

Planning for the Economy of the Future

If you believe what the media reports, you might think young workers are individualistic, selfish narcissists. You might think the only way to connect with young people is on social media. And you might think we don't know anything about the value of work.

Don't believe a word of it.

It's true we've been dealt a raw hand by corporations that view us as replaceable and by politicians who rely on us for votes but rely on Wall Street to finance their campaigns and choose their policies. And yet our generation is one of the most civic-minded, activist generations in history. That's because we're not going to wait for the world to change—we're determined to fix it ourselves.

This policy platform is a step in that direction. We've been honored to work with a host of established progressive youth organizations on its development, and we hope that as young union members we can provide an additional voice in the chorus for change. This generation knows our strength lies in our diversity; we are mothers and fathers, apprentices and college graduates, straight, queer, cis-gender and transgender. We come from a variety of racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

But we are all workers. This is our call for change. And we are committed to building a nationwide youth economic movement that will make that change a reality.

In Solidarity,

AFL-CIO Young Worker Advisory Council

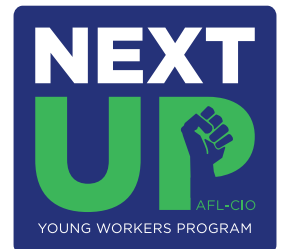
Jessica Akers, State Federation Rep
Melinda Barrett, AFT
Rachel Bryan, Electrical Workers (IBEW)
Amy Burns, National Federation of Federal Employees-IAM
Erica Clemmons, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)
Eric Clinton, UNITE HERE
Victoria Fisher, Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Andrew Glauser, Elevator Constructors (IUEC)
(Northwest Regional Rep)
Brianna Gregory, Machinists (IAM)
Ryan Gurganious, AFGE
Brett Horton, IUEC (Southern Regional Rep)
Mike Jackson, IBEW (Southwest Regional Rep)
Courtney Jenkins, American Postal Workers Union (APWU)
Angela Kasse, Transport Workers (TWU)
Paul Kent, Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)

Emeritus

Lorenzo Arciniega, Electrical Workers (IBEW)
Greg Cendana, Labor Coalition for Community Action
Reggie Davis, Utility Workers (UWUA)
Nick Gaitaud, United Steelworkers (USW)

Dave Levine, AFSCME
Ryan Mariategue, Working America
Shannon Meissner, Fire Fighters (IAFF)
Sarah Meyer, Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union/UFCW
Fareed Michelen, Labor Coalition for Community Action
Anthony Muniz, California School Employees Association (CSEA)
Chelsea Nelson, IBEW (Western Regional Rep)
Julio Perez, Central Labor Council Rep
Rick Pospichal, AFSCME (Midwest Regional Rep)
Chris Sloan, Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT)
Michael Sosa, Longshoremen (ILA)
Paul Talboo, Utility Workers (UWUA)
Robert Torkelson, Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers (GMP)
Marcos Velez, United Steelworkers (USW)
Caniesha Washington, Office and Professional Employees (OPEIU)

Jessica Hayssen, State Federation Rep
Jake Lake, Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Keith Richardson, American Postal Workers Union (APWU)
Brianna Rodriguez, Working America
Michelle Wyvill, Machinists (IAM)



As an organization that works with and for young people to promote progressive solutions to key political and social challenges, we are thrilled to see the AFL-CIO launch its first youth platform dedicated to addressing the economic needs of the Millennial generation. Millennials are the first generation projected to be worse off financially than their parents. From high rates of unemployment and underemployment, to mounting student loan debt resulting in the inability to purchase homes or save for retirement, the future is not lacking for areas of concern. We need an economy that works for everyone—where a 40-hour workweek means you can support your family, households are not burdened by excessive student loan debt, equal pay is a reality, and you cannot be fired based on your sexual orientation or gender identity. While Millennials are working hard to tackle these and other economic challenges, it will take ideas, support and investment from many sectors to help address these issues.

For years, unions have helped to protect and provide workers with the benefits they need to support themselves and their families. Declining union membership among young people is a great concern, but opinion data showing Millennials' support of unions surpassing other generations should serve as an opening for engagement. Therefore, we are so excited to see the AFL-CIO dedicate energy and resources to investing in this generation.

