



An Economy for All

Background

I'm not going to sugar-coat anything here--the income divide is making it even harder to get by in our country. In the past, the C-suite did not receive 300-1,000% higher incomes than the average worker and strong unions were able to increase the quality of life for all workers and their families. Since the start of the pandemic, [billionaires became up to 62% richer](#) - all while many Americans continue to struggle paying their bills. Currently, [nearly half of all millennials say financial fallout is holding them back from living a fulfilling life](#).

We are seeing executive management incomes skyrocketing, all while middle management and entry-level staff salaries and wages have stagnated and union membership has declined rapidly for decades. As the middle class continues to work hard--many with two or three jobs--the quality of life is unfortunately decreasing because of this stagnation and the ever-widening income divide.

We have a system that largely benefits the top earners, while the rest of us struggle to pay for rent, student loans, groceries, child care, health care, and more. But now, workers are unionizing and standing up for fairer wages like never before.

These costs aren't simply a fact of life--as policymakers, we have a duty to create the most positive change for constituents.

Wage Inequality

We've seen the rich get richer while working families suffer across the country. One of the root causes of this is the federal minimum wage has not been raised since 2009, and currently it sits at \$7.25. Yet, the average hourly wage needed to afford rent is nearly double that. The average minimum wage worker would need to work [97 hours a week](#) (two or three jobs) to afford a two-bedroom apartment. [Here in Illinois](#), you'd need to make \$22.11 an hour, or work 80 hours a week at minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

We need a federal minimum wage of at least \$15 per hour. I proudly voted for and co-sponsored the Raise the Wage Act ([H.R.603](#)), which would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour over five years, and thereafter index minimum wage to the median hourly wage. I am supportive of the Raise the Wage Act and the Fight for \$15 because we must uplift all workers--this includes temporary and seasonal workers, young people, tipped employees, and individuals with disabilities.

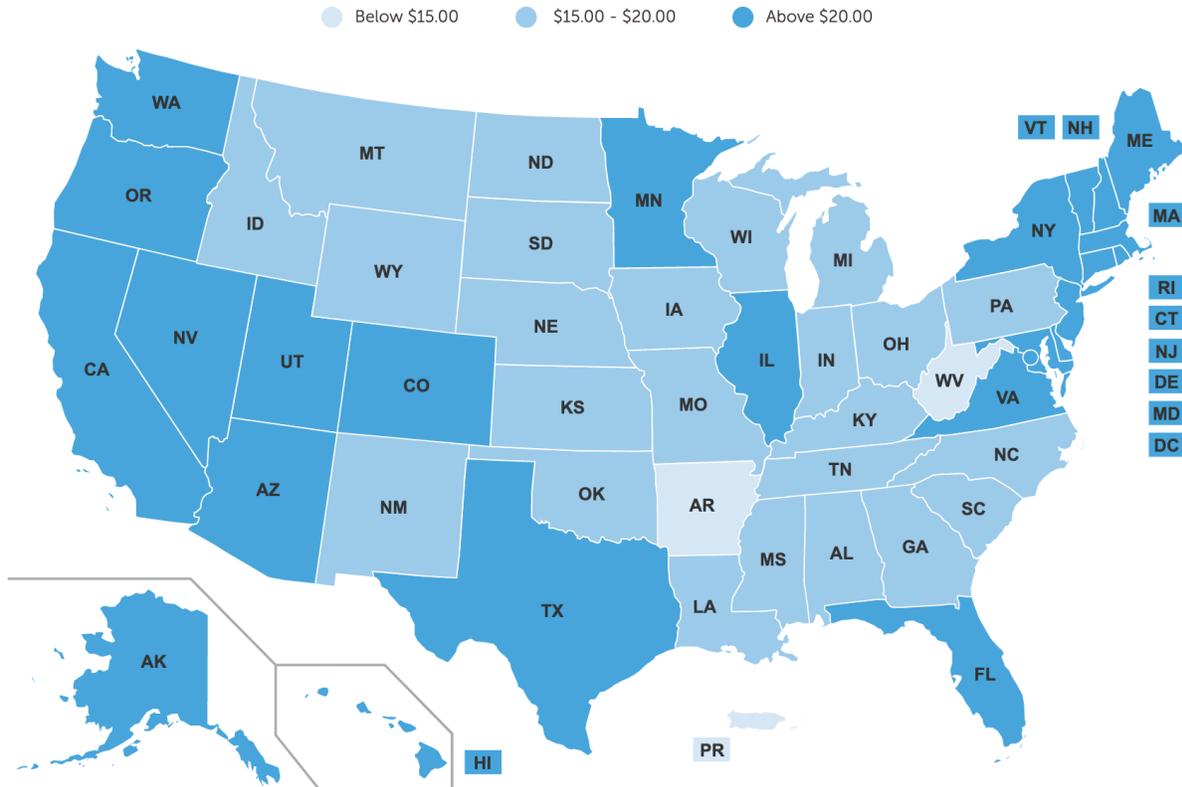
Raising the minimum wage is the morally and financially-just action to take. When there is more money in people's pockets, we all contribute to the GDP. After the housing crisis over a decade ago, some of us have not yet recovered, and this is largely due to income inequality. For working families working a patchwork of jobs, low wages disproportionately affect their ability to thrive financially. A federal minimum wage increase empowers all families to earn fair wages, but it helps low-income individuals and people of color the most.

