



AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL

A Non-Profit Consumer Information Organization

## *Consumer News & Views*



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## What Will the Biden Presidency Mean to Consumers?

Former Vice President Joe Biden has won a decisive victory over Donald Trump and he'll become the 46<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. What will a Biden presidency mean to consumers? Here's what several news reports from CNBC tell us.

“With Senate control still hanging in the balance due to two run-off elections in Georgia, the extent to which the Biden administration will be able to fulfill its campaign promises remains unclear. But there are other ways the president-elect can make his mark. Here are some of the issues Biden and his team are likely to prioritize after assuming office in January.

### **Consumer financial protection:**

Blunting the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic on households and getting more aggressive relative to policing Wall Street will likely be among the Biden administration's top priorities, according to consumer advocates.

Installing a new head at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which has grown lax in regulating financial firms in the Trump era, is likely to be among the Biden team's first moves, they said.



The federal agency, created by the Dodd-Frank financial reform law in the aftermath of the Great Recession, protects consumers from financial abuse and predatory practices in common financial services like credit cards, mortgages, and loans.

“The CFPB did a 180 turn under Trump,” said Prentiss Cox, a professor at the University of Minnesota who specializes in consumer protection law. “I expect a leadership change to happen really quickly, and when that happens, I think you'll see a very quick shift.”

A recent Supreme Court ruling allows the president to fire the CFPB director at will. Kathy Kraninger, the current director at the consumer agency, is a Trump appointee. (She replaced then-acting director Mick Mulvaney in 2018.)

“The CFPB has worked tirelessly under Director Kraninger’s leadership to ensure that consumers are protected in the financial marketplace,” according to a CFPB spokeswoman. “When [consumer] harm has occurred, she has forcefully used the Bureau’s enforcement tool to pursue bad actors on behalf of consumers.

“And to further prevention, she has advanced an aggressive agenda of education, regulation and supervision to pursue this goal,” she added.

### **Coronavirus pandemic:**

The Biden administration (via the CFPB and executive measures, for example) will also seek to blunt the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which pushed the country into its [deepest recession in modern history](#).

“The natural place to start with consumer protection is making sure people aren’t pushed out further into distress,” said Linda Jun, senior policy counsel at Americans for Financial Reform, an advocacy group.

The federal CARES Act relief law, enacted in March, extended certain protections to homeowners and renters, for example.

Among them, the law prevented lenders or loan servicers from foreclosing on homes with a federally backed mortgage until at least Dec. 31. Officials at the CFPB will likely monitor such firms more closely to ensure consumers aren’t unlawfully losing their homes, experts said.

### **More from Personal Finance:**

[Why more coronavirus stimulus may wait until January](#)

[Biden could make student loan forgiveness a reality](#)

[US is closer than ever to \\$15 federal minimum wage after Biden win](#)

The federal agency is also well-positioned to help avoid evictions and vehicle repossessions, reduce loan delinquencies and defaults, and closely monitor debt collectors and credit-reporting agencies, according to a letter sent to Director Kraninger in April by former CFPB officials, including former director Richard Cordray, an Obama appointee.

Like the Trump administration, the Biden camp could also sign executive measures to address financial security during Covid-19, experts said.

In August, President Donald Trump repurposed federal disaster funds to offer a temporary \$300 weekly boost to unemployment benefits and suspended federal student loan payments through year-end, for example. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a temporary moratorium on evictions in September.

A new CFPB director would likely focus more scrutiny on wrongdoing among major banks and other financial institutions, which has been less of a priority in the Trump era, and seek to rewrite certain rules like one around payday lending, according to consumer advocates.

New leadership would also likely zero in on regulation impacting lower-income and minority consumers, like fair housing, fair lending and overdraft fees, they said.

That would be consistent with racial equity, outlined by the Biden transition team as a chief focus.

A firm that breaks fair-lending rules, for example, may give a lower interest rate to White borrowers over people of color, even when controlling for creditworthiness, according to Patricia McCoy, a professor at Boston College Law School and a former CFPB official.

The Biden camp has also supported expanding access to banking, perhaps via free or low-cost bank accounts, McCoy said. Being “unbanked” disproportionately affects people of color, she said.