We look forward to continuing our work with the AFL-CIO and are excited to see the great work that is to come.

Sincerely,

Anne Johnson
Executive Director, Generation Progress

This document reflects that young people are engaged and informed about the importance of the labor movement. Now, as it is becoming harder for workers to organize, it's important that labor- and youth-led organizations align and work together. We need to be more aggressive in making sure voices of young people are included in the process.

Sincerely,

Biko Baker
Executive Director, The League of Young Voters Education Fund

In today's economy, with high young adult unemployment and underemployment, and the growing problem of high levels of student debt, young people can't wait any longer. We need all hands on deck to put this generation back to work, and we're so pleased the AFL-CIO has put in the type of engagement necessary to take this issue on in a meaningful way.

At Young Invincibles, we share your concern around the need for investments in our generation, in our jobs, in infrastructure, diversity and in innovation. We're pleased with the focus on meaningful access to a quality postsecondary education, to alternative pathways for success, and to jobs that allow our generation to support a family and stay healthy and safe. And we all need to work together to address the crushing burden of student debt facing about 40 million Americans, most of whom are young.

Thank you to the AFL-CIO for your hard work.

Sincerely,

Aaron Smith
Co-founder and Executive Director, Young Invincibles

Overview

The millennial generation of young workers is the most diverse, well-educated and technologically savvy in history. But we struggle in an economy that denies us the opportunity, mobility and security of previous generations. In Summer 2013, the AFL-CIO's Young Worker Advisory Council and progressive youth activist groups hosted the National Youth Economic Policy Forum to identify the biggest challenges facing young workers in today's economy. This is what they found:

1. Education and skills training are necessary to build a strong and stable workforce, yet the rapidly rising costs of postsecondary education and training, and accompanying student loan debt, are crippling many young workers.
2. Even when we have the requisite education and training, young people are having a hard time finding work. The majority of young workers today struggle to find adequate work; the unemployment rate among workers ages 16 to 24 is more than twice the rate of older workers.
3. The traditional 40-hour workweek with a single employer over the course of a career lifetime is not a reality for most young workers, who often are only able to find jobs that offer contingent and precarious work arrangements and usually lack the basic benefits and stability needed for young workers to feel economically secure.
4. Millennials care about inclusive, culturally competent employment practices that provide a high quality of life and protect workers from discrimination based on race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability and immigration status.
5. Despite the very clear realities of the youth workforce, young workers are joining unions at rates lower than any other age group, and often see unions as irrelevant and unnecessary for the modern workplace.

From a series of discussions about these issues and possible solutions, the AFL-CIO Young Worker Advisory Council developed this Economic Agenda by and for young workers:

1. We will defend our right to speak out. Together.

Workers, young and less young, must be able to join together to create good workplaces and an economy that works for all. The Young Worker Advisory Council, AFL-CIO, its affiliates, local labor bodies and young worker groups are dedicated to bringing more people into our movement and fighting for the rights of all workers to organize and fight back against corporate greed.

2. We demand that our government invest in jobs, infrastructure and innovation. Invest in us!

We need federal and state job creation policies that are sensitive to the needs of both younger workers who are just starting their careers and older workers who should be able to transition to stable retirement at the time of their own choosing. Direct government job creation through public investment would create good jobs while strengthening the economy as a whole.

3. We call for dramatically increasing access to postsecondary education and training for all.

High-quality postsecondary education is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, a moral imperative and a fundamental civil right. It's time we started treating it as such. That's why we're calling for the funding of universal public postsecondary education. Without the foundation a strong education provides, our other rights never can be realized fully. The United States needs a highly educated workforce to remain competitive in the global market. Further, we must remind our community partners that apprenticeships and technical training certificate programs are forms of postsecondary education and should be supported to at least the same extent as two- and four-year colleges. It is imperative that higher education is

equally affordable and accessible at every stage in life to all who seek it.