The average wage of all employees will rise in more than two-thirds of low-wage industries, and have no evidence of a change in employment status of its workers¹. For individuals making above the minimum wage in other sectors, familial income does not decrease and neither does employment status as a result². Raising the federal minimum wage empowers all businesses and organizations to pay their workers fairly--it establishes a benchmark and sets a standard for economic justice.

¹ Belman, D. and Wolfson, P. (2010). The effect of legislated minimum wage to U.S. wage inequality over three decades: A Reassessment. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 8(1), 58-99.

² Aaronson, D., Agarwal, S., and French, E. (2012). The spending and debt response to minimum wage hikes. *American Economic Review*, 102(7), 3111-3139.

Hourly wage required to afford a two bedroom rental home by state.



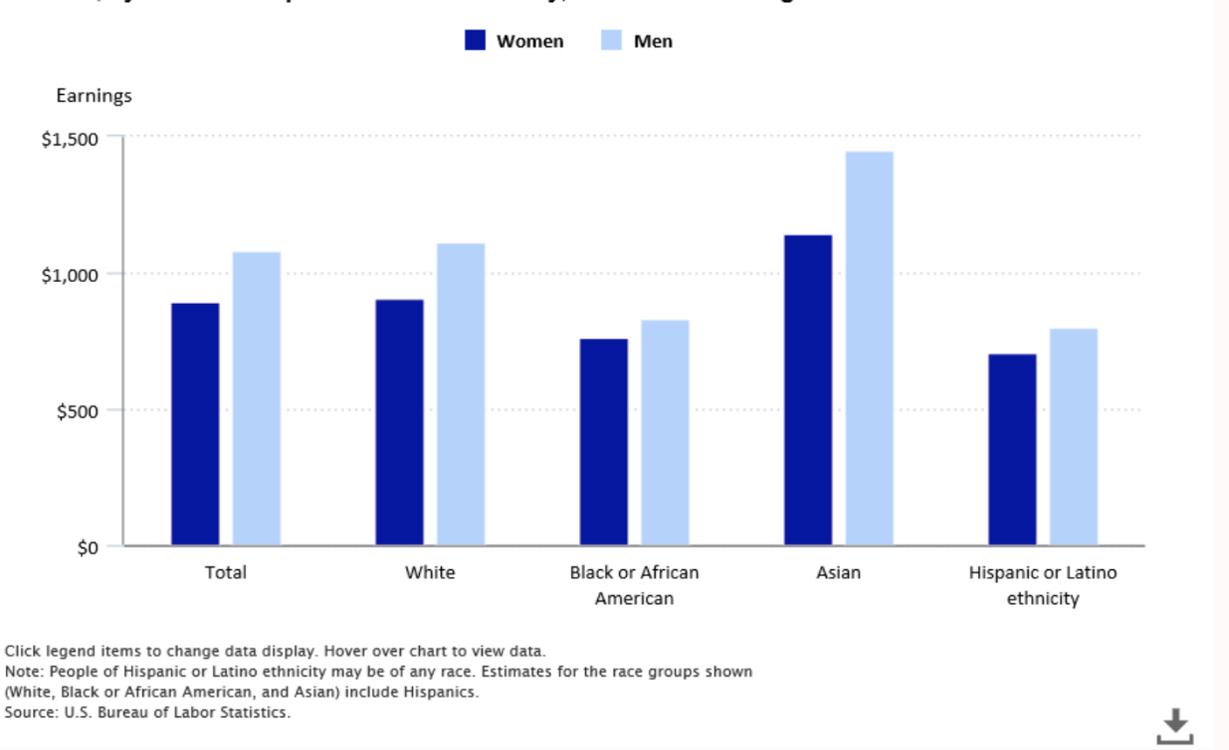
For decades, women have always made less than men, and this is supported by numerous studies. The gender pay gap exists because of systemic oppression and implicit biases against women, age, disability, and individuals with different ethnic backgrounds.

