

If you could advise the next president of the United States, what would you say?

Review asked six UCSC experts what the next president's top priorities should be.

Here are their responses.

Mr. President...

Interviews conducted by Jennifer McNulty



Restore democracy to elections

Our country is beginning to look like an hour glass as the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the middle class gets squeezed. Your challenge will be to rethink the goals of our government and the values of our country as far as establishing safety nets and caring for the poor.

Americans are not as socially minded as our European counterparts who pay high income taxes, yet we still want the same government services Europeans enjoy. We can't do both, so you'll be faced with difficult decisions.

As an elected politician, however, your ability to make independent decisions will be severely constrained by the pressures of special-interest groups and your own desire to be reelected, which is why your first order of business should be to seek widespread public support for meaningful campaign finance reform.

The current campaign-finance system undermines the central tenets and principles of democracy because it allows people with a lot of money to influence government way beyond anything that could be interpreted as free speech. Reforming the way we elect the president and members of Congress will counterbalance the influence of major corporations, unions, and all other interest groups.

We need to increase public funding for campaigns and decrease the cost of running for office. We need stricter controls on campaign contributions, and we need to make it easier for people to vote by extending elections to several days, including a weekend.

If we believe government is supposed to be accountable to its citizens, protect people equally, and provide opportunities for a satisfying quality of life, we need to correct the injustices in society. It won't happen overnight, but campaign finance reform is the first step.



Sheldon Kamieniecki

Dean of Social Sciences and Professor of Environmental Studies

Research focus: Elections, environmental policy, politics



Daniel Wirls

Professor of Politics and department chair

Research focus: U.S. politics, Congress, the presidency

Rethink military spending

The most difficult thing you're going to face is controlling military spending. Unless you make tough decisions about which Pentagon programs to cut, you will never have any budget flexibility.

Pentagon spending has gone unchecked for years. The Pentagon budget is \$500 billion a year, on top of what we're spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's up two-thirds from 2000, for the largest increase we've seen since the unprecedented military buildup during Reagan's presidency. But at least then the public was aware of it. There was debate in Congress.

This spending is considered politically untouchable. Democrats are having a tough enough time figuring out how to extract the country from Iraq, and they have no political capital to spare.

Which is why you need to rethink the U.S. role in the world. The United States makes up half the world's military spending. We're so far ahead of everybody else, our military might isn't an issue. You have an opportunity to reconfigure our foreign and military policy so we're cooperating with our wealthy and closest allies—Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Australia. They will have to increase spending, and we will have to get away from this unilateral model.

Our buildup has given our allies a blank check to take care of their welfare states. In the meantime, our bridges are literally collapsing. And it's not just the money, it's the talent—the engineers and scientists. The Pentagon is spending \$75 billion a year on research and development. Those experts aren't solving the energy crisis.

When people say we can't afford national health care, I urge them to look at the Pentagon budget. Those commitments are going to be very hard to back away from, but some of that money could do other things. You are going to have to make tough decisions about where to cut, or you won't have any money to do anything else.

Strengthen the middle class

Part of the American dream is the belief that your kids will do better than you, and I think we're losing that. Your focus needs to be on strengthening the economic status and security of the middle class.

There's an awareness now that the private sector alone can't solve problems like health care and the environment. Business interests are more amenable to government leadership. Employers like General Motors are paying huge amounts to provide health insurance to their workers, and their overseas competitors don't have that same burden. There's a role for government, and moving toward universal, affordable health insurance would be a major development strengthening the middle class, as would reducing the high cost of college through more federal financial aid.

I want you to be more fiscally responsible and to address the budget deficit. We need to broaden the base that pays into government programs like Social Security and Medicare by

increasing taxes on those with the highest incomes. We've been through eight years of tax cuts only to the wealthy. Middle-class and working-class tax cuts should be on the table.

At the same time, borrowing to rebuild our nation's roads, buildings, and schools is entirely more suitable than borrowing to fund a war. So, I'm not saying budgets have to be balanced, but we need to move toward balance.

We also need to strengthen worker-assistance programs to help all workers who lose their jobs. We need to raise the federal minimum wage. Workers need paid family leave, and you need to move vigorously to ensure that when workers want to unionize, they have the freedom to make that choice without intimidation.

Job growth should be linked to environmental protection. It's going to take your strong leadership, because it's going to require technology and innovation, but that's what the United States does well. It's our moment, and we should grab it.