- 4. We stand together for living wages, reasonable hours and a fulfilling work experience for all.** In addition to raising wages, federal and state laws designed to protect workers must be expanded so all workers have the protections of minimum wages, overtime pay and the freedom to organize or join a union.
- 5. We call for strengthening—not cutting—the social insurance programs that protect the financial and health security of millions of families.** We must defend Social Security, Medicare and other earned benefits programs from cuts, while advocating for stronger, better-funded and more comprehensive social protection programs. Social protection policies must recognize and be responsive to the realities of the modern workplace.
- 6. We are committed to smashing sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism and xenophobia.** The workplace should be a safe place for all, and no one should worry about their job security, personal safety or well-being on the job based on who they are. We will advocate and defend anti-discrimination laws and employment practices that include protections against discrimination based on age, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, race, ability, national origin and immigration status.

7. We will partner with the labor movement to invest in its future and in the economy by engaging and developing leaders among young workers.

Resolution 19, adopted at the 2013 AFL-CIO Convention, recognized the importance of building young worker programs and young worker-focused policies at all levels of the labor movement, as well as developing the organizational infrastructures, community partnerships and networks necessary to support the growing young worker movement. The Young Worker Advisory Council will partner with the AFL-CIO State Federation and Central Labor Council Advisory Committee to promote young worker development in state federation and labor council strategic plans, with the goal of tripling the number of local young worker organizations over the next four years.

The Youth Economic Policy Forum was a first step in addressing the needs and concerns of today's young workers. The Young Worker Advisory Council and the AFL-CIO will continue to consult with young members and partner with youth organizations to understand and elevate the concerns of young workers, and to empower them to find and implement solutions to the economic struggles faced by our generation and the entire country.

An Economic Agenda by and for Young Workers

The millennial generation may be the first in U.S. history not to do better than their parents.¹

Young workers face unemployment rates of double the national average² and make up nearly half of unemployed workers.³ As student debt continues to climb, past the all-time high of \$1.2 trillion hit in 2013,⁴ exceeding even credit card debt⁵—and wages stagnate or fall for all workers⁶—young people are losing economic ground. Young workers struggle to find work and often take jobs below their education and skill level or their desired number of hours.⁷ Many young workers find themselves taking temp jobs or contract work, even post-graduation unpaid internships. Even when young people are working hard, they don't have access to the stability, benefits or pay of traditional full-time jobs.⁸

The forecast is troubling. The financial crisis and resulting recession have brought on a hostile economic environment, especially difficult for those in the early stages of their work lives. The U.S. economy continues to trudge along in a recovery that most of us have yet to experience, and some policy makers in Washington, D.C., seem to think the prescription for high unemployment and slow growth is just more budget cuts.

So what is this generation going to do?

To drill down on the concerns, challenges, hopes and dreams of young workers, the AFL-CIO and the Young Worker Advisory Council partnered with youth activist organizations Generation Progress, Generational Alliance, the Young Invincibles, the Roosevelt Institute Campus Network, United States Student Association and Jobs with Justice to host the National Youth Economic Policy Forum on May 8, 2013.

**“The defining issue of our time
is economic inequality.”**

—Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn.

The lack of economic mobility and stability weigh heavily on young workers' minds. Participants at the forum identified the following problems as the biggest challenges facing young workers in today's economy:

1. Young people are having a hard time finding work. Unemployment among workers ages 16–24 is more than twice that of older workers. Underemployment is also a major problem for many young workers. The majority of young workers with just a high school diploma today are either unemployed or underemployed.⁹
2. Education and skills training are necessary to build a strong and stable workforce, yet the rapidly rising costs of postsecondary education and training and accompanying student loan debt are crippling many young workers. Furthermore, despite the effectiveness of union-affiliated apprenticeship programs at providing workers with skills training while they earn money, many young workers lack information about how to become apprentices.
3. The traditional 40-hour workweek with a single employer over the course of a career lifetime is not a reality for most young workers,¹⁰ who find themselves working unpaid or poorly paid internships, sometimes misclassified in independent contractor arrangements, temp agency gigs, part-time work or other contingent or precarious work arrangements. Many existing public and private

“The American landscape of work and life is a history waiting to be written....You’ll be the ones to do it. And we’re here to help you get on your way.”