Compared to men's median earnings in 2020, [women only made between 78-81% of those earnings](#). When broken down further by ethnicity, the gender pay gap is even easier to see.

Some of you might think, didn't we pass equal pay legislation years ago? Yes, we did - we even passed it through the House last year. This issue persists because companies are often given discretion, and private companies are not required to disclose what they pay workers. Public entities must--such as government offices. For those fields, pay equity is easier to adopt.

There is, however, one additional step we could take to reach equal pay once and for all. Decades ago, the Equal Rights Amendment received a lot of attention and nearly was added to the U.S. Constitution. I proudly voted to remove the arbitrary deadline to enact the ERA, and I will continue to fight tirelessly to achieve equal rights for all.

Chart 3. Median usual weekly earnings of women and men who are full-time wage and salary workers, by race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2020 annual averages



The Equal Rights Amendment states, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” (National Organization for Women Foundation, 2022)³. When adopted into the U.S. Constitution, the ERA will protect all workers against sex discrimination in employment, education, and more--and guarantee equal pay as a constitutional right.

Addressing the Benefits of Unions

Unions are facing more setbacks than ever before. Yet when unions are strong, they uplift wages for everyone, including non-union workers. To get there, we have a bold vision for growing union presence and membership in communities across the Sixth District.

In Congress, I have been a loud and vocal advocate for organized labor. It’s why a number of unions have already endorsed my re-election campaign, including National Nurses United, National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 4016, Amalgamated Transit Union, and Teamsters Local 727 to name a few.

³ National Organization for Women Foundation. (2022). Equal Rights Amendment. *NOW*. Accessed from <https://now.org/resource/equal-rights-ammendment/>.

I am a proud original co-sponsor of the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which would be the biggest expansion in collective bargaining in decades. This bill passed the House and as of February 2022, it is stalled in the Senate.

The PRO Act would significantly help workers by doing the following:

- Increasing fines and penalties for companies and management that violate workers' rights
- Prevent employers from misclassifying workers as independent contractors and supervisors (which would render them ineligible for protections through the National Labor Relations Act)
- Prohibit management from pressuring workers against unionization efforts
- Ban "scab" workers, in which employers would permanently replace striking workers with non-union labor
- Strengthening workers' access to fair union elections and requiring management respect the results

I pledge to continue fighting alongside organized labor every day to strengthen protections in workplaces across the district.

Vocational and career training in schools and public spaces

We plan to increase accessibility of unions by placing informational kiosks and training opportunities in all schools, and adding more kiosks to public spaces like libraries and post offices. Too many of our students have no idea about the trades and are forced into the "college or bust" mentality. Yet a union job often provides for a higher quality of life and liveable wages, even upon graduation from high school.

We also plan to use the strengths of our community colleges to access union training, apprenticeship programs, and expand partnerships between the trades and our education system.

Green workforce training and green construction jobs

As the economy changes and we push toward passing the Thrive Agenda, a comprehensive action plan, many skills learned in the trades can be easily transferred to green construction jobs and related sustainable industries. I plan to work closely alongside unions, manufacturers, and industrial leaders to make sure their members have all the skills they need to thrive.

I was proud to pass my legislation on the Rail Center for Excellence as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This legislation will establish a center at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) to study high-speed rail and green technologies, which will innovate our transportation systems and create hundreds of jobs.

By expanding workforce training sites in IL06 and increasing awareness, we can continue to foster business growth and push for jobs that are environmentally sustainable.

A Pragmatic Path to Universal Health Care

The cost of health care is increasingly growing as insurance companies retain their power and greed.

