finished under the other, delivered safe vaccines in eleven months and averted an estimated 3.2 million American deaths. The answer is not to abandon public capacity but to fix it: a Government Maintenance Act, permitting reform on the principle of voice not veto, and honest respect for cases like Sandy Springs, Georgia, which found insourcing cheaper after two decades of full privatization. We judge government the way we judge everything else, by whether it delivers.

This beyond-GDP talk is just degrowth in disguise.

It is bookkeeping, not ideology. The man who invented the national income accounts warned Congress in 1934 not to use them as a welfare measure. Counting the pollution damage that peer-reviewed economics shows exceeds some industries' entire value added, and counting the trillion dollars of unpaid care GDP prices at zero, is honesty, not shrinkage. Nearly everything this platform builds, homes, clean power, care, cures, is growth on any honest ledger. What ends is calling damage growth.

Why should anyone trust your numbers?

Check them. Every figure traces to a primary source on the Evidence page, we use the official scorekeepers when numbers are contested (CBO, GAO, Census, EPA), we label lower-confidence sources as such, and there is a public form for reporting an inaccuracy. When the evidence changes, the platform changes, in public.

Forgiving student debt insults everyone who already paid theirs off.

The fairness objection deserves a straight answer. Every transition policy helps people on one side of a line: the GI Bill did not refund veterans who had already paid tuition, and Medicare did not reimburse anyone who retired in 1964. The question is whether the line is drawn for a real reason, and it is: $1.7 trillion across 43 million borrowers is the toll from a generation told a degree was the only door while tuition tripled and states cut support. Forgiveness here is transition policy for the automation era, paired with debt-free public college and training so the trap does not refill behind the people pulled out. And the regressivity charge is answered in the brief: the heaviest defaults sit with borrowers who carry balances but never finished the degree, and the design reaches them first.

Producer responsibility for packaging is a hidden grocery tax.

Some cost pass-through is real, and the plank says so instead of pretending otherwise. But the tax already exists. Households pay for the waste system today through municipal trash budgets, landfill costs, and the cleanup of plastic marketed as recyclable that never was: about 9 percent of all plastic ever made has been recycled. Producer responsibility moves the bill from your county to the company that designed the package, the only party positioned to design it cheaper. Seven states from Maine to California are running the experiment now, and the plank binds itself to their results: if measured recycling and reuse rates do not rise over the implementation windows, the mechanism gets redesigned. The grocery bill already carries the waste system. The question is whether the line item is visible and aimed at the right party.

Permit-to-purchase is unconstitutional after Bruen.

Bruen itself preserved the kind of licensing this plank proposes. The decision struck down discretionary may-issue permitting while the majority opinion expressly declined to condemn the shall-issue regimes operating in most states, where permits issue on objective criteria. That is our design: a permit with required safety training, issued on objective standards, with no official discretion to deny a qualified adult. The evidence runs in both directions, which is rare and worth taking seriously: Connecticut adopted permit-to-purchase and firearm homicide fell about 40 percent; Missouri repealed its law and firearm homicide rose about 25 percent. And the current federal vehicle is more modest still, a grant program funding states that choose licensing. That is federalism, not a mandate.

A public stake in AI will strangle the most important technology of the century.

The history of this exact industry argues the other way. The internet began as a Defense Department project. GPS is a public system. The search algorithm that built Google began in National Science Foundation-funded research at Stanford. The public has seeded the platform technologies of the digital age and then bought back its own creations at monopoly prices; doing it a second time with AI would be a choice, not an accident. The plank is terms, not takeover: when public money, public data, public compute, or public underwriting flows into AI, the public holds a stake and the returns feed a citizens' dividend. A company that takes no public support owes nothing under it. Investors expect returns. The objection is only surprising when the investor is everyone.

FROM THE LEFT

Why a Swiss-style bridge instead of Medicare for All right now?

The destination is not negotiable, and the platform says plainly that Medicare for All is the clearest path. The bridge exists because 27 million people are uninsured today, and a universal Swiss-style system covers them now, on structures that already exist, while the harder financing politics of single payer is built. Refusing the bridge does not speed up the destination. It just leaves people uncovered while everyone waits.

Why defend markets at all?