After campaigning on an ambitious domestic agenda President-elect Biden hopes will improve voters’ finances and invigorate an economy battered by the coronavirus pandemic. tax hikes for the rich, broadened health care coverage and student loan forgiveness were some of the projects on candidate Biden’s to-do list.

“I sought this office to restore the soul of America, to rebuild the backbone of this nation, the middle class,” Biden said in a victory speech that listed many challenges ahead, like “the battle to control the virus, the battle to build prosperity, the battle to secure your family’s health care.” Turning though visions into laws, as the president, will be the trick now depending on how the U.S. Senate race results in Georgia.



## **Ten Ways to Deal with the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Virus.**

Haven’t we been through this before? As the second wave of COVID-19 sweeps across the United States, you need to be ready for more quarantines and business shutdowns.

Here’s a checklist from Hartford Healthcare to help you weather this new round of Covid-19:

### ***1. Exercise Equipment***

Exercise is good for the mind and body, especially during an inordinate of at-home time. If you can’t go to the gym, make sure you have whatever exercise equipment you need, whether it’s a \$2,000 exercise bike or a set of \$29 exercise bands.

“The American Heart Association recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week,” says Amanda Zaleski, PhD, an exercise physiologist with the [Department of Preventive Cardiology](#) at the [Heart & Vascular Institute](#) at Hartford Hospital, “plus moderate- to high-intensity muscle strengthening activity two to three days a week.” Free weight sales have spiked 181 percent, yoga mat sales 146 percent since the pandemic began, according to data from the NPD Group. Try a daily walk. It costs nothing.

### ***2. Humidifier***

A new, peer-reviewed study by researchers from the University of Sydney (Australia) and the Fudan University School of Public Health in Shanghai estimated that for every 1 percent

decrease in relative humidity, COVID-19 cases can increase by 7 percent to 8 percent. A 10 percent drop in relative humidity could double COVID-19 infections, the researchers said in the study published in *Transboundary and Emerging Diseases*.

Airborne particles are smaller in dry air and low humidity. Infectious particles produced by a sneeze or cough remain in the air longer, increasing the risk of exposure to other people. Increasing the humidity makes the infectious particles both bigger and heavier, causing them to drop from the air and land on hard surfaces.

Monitor humidity levels in your home with an inexpensive hygrometer.

### ***3. Air Purifier***

The Environmental Protection agency says portable air cleaners and HVAC filters on forced-air heating systems cannot singlehandedly protect people from getting COVID-19. But: “When used along with other best practices recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others,” the EPA says, “filtration can be part of a plan to protect people indoors.”

### ***4. Pulse Oximeter***

COVID-19, a respiratory disease, prevents the lungs from circulating oxygen properly through the body. A pulse oximeter, using beams of light through the finger, calculates the oxygen level in red blood cells based on light absorption.

### ***5. Thermometer***

Thermometers, digital or infrared, were hard to find during the first wave. No wonder: Fever is typically the first indicator of COVID-19.

### ***6. Bidet Toilet Seat***

So, your neighbors have run out of toilet paper again? What a pity. Invite them to try your bidet toilet seat, the Americanized adaptation of the European bidet that greatly reduces, even eliminates, the amount of toilet paper you’ll use. These seats, easily installed, start at about \$30. At close to \$250, you’ll get internal water heaters, heated seats, warm-air dryers and a remote control. For these models, you’ll need a nearby electrical outlet.

### ***7. House Plants***

A 1989 study by a NASA scientist bestowed almost mystical powers to common houseplants believed to remove an indoor air pollutant known as volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. These compounds are released by almost anything that smells whether house paint, shampoo or nail polish.

Subsequent research found that maybe houseplants aren’t such great air-purifiers and oxygen-producers. But they remain a powerful link to the outdoors during winter, a feel-good psychological boost that should not be underestimated.

Here are 10 suggestions:

1. **Areca Palm.**
2. **Aloe Vera.**
3. **English Ivy.**
4. **Dwarf Date Palm.**
5. **Boston Fern.**
6. **Chinese Evergreen.**
7. **Peace Lily.**
8. **Spider plant.**
9. **Lady Palm.**
10. **Weeping Fig.**

### ***8. Baking Supplies***

America baked its way through the first wave, so why not the second? (Please, someone make a carrot cake!) Buy now before the holiday rush on cookie, pie and cake ingredients.