The cost of prescription drugs is astronomical. For individuals that depend on prescription drugs to survive, companies charging unjustifiable, excessive prices are acting immorally. These financial costs of prescriptions can leave people strapped financially every month. Companies do not have to raise the cost of these drugs to fund research--they are purely doing so out of corporate greed and preying on people that depend on these drugs to live.

I support legislation to regulate and reduce the price of prescription drugs, and encourage generic forms of drugs to be made. Research must still be funded, but that is a cost insurance companies should accept--not delegate to individuals that need prescriptions.

Yet, the best way to address the rising costs of health care would be to enact Medicare for All. Adopting Medicare for All and rolling it out in stages will greatly reduce the cost of health care not only for individuals, but also for business owners. By removing the cost of health insurance, small business owners in IL06 will have a higher profit margin, and their own wages will rise as well.

Enacting this legislation removes costs like doctor visits, ambulance trips, blood tests, and completely covers vision, dental, long-term care, and prescription drugs as well. These costs are paid for by ensuring everyone in the country pays their taxes, raising taxes on the ultra-billionaires, and appropriating federal funds to ensure the process is administered smoothly.

As a former management consultant and small business owner, I always pay attention to the implementation of policies and adhere to timelines. There are many versions of Medicare for All, but the crucial element I support is the ability to phase the plan into effect. Medicare for All is a significant policy change, and it will require phases to implement, course-correct, implement another phase, and so on.

Starting with our most vulnerable populations and people over 55 years of age, this initial rollout will allow us to test, refine, and roll out further.

There are a number of reasons Medicare for All is more effective than the current health care system. Here are some of them, quoted from "The Case for Medicare for All."⁴

⁴ Kahn, James G. (2019). The case for Medicare for All. *New Labor Forum*, 28(2), pp. 52-56.

1. **100% coverage.** Medicare for All ensures everyone. Under this plan, no one can be denied coverage and reliable health care is guaranteed as a human right.
2. **Quality of health care rises.** Insurance premiums are eliminated, removing “underinsurance.”
3. **Everyone has the same insurance, eliminating confusion.** By sharing experience with others, quality is forced to improve by collaboration and proximity to one another. The current patchwork system of employer-covered insurance, public programs like Medicaid and Medicare, and other private plans are subject to many restrictions, guidelines, and confusing policies.
4. **Removing fear from the discussion on health care from employer contracts.** Unions, businesses, and all workers will be relieved once hiring discussions return to wages, work conditions, and other work-related concerns.
5. **Unlinking health care and employment.** No longer will health care coverage depend on retaining a job, particularly one with “good” health care coverage. This will empower individuals to pursue jobs they enjoy and seek opportunities for personal growth while still receiving health care coverage.
6. **Enhancing administrative efficiency.** The automation of medical billing and payment has wasted nearly \$400 billion per year (about \$1,400 per person per year). By adopting a single Medicare for All system, this wasteful cost would transition to funding for actual care.
7. **Controlling health care costs.** Under Medicare for All, the cost of prescription drugs drops by 30%, and growth in spending is controlled over time.
8. **Enhancing quality within the system.** There would be uniform data across the entire country, rather than one insurance provider coding something one way and another provider doing it differently. This also will be reflected in choices for care and clinical outcomes.
9. **Reducing waste and fraud.** The U.S. Institute of Medicine reports nearly 20% of health care today is “unnecessary, not indicated, or just plain fraudulent.” Medicare for All not only reduces duplicity in the billing system, but it will reduce all-around cost by addressing waste and fraud.
10. **Empowering patients.** Individuals can choose doctors they like; they are not bound by choosing doctors in-network.
11. **Empowering doctors and other providers.** Medicare for All will prioritize clinical issues, instead of documentation for insurance purposes and discovering what is and is not covered.
12. **Encourages comfortable patient-doctor relationships.** By allowing individuals to choose their health care providers, patients will no longer face restrictions on where they can go for care, thus fostering deeper trust with health care providers.
13. **Ending attempts to protect the current broken system.** Adopting and implementing Medicare for All requires massive systemic change. But, Republicans are frequently attempting to undermine Medicaid, Medicare, and eliminate public health programs. Medicare for All ensures everyone is guaranteed coverage.

How do we pay for it?

Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) explains her version of the bill in a detailed way, and you can watch her do so [at this link](#). Under the current system, \$1.3 trillion of all costs are paid by individuals and employers. Individuals like us are paying on average \$18,000 per year on health care--\$30,000 if you are a family of four. With Medicare for All, those extra health care costs disappear, and that's more money you can spend on other things.