Because the sharpest critique of what has gone wrong is not anti-market, it is anti-extraction, and the evidence backs it: markups rose from 21 to 61 percent above cost since 1980, and Treasury finds employer power holds wages roughly 20 percent below the competitive level. Worker power, honest prices, and public options attack that directly. A vaguer war on markets attacks the corner store and the co-op along with the monopolist.

Why credit Republican states and conservative ideas?

Because the standard is evidence, not tribe. Georgia built the country's most successful automatic voter registration under Republican officials. Mississippi moved its reading scores with a program worth studying honestly. Crediting what works, whoever did it, is what makes the criticism credible when it comes, and it is how a platform built for the whole country actually gets adopted by it.

Carbon pricing is a neoliberal distraction from regulation and public investment.

It is not either-or, and this platform never offers it as one. The climate agenda is standards, public building, and a methane fee alongside a price on carbon, and fee-and-dividend is designed to be progressive in net terms, a result the household-incidence tables this platform commits to must demonstrate, not assume. Meanwhile the status quo hands fossil fuels the largest subsidy on earth, $7 trillion a year globally by the IMF's count, 82 percent of it the unpriced damage the public absorbs. Refusing to price the damage does not hurt polluters. It is the subsidy.

Why fund police at all instead of abolishing them?

Because communities are asking for two things at once, safety and justice, and the evidence serves both. The platform restructures the response: mental-health crisis teams for crisis calls, prevention built on protective factors, and restorative justice where ten randomized trials show it cuts reoffending and serves victims better. It also insists serious violence gets solved, because impunity falls hardest on the poorest neighborhoods. Defunding solved murders is not a left value.

A service mandate is state coercion of young people.

The sequencing answers this. First build real, paid, chosen options with serious benefits attached, so participation climbs because service is worth it. The expectation becomes law only when a genuine place exists for everyone, with accommodation for conscience, disability, and circumstance, no fine and no criminal record attached to refusal, and it remains a defined, paid term with a wide civilian menu, education benefits, and a citizenship path. A duty that invests in you is not conscription. It is the same logic as jury duty, made into an opportunity.

Abundance rhetoric is a deregulation trojan horse.

The platform's own guardrail is named after the failure mode: no return to Robert Moses bulldozing neighborhoods without a voice. Voice stays; what goes is veto by attrition, the endless procedural delay that blocks the housing, transit, and clean energy that working people and the climate need. Environmental and labor standards are kept and enforced. The test for every reform is who it lets build what, and the answer is homes, transmission, and transit, not refineries in floodplains.

The immigration plank still centers enforcement.

It centers order because order is what makes generosity durable, and the brief is honest about that sequencing. But look at what it builds: legal channels sized to reality, a funded court system instead of a 3.2 million-case backlog, and labor protections that end the wage penalty of 14 to 24 percent that undocumented status imposes, which is the exploitation employers actually profit from. The enforcement that matters most in this platform is enforcement of the wage floor, on employers.

Dashboards and accounting reform are technocratic tinkering while people suffer.

What gets counted decides what gets funded. Unpaid care is a trillion-dollar sector that gets nothing partly because the national accounts say it is worth nothing. The food-security survey that was just defunded is how the country sees hunger; lose the count and the suffering goes dark. The measurement agenda is not instead of the material agenda, it is how the material agenda survives hostile budgets: keep the count, and the count keeps the pressure.

Forgiveness without fixing tuition just refills the debt pool.

Correct, which is why the plank is written as a pair and says the order out loud: cancellation is the cleanup, debt-free public college and training is the fix, and doing the first without the second is the one version this platform rules out. The deeper reconfiguration is the education brief's actual center: post-secondary education rebuilt for an automation era, with apprenticeships and training carrying the same respect and funding as degrees, so the next generation is not pushed through the single expensive door that created the debt in the first place.

THE STRESS TESTS

These do not come from a flank. They come from reality: what happens when revenue misses, capacity fails, or the design meets its worst case. Where the honest answer is a number we do not have yet, we say that instead of inventing one.

Which benefits get cut if revenues underperform?

The priority order is stated now, before the pressure: floors are last. The child allowance, food security, and coverage protections are the load-bearing floor, and if revenue underperforms, the response is to stretch timelines and slow phase-ins on everything above the floor before touching it. Automatic stabilizers do not get cut in downturns, because downturns are what they are for. The principle is cut speed, not floors, and any budget this platform endorses has to encode that order rather than leave it to the worst week of a fiscal fight.

What happens when public capacity cannot meet promised demand?