“Baking can be a very grounding activity,” said [Dr. Laura Saunders](#) of the [Institute of Living](#), part of the Hartford HealthCare [Behavioral Health Network](#) (BHN). “It requires precise measurement and sustained attention. Measuring precisely keeps us focused in the present so we aren’t thinking or worrying about the past or future.”

### ***9. Pantry Items***

Start making your list: coffee, canned goods (diced tomatoes and black beans are a nutritious meal waiting to happen), broth for soup and anything else that will help you through the winter. Remember, you’re stocking the pantry, not hoarding.

### ***10. COVID-19 Supplies***

Keep a reasonable supply of hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, masks and household cleaners. The latter has become especially hard to find. But the EPA recently approved the more readily available Pine-Sol multi-surface cleaner after third-party laboratory testing proved the cleaner’s effectiveness against the virus on hard, nonporous surfaces.



## **Consumer Confidence Declines in November.**

The Conference Board *Consumer Confidence Index*<sup>®</sup> declined in November, after remaining relatively flat in October. The Index now stands at 96.1 (1985=100), down from 101.4 (an upward revision) in October. The Present Situation Index – based on consumers’ assessment of current business and labor market conditions – decreased slightly from 106.2 to 105.9. The Expectations Index – based on consumers’ short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions – declined from 98.2 in October to 89.5 this month.



The monthly *Consumer Confidence Survey*<sup>®</sup>, based on a probability-design random sample, is conducted for The Conference Board by Nielsen, a leading global provider of information and analytics around what consumers buy and watch. The cutoff date for the preliminary results was November 13.

“Consumer confidence declined in November, after remaining virtually flat in October,” said Lynn Franco, Senior Director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board. “Consumers’ assessment of present-day conditions held steady, though consumers noted a moderation in business conditions, suggesting growth has slowed in Q4. Heading into 2021, consumers do not foresee the economy, nor the labor market, gaining strength. In addition, the resurgence of COVID-19 is further increasing uncertainty and exacerbating concerns about the outlook.”

Consumers’ appraisal of current conditions was relatively unchanged in November. The percentage of consumers claiming business conditions are “good” declined from 18.6 percent to 17.6 percent, but those claiming business conditions are “bad” also decreased, from 34.4 percent to 33.5 percent. Consumers’ assessment of the labor market was unchanged. The percentage of consumers saying jobs are “plentiful” held steady at 26.7 percent, while those claiming jobs are “hard to get” was virtually unchanged at 19.5 percent.

Consumers, however, have grown less optimistic about the short-term outlook. The percentage of consumers expecting business conditions will improve over the next six months decreased from 36.0 percent to 27.4 percent, while those expecting business conditions will worsen increased from 15.9 percent to 19.8 percent. Consumers’ optimism regarding the job market also weakened. The proportion expecting more jobs in the months ahead declined from 32.0 percent to 25.9 percent, while those anticipating fewer jobs increased moderately from 19.8 percent to 20.5 percent. Regarding their short-term income prospects, the percentage of consumers expecting an increase was virtually unchanged at 17.6 percent, while the proportion expecting a decrease declined from 14.2 percent to 13.3 percent.

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## Holiday Fraud and Scams Are Back! Be Careful Out There!

During the holidays, scammers focus less on giving and more on stealing. Shoppers looking for a good deal this holiday season should be aware of increasingly aggressive and unorthodox scams designed by criminals to steal money and personal information. According to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), in 2019 Arkansans lost over \$22,681,000 due to a variety of scams. This year, the FBI wants local shoppers to enjoy a scam-free holiday season by remaining vigilant against the following schemes.

**Online Shopping Scams:** If a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is! Steer clear of unfamiliar sites offering unrealistic discounts on brand-name merchandise. Scammers frequently prey on Black Friday and Cyber Monday bargain hunters by advertising "One-Day Only" promotions from recognized brands. Without a skeptical eye, consumers may end up paying for an item, giving away personal information, and receive nothing in return except a compromised identity.



**Payment Red Flags:** Be cautious of sellers and websites that demand payment solely through gift cards. Scammers sometimes encourage shoppers to conduct wire transfers, allowing criminals to quickly receive illicit funds. Credit cards provide several layers of security against fraud and are typically the safest way to conduct online shopping.