Americans currently spend \$3.9 trillion on health care costs per year, and that number is expected to increase to \$5.5 trillion. Under estimates from even a conservative think tank, the highest cost for Medicare for All per year would be \$3.2 trillion (using Jayapal's version of Medicare for All). Simply from an economic analysis, a Medicare for All system saves us all money in the long-run.

Protecting Social Security

Nearly [70 million](#) seniors depend on Social Security. Although the country has gotten wealthier and more people rely on Social Security than ever before, there have not been any changes--no new protections or increases in benefits--for over 50 years. As written in *Forbes*, "Expanding Social Security is a solution to our looming retirement income crisis where most workers will be unable to retire without drastic reductions in their standards of living. Expanding Social Security is also a solution to our perilous and growing income and wealth inequality, and the financial squeeze on families"⁵ (Altman, 2019).

There is current legislation that will protect Social Security for decades to come. I support [H.R.5723](#), the Social Security 2100 Act, which would do the following (as described by Altman):

1. **Guarantee Social Security benefits for all.** Increase benefits for those receiving Social Security today and others that will receive it in the future.
2. **Extend benefits to low-wage workers.** Increase the minimum Social Security benefit earned by low-wage workers, which has been decimated since its enactment in 1972. This also allows for a more accurate cost of living adjustment every year.
3. **Protect Social Security for the remainder of the 21st century.** This will be achieved by raising the Social Security contribution (FICA) on everyone's paycheck by 0.05% (ultimately to 7.4%; it is currently at 6.2%)--an average of 50 cents per week for the average worker. This small amount secures funds through 2100 and beyond, and is more cost-effective than addressing funding for Social Security by doing a patchwork of temporary fixes.
4. **Include a tax cut for middle-income seniors and Social Security beneficiaries who are required to pay federal income tax on their benefits.** This is balanced by having

⁵ Altman, Nancy. (January 30, 2019). A huge step forward in the quest to expand Social Security. *Forbes*. Accessed from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nancyaltman/2019/01/30/a-huge-step-forward-in-the-quest-to-expand-social-security/#39553d156849>.

ultra-billionaires pay their fair share of taxes and the small increases mentioned in point #3.

We must do all we can to prevent privatization of Social Security. Much like insurance companies today, privatizing Social Security will allow for more exemptions and seniors' already-fixed incomes to stagnate and income inequality to grow. We can't risk placing Social Security in the hands of private investors; doing so jeopardizes seniors' life earnings.

There are a multitude of reasons to oppose privatization. *The Century Foundation* includes these points in a statistical analysis of a privatization plan⁶:

1. **Coverage of workers and their families would be threatened.** Privatizing Social Security would shift funding from the current program to investment accounts, limiting protections for all people, but especially those on disability.
2. **Dampen economic growth and increase the national debt.** The debt burden on individuals in 2036 (32 years after the George W. Bush plan for privatization was proposed) would have been \$32,000 due to Social Security privatization. This figure is high because all interest rates would likely increase (mortgages, car loans, student loans, credit cards, etc.), and people would be spending less money in the economy.
3. **The financing of Social Security would suffer.** Allocating 2-4% of payroll to create private accounts would shorten the time until current benefit levels could be sustained, requiring frequent raising of taxes.
4. **Relies heavily on market patterns and gives Wall Street more power.** Investment companies and big businesses on Wall Street stand to gain financially from privatization because they will gain a new revenue source from fees associated with a privatized Social Security's investment accounts.
5. **Younger generations will receive less return on their investment.** Under a new system financed through federal borrowing, younger generations will receive less return. Particularly for individuals born since the 1960s and 1970s, the rate of return under a privatized Social Security would be 20% lower than the current system, according to historical rates of return over a 50-year period.

Privatization will not protect Social Security for the next generation and beyond, but passing the Social Security 2100 Act will.

Mandating Paid Leave

We know that everyone is working hard across the Sixth District, and it's long overdue we finally adopt paid family leave. We need the federal government to step in and mandate this policy nationwide.

⁶ Anrig, Greg. (December 14, 2004). Twelve reasons why privatizing Social Security is a bad idea. *The Century Foundation*. Accessed from <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/twelve-reasons-why-privatizing-social-security-is-a-bad-idea/?session=1>.