Lori Kletzer

Professor of Economics

Research focus:
Labor and employment,
global trade

Reinvent education

Our public school system, designed in the 19th century, is working exactly the way it was designed to work: It batches and categorizes kids by ability, and it tracks children to prepare them for different levels of employment and roles in civil society.

But we have very different aspirations and problems in the 21st century. Our schools are clearly failing kids from low-income and racially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized backgrounds, and we've got to do something about it.

First, we need to revamp the No Child Left Behind legislation. Everyone agrees schools should be held accountable, but right now they're being held accountable to a single test score, and that isn't adequate. So let's develop appropriate and genuine ways to assess student learning and school performance.

But our public education system needs more than reform. As an organizational researcher, I know how resistant organizations are to

change, and after 150 years, I think it's time to reinvent the American school. I challenge you to begin the process in ways that will generate radical new ideas, not just tinker with the existing system.

Historically, as a nation we have relied on the marketplace for innovation. Just look at Silicon Valley. But I don't have much confidence in the marketplace as a mechanism for serving poor and marginalized populations.

The other great American tradition is democracy. As president, you can create government incentives to bring people together at the local level to decide what their schools should look like. I think we need to create civic arenas to find fresh ideas about schools.

If we get beyond the historical legacy of schools, what other cultural traditions can we draw on to enhance learning for kids? I don't have all the answers, but you, as president, can begin a much-needed national conversation.



Rodney Ogawa

Professor of Education

Research focus:
Educational reform, school
organization, leadership

Confront climate change

Climate change is the single biggest challenge facing your administration. As a nation, we need to reduce our current carbon emissions by 50 to 80 percent to stabilize the climate, and we need to take a big bite out of that within 10 years.

There is a suite of things you need to do to get serious about climate change: introduce a carbon tax, invest in new technology, and provide greater incentives for renewable and alternative energy. There's still a role for conservation, because we can't rely on government alone, so changing individual behaviors is part of the cultural mindset you need to modify.

I want to see more support for manufacturing in the form of tax incentives, and I urge you to go to the next round of World Trade Organization talks and push for higher environmental standards, so our policies won't make U.S. manufacturers less competitive in the global market.

But climate change also presents an opportunity for job creation in redevelopment, retrofitting, installation, and manufacturing. A greener economy requires new things to be made and old things to be improved, and that translates to site-specific, skilled jobs that can't be outsourced to India.

All of this will require presidential leadership, but it won't take long for new tax policies and research investment to bear fruit.

There's a lot of pent-up frustration and concern, so you won't be starting from scratch. I don't agree when people say climate change is an unprecedented challenge for humanity. Time and again, people have reached into themselves and found what it takes to surmount what appeared to be impossible obstacles. So let's do it.



Daniel Press

Professor of
Environmental Studies
and department chair

Research focus:
Environmental politics
and policy

What do you think the new president should do?

E-mail us at review@ucsc.edu.

Margaret Delaney

Professor of Ocean
Sciences

Research focus:
Paleoceanography and
marine geochemistry



Lead the way on global warming

You have an incredible opportunity to cut through the confusion and misinformation around climate change and help Americans become role models for the world.

First, we need a coherent and concise summary of the scientific evidence that climate change is real, and we need a communications campaign to help people understand what they can do that will have the greatest impact. We need to empower people to make informed decisions.

Second, you need to focus on our national energy policy, starting with more ambitious fuel-economy standards. We need to invest in alternative energy, increase energy efficiency, and reduce consumption. You need to work with Congress to set a new tone in this country.

Third, we need an interdisciplinary research strategy that will support our energy policy and the outreach and education effort. We need to continue scientific research, but the agenda needs to include social science, too, because we need to influence behavior and spur people to action.

Lastly, the United States needs to take an international leadership role. China's government is reluctant to embrace environmental controls, because what they need is economic growth. You have an opportunity to rethink U.S. foreign policy and foreign aid in ways that will overcome this apparent dichotomy. The deployment of American ingenuity and technological innovation around the globe would benefit developing nations and help stabilize the climate.

We worked with our global partners to solve the ozone problem, and we did it in ways that benefited U.S. industries. We've squandered decades allowing the debate to be about whether climate change is real. It's time for large-scale change, and we need you to lead the way.

Want more? Watch highlights of interviews with our experts at review.ucsc.edu/fall08/.