**Charity Scams:** Charity-related frauds increase during the holidays as individuals seek to donate money to those less fortunate. Criminals use phone calls, email campaigns, and fake websites to solicit on behalf of fraudulent charities. Scammers target people who want to donate to charity, then hoard their well-intentioned donations while those most in need never see a dime.

## Steps to avoid holiday fraud schemes:

- Before shopping online, secure all financial accounts with strong passwords or passphrases. Additionally, the FBI recommends using different passwords for each financial account.
- Check bank and credit card statements routinely, including after making online purchases and in the weeks following the holiday season.
- Never give personal information— such as your date of birth, Social Security number, or billing addresses— to anyone you do not know.
- Be wary of promotions and giveaways that request your personal information.
- Prior to donating to any charity, verify that they have a valid Taxpayer Identification number by visiting their website or calling the charity directly.

*If you suspect a fraudulent scheme is being played on you, call your local FBI office and report it so you and others are not victimized.*



## Financial Education Series:

### ACC Video Focuses on “How to Ask Your Boss for A Raise!”

The American Consumer Council has released a new video as part of its financial education series. The latest video, which targets Millennials and Gen Z’ers, is entitled, *“How to Ask Your Boss for a Raise!”* Members can view it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjkREP03-GU>



ACC also released three other videos as part of its series to help Millennials feel more confident about their financial dealings.

Those videos are: *“How to Have a Great Vacation... on the Cheap!”* Members can view it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJo0UjLINKk&feature=youtu.be> The second video is entitled, *“Money Topics Every Couple Must Discuss.”* It can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsGb3Gr1aMY&feature=youtu.be> The third video is

## **“What Consumers Should Know About Time Shares Before Signing on the Dotted Line.”**

It can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2OX0hnFq8k>

ACC's financial education video series is designed to help consumers, especially Millennials, better manage their finances and get access to financial services. The free series is available online at

<http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/videos.asp> and features certified financial planner and author, Kimberly Curtis, who is a popular author, speaker and the CEO of *The Wealth Legacy Institute* in Denver, Colorado.

The video series has been well received by Millennials (18-30 year old) and has encouraged over 9,400 Millennials to join credit unions through ACC since September 1, 2016.

The other video topics include: **[Paying for the Cost of College](#)**; **[Paying Off Debt While Building Wealth](#)**; **[Home-Buying Mistakes to Avoid](#)**; **[Goals to Reach by Age 30](#)**; **[Money Mistakes Everyone Makes](#)**; and, **[“How to Prevent Identity Theft.”](#)**

**Click on any of the links to watch these videos.**

The American Consumer Council's president Thomas Hinton, stated “Millennials (ages 18-30) want timely information delivered through short videos to help them better manage their money and debts. This series answers many of their questions and encourages Millennials to seek out the services of credit unions that are skilled at providing a broad range of financial services at very competitive rates.”

According to ACC's research, there are over 75 million Millennials in the United States and nearly 42% have not established any financial services relationship with an insured financial institution.

The American Consumer Council is currently promoting a series of financial education videos for Millennials that will be continue into 2020. ACC expects a strong response to the video series given the number of inquiries ACC has received from its 306,000+ members.

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## ***ACC's Friend of the Consumer Award Recognizes Outstanding Businesses.***

Is your business consumer-friendly? Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers? If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award. Now is the time to apply!

Throughout the year, ACC presents its "Friend of the Consumer" Awards. This prestigious award recognizes manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States that meet or exceed federally mandated standards and are touted by consumers as "consumer friendly."



Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" Awards to deserving companies and organizations because they have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing a specific product or service that fosters consumer confidence and market acceptance."

To apply for the "Friend of the Consumer" Award, complete the online application and return it to ACC with the application fee. Applicants will be notified within 5 days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of receipt of your award application.

For more information, visit: <http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.html>



### **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Accepting Applications for Winter 2020 Cycle:**

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification**. Applications for the Winter 2020 application cycle are now being accepted through December 21, 2020.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org/green](http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/green)



For more information, please call ACC at 1-800-544-0414 or visit ACC's website by [clicking here](#). To become a member of the American Consumer Council, visit us at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org](http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org)