Currently, we are the only developed country that does not provide all forms of paid leave (family leave, vacation days, or parental leave--all three) to our people. Employers are required to provide 12 weeks of maternity leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), but that is not paid, and FMLA only applies to organizations with more than 50 employees⁷. [While 86% of all full-time workers have access to paid family leave, that number dips to 45% if you are a part-time worker](#) - and that number is made up largely of lower-wage workers and folks who work multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Paid leave produces better health outcomes, and this makes an even larger difference for low-income individuals. Because of the current patchwork of jobs, many people can not afford to take time off work to provide care to others or seek care for themselves. Some states have adopted paid leave policies already, such as California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, and all have seen improved health outcomes. The best outcomes are for children. Since California implemented its paid family leave policy, upper respiratory, gastrointestinal, and general hospital admissions among infants decreased by 3-6% on average⁸. While California's paid family leave program is only for six weeks, it is still better than having unpaid leave.

Paid leave programs will not only improve health, but it will reduce dependence on supplemental government assistance like SNAP and other assistance. In fact, "California's paid leave program reduces mothers' risk of poverty following a birth," and it "increases the likelihood of returning to work following paid leave"⁹ (Isaccs, et al., 2017, p. 5).

I am supportive of the American Families Plan and the Build Back Better agenda, which would mandate 12 weeks of paid family leave each year (or 60 workdays). The American Families Plan will cover parental care, caring for a loved one with a serious medical condition, or addressing your own health conditions. Not all 12 weeks are required to be taken at once, and paid family leave benefits will amount to 66% of an individual's monthly wages, averaged by the highest annual earnings from the last three years. There will be no exemptions for businesses with fewer than 50 employees--all people will be covered by this paid family leave program¹⁰.

By passing paid family leave, we can finally prioritize the health of our families and not have to fear an illness jeopardizing our career, whether it be our own or a loved one's.

⁷ Green, Alison. (May 8, 2018). Everything you need to know about maternity leave in the U.S. *The Cut*. Accessed from <https://www.thecut.com/article/maternity-leave-usa.html>.

⁸ Pihl, Ariel Marek and Gaetano Basso. (2018). Did California paid family leave impact infant health? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(1), pp. 155-180.

⁹ Isaacs, Julia, Olivia Healy, and H. Elizabeth Peters. (May 2017). Paid family leave in the United States. *Urban Institute*. Accessed from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/90201/paid_family_leave_0.pdf.

¹⁰ National Partnership for Women & Families. (February 2019). The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act: Frequently Asked Questions. *National Partnership for Women & Families*. Accessed from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/coalition/family-act-faq.pdf>.

Universal Child Care

The rising cost of child care continues to place a burden on families. We have a plan to reduce costs, increase the accessibility of child care, and make it easier for families to spend time together.

During the pandemic, [the cost of child care has risen 41%](#), with some families now paying more than 20% of their salaries on it. Keeping kids safe during the pandemic is essential, but families shouldn't have to spend on average \$15,000 a year to access child care.

New Methods of Funding

We must create a universal child care system for children 0-5 and afterschool programs with sliding scale and affordable pricing. I am in strong support of the Build Back Better Act, which passed the House, that includes universal child care. Across the country, there are plenty of buildings sitting vacant or with extra space. This system can use existing spaces like elementary schools and community centers in IL06 and across the country.

Part of this ambitious plan will be funded by Wall Street transactions and requiring ultra-millionaires to pay their fair share in taxes. By eliminating loopholes and pushing for equity, we truly can develop a comprehensive system that will benefit our children and our finances.

By increasing funding to this program through appropriations, all low- and moderate-income families (those with incomes below 200% of the poverty line, or approximately \$40,000 for a family of three) with children age three and under have access to a subsidy to pay for quality child care so they can work or attend school or job training.

Restructuring Tax Credits

I was proud to support the Child Tax Credit (CTC) as part of the American Rescue Plan Act and I would do it again in a heartbeat. The CTC greatly benefitted middle class families by lowering their taxes and it [reduced child poverty by 30%](#) in just a few months. It's time we get this reinstated - even if it requires abolishing the filibuster in the Senate to get it done.

We have to streamline Child Tax Credits and increase the possible tax credit for middle class families, increasing it even more for those with young children and those who face the highest costs. By restructuring the CTC, raising thresholds on tax credit limits, and increasing awareness among low- and middle-income families, the children of our country will benefit.