Delay and fix, in public, rather than fake delivery. That is why the biggest commitments are sequenced: the service mandate only arrives if the voluntary build-out proves capacity; the Swiss-style bridge covers everyone before the larger transition is attempted; the tutoring corps scales with its evaluations. California high-speed rail is cited by name in the government brief as what happens when you break ground at fifteen percent design to hit a deadline. Capacity metrics get published, and when they miss, the schedule moves, because the alternative is the credibility of everything else on this site.

What are the inflationary constraints on all this?

Real ones. Money aimed at families meets whatever supply exists, so a child allowance launched into a housing and childcare shortage partly becomes higher prices, which is exactly why the supply agenda, legalizing homes, permitting clean power, building care capacity, is not decoration around the checks. It is the anti-inflation half of the platform. Big programs also need pacing that respects macro conditions, and phase-ins are the tool. A platform that only expanded demand would deserve the inflation critique; this one builds supply first and says so.

How much do my taxes go up, specifically?

For most household types, we do not have that number yet, and we will not invent it. What is committed: the Social Security cap fix touches only wages above the cap, roughly the top six percent of earners; pollution fee-and-dividend is designed so most below-median households come out ahead, and the design fails its own test if they do not; and any single-payer financing must leave most working families paying less in new taxes than they now pay in premiums and out-of-pocket costs, a binding constraint, not a hope. The Ledger's ten-year model, under construction and labeled as such, will publish household-type tables. Until then, treat precise numbers from us as missing and precise numbers from opponents as invented.

What if provider payment rates cause doctor and hospital shortages?

Then the rates were wrong and they change, monitored by access rather than by ideology. Payment design under any universal system gets judged by wait times, panel closures, and rural capacity, with rate floors and rural add-ons adjusted when those metrics slip. The healthcare brief already names this as a falsifier. What does not happen is pretending access problems away to protect a headline rate, because coverage without care fails the platform's own standard: a card with no hospital within an hour is not a health system.

When does zoning reform accelerate displacement instead of easing it?

In hot markets, in the gap between legalizing and building: upzoning can raise land values and push people out before new supply arrives. That is a documented failure mode, not a NIMBY myth, and the housing brief sequences for it: anti-displacement protections and tenant protections go in before construction, value capture funds affordability from day one, and displacement in upzoned neighborhoods is a tracked metric with the falsifier stated, protections first if it outruns the building.

What actually happens to someone who refuses national service?

No one goes to jail, full stop. Enforcement runs through the attached benefits: decline to serve and you forgo the education funding, hiring preferences, and other advantages tied to service, with broad accommodation for conscience, disability, caregiving, and hardship. If the program ever cannot be administered without criminal penalties on young people, it stays voluntary, because a duty meant to build belonging cannot start by building a new category of offender. That is a design constraint stated in advance.

What happens when public investments lose money?

Some will, and a public investor that never loses money is not taking the early risk that justifies its existence. The rules: judge the portfolio, not the headline failure; publish every deal's terms and outcomes so losses surface in the accounts rather than in scandals; cap exposure per bet; and let independent review, not the investing agency, do the scoring. The falsifier is portfolio-level: if the public's investments persistently underperform their benchmarks after honest accounting, the model shrinks to the tools that work.

How is political favoritism prevented when government picks companies and attaches terms?

By removing the picking wherever possible. Standardized terms that apply by formula to any recipient of public money beat discretionary deal-making; eligibility rules published in advance beat selection committees; every agreement public by default; inspectors general and the corrections-page standard applied to the government's own portfolio. Warp Speed worked partly because it bought outcomes from anyone who could deliver them. Where discretion is unavoidable, it gets a paper trail, and the paper is public.

When immigration capacity is limited, who gets priority?

The order is published, not discretionary: first, the courts and processing capacity itself, because due process delayed for years is the system's deepest failure; then keeping families together; then the labor-market channels sized to verified need, agriculture and care first, where the dependence is documented. Rationing by published rule can be argued with, which is the point. Rationing by backlog, which is the current system, cannot, because no one decided it and no one answers for it.

Think we dodged one, or got a fact wrong? Report it. The standard is the same everywhere on this site: primary sources, official scorekeepers, and public corrections when the evidence changes. And the hardest question of all, what evidence would change our minds, is answered in writing: every policy brief now carries a "What Would Change Our Position" section naming its own falsifiers.