Parents of children with special needs face the highest costs of child care. Our lawmakers have failed them for far too long. We have to give these parents the assistance they need. This can be achieved by expanding tax credits for parents with special needs children and fully funding the Department of Education to expand programs and analyze their effectiveness over time.

Looking to Other States

We should look at states with successful child care programs for universal pre-kindergarten, for example, to ensure 3- and 4-year olds have a healthy, safe, and educational environment.

By comparison, Connecticut ranks 24th out of 50 states in child care affordability, but 2nd in quality, and 2nd in availability¹¹. We can achieve the ranks of Connecticut by unifying all levels 10 of government on a comprehensive solution. After involving federal, state, and local governments and coalescing around a solution, we can adopt programs and initiatives to decrease the price of child care and increase accessibility.

We must pay our child care workers a living wage. We are trusting these professionals with what we value most--our children--and we have to compensate them appropriately. Yet, the child care facilities need not continue to raise the price of child care to adjust for fair wages. Instead, we must push for income-based government subsidies to cover the cost, raise the minimum wage and pair workers fairly, and pass legislation for universal pre-K.

Universal Pre-K

Multiple studies have outlined the importance of attending preschool. Preschool can lead to economic and social benefits, including “lower special education placement rates, reduced grade repetition, decreased welfare dependency, and fewer costs for the criminal justice system”¹² (McWalters, 2019, p. 22). In order to truly give the best opportunities to our children, 11 we have a duty to pass universal pre-K at the federal level.

With deep cuts to the Department of Education from the current administration, not only do we have to reinvest federal dollars into education, but we must work with states to expand access to pre-K¹³. These cuts have continued for the 2020 fiscal year¹⁴.

¹¹ Bugbee, Katie. (April 9, 2018). The best--and worst--states for child care, ranked in order. Care.com. Accessed from <https://www.care.com/c/stories/7535/the-best-and-worst-states-for-child-car/>.

¹² McWalters, Brian. (2019). The federal role in universal pre-K. *BYU Education & Law Journal*.

¹³ Brown, Emma and Danielle Douglas-Gabriel. (March 16, 2017). Trump seeks to slash Education Department but make big push for school choice. *Washington Post*. Accessed from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/trump-seeks-to-slash-education-department-but-make-big-push-for-school-choice/2017/03/15/63b8b6f8-09a1-11e7-b77c-0047d15a24e0_story.html?utm_term=.8%208cfd517f139.

¹⁴ Harris, Adam. (March 11, 2019). The Trump administration really wants to cut education funding. Congress doesn't. *The Atlantic*. Accessed from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/03/trump-administration-would-cut-education-budget-gain/584599/>.

The federal government must push for universal pre-K, and we can do so in a few steps. By doing so, this will greatly improve the lives and ability to succeed for low-income individuals. Increasing the accessibility of universal pre-K will allow children in all parts of the country to thrive. We can get even more money to states by pushing for a cost-sharing initiative. We can achieve a federal universal pre-K program by advancing a competitive grant program that allows states to receive funding for these incentives. The competitive grant program is a more measured approach than a blanket federal-state partnership model, and will increase the strength of programs because it allows states to adopt models based on their states' standards

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In order to pass universal pre-K at the federal level, I plan to include stakeholders from education, both private and faith-based child care programs, school boards, researchers, and others that are invested in the success of our children. Once we include all the voices that have a stake in this policy, we can craft the best options for our communities.

Universal pre-K has comprehensive grassroots support across the country, and some states are already at work. Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker proposed an additional \$100 million to fund early childhood education, which can become a reality in our state by 2023¹⁶. It's time to get the 15 federal government on board, and ensure 3- and 4-year olds have a healthy, safe, and educational environment.

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Questions or comments about this policy? Please send us your ideas at info@marienewmanforcongress.com.

¹⁵ McWalters, Brian. (2019). The federal role in universal pre-K. *BYU Education & Law Journal*.

¹⁶ Walker Burke, Cassie. (March 22, 2019). Big day for preschool: Illinois governor says state universal pre-K coming in 4 years; Chicago invests \$77 million in early learning. Chalkbeat. Accessed from <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/chicago/2019/03/22/chicago-to-invest-50-million-to-boost-care-of-babies-and-toddlers/>.