—AFL-CIO President Richard L. Trumka

support institutions are not designed for the kind of careers young workers have, which leaves many lacking health insurance, retirement security and other social protections that were designed for a bygone era of work life. Additionally, unemployment and delayed entry into the workforce because of the lack of job opportunities can result in young workers not qualifying for unemployment insurance or Social Security Disability Insurance, leaving them without these crucial safety nets until later in life.¹¹

4. Many workplaces are not designed for the modern workforce, not reflective of or supporting the lifestyles and values of young workers. Millennials care about inclusive, culturally sensitive employment and human resources practices that provide a high quality of life and protect workers from discrimination based on race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability and immigration status. This means not just protection from discrimination and retaliation, but human resources practices and work arrangements that recognize the needs and best interests of workers and their families—no matter what those families may look like.
5. While unions are the best catalyst for change at the workplace and in the larger economy, organizing has become harder and harder because of legislative and legal attacks at both the federal and state levels. Despite the very clear economic challenges facing the youth workforce, young workers are joining unions at rates lower than any other age group; they often see unions as irrelevant and unnecessary for the modern workplace. It is of

paramount importance to the future of the labor movement that young workers receive support in their efforts to organize, and to build partnerships with existing youth organizations to address their unique generational concerns. This not only would improve the lives of young workers, but the energy and innovation they bring to their unions can help union structures change to be more relevant to the way young workers work and think.

Based on the findings of the Youth Economic Policy Forum and ongoing conversations with young workers and community partners, the Young Worker Advisory Council has adopted an action agenda that addresses the needs and interests of young workers:

1 We will defend our right to speak out. Together.

Unions are particularly well-suited for helping workers get access to the kinds of workplace resources they need, from paid sick days to gender-neutral restrooms, and quality child care facilities to multilingual communications. And unions are the perfect megaphone to amplify workers’ voices in Washington, D.C., and statehouses around the country.

To this end, the AFL-CIO and its partners must continue to fight to defend and strengthen the collective bargaining rights of workers in the United States and across the world.

Fundamental weaknesses and shortcomings in our labor laws, and aggressive, relentless and shameless anti-union politicking and union-busting by employers, have eroded the rights and protections workers had achieved in previous generations. Pro-union workers face retaliation and lose their jobs. Employers stall on contract negotiations and refuse to agree to workers’ demands, or they refuse to recognize the union, forcing a lengthy official National Labor Relations Board election—giving them extra time to fight the workers’ union. Millions of workers simply are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act, the legislation that provides workers with labor rights. Tech workers, agricultural workers, independent contractors, supervisors and domestic workers all are excluded from those legal protections.

And when employers violate workers' labor rights? The law doesn't allow the National Labor Relations Board, the body that enforces labor rights, to charge fines or penalties to employers who retaliate against pro-union workers or workers who demand better conditions. The only remedy workers can pursue is reinstatement of their jobs and back pay. And if the board declines to take a worker's case, that worker has no other remedy; he or she cannot bring a lawsuit on any violation of his or her rights under the National Labor Relations Act. In reality, employers have nothing to lose if they violate their employees' rights.

"I think some of the big challenges we need to face and meet will be faced, and will be met, by working together."

—Tobin Van Ostern
Generation Progress/Young Invincibles

We won't accept this. Unions always have been the backbone of a strong, middle-class economy. Union workplaces provide higher wages and better working conditions, which often motivates other employers in the area to offer better jobs. Creating a strong and fair economy for the future requires that workers have strong rights to organize and shape their workplaces and communities. The AFL-CIO, its affiliates and young worker programs have committed to bringing more people into our movement and fighting for the rights of all workers to organize and fight back against corporate greed.

2 We demand that our government invest in jobs, infrastructure and innovation. Invest in us!

We need federal and state job creation policies that are sensitive to the needs of both younger workers who are just starting their careers and older workers who should be able to transition to stable retirement at the time of their own choosing. The low-wage service jobs that have been the majority of jobs created since

the beginning of the Great Recession do not pay the wages or provide the stability young workers need as they begin their careers.

Direct government job creation through public investment in infrastructure development and repair would create good jobs while strengthening the economy as a whole. Apprenticeship programs, project labor agreements and prevailing wages should be applied to public infrastructure programs to ensure the biggest return for public investment while creating and supporting good jobs for new labor market entrants, currently unemployed workers and the many skilled union tradespeople who provide higher-quality services with better on-time records than their nonunion counterparts.¹²

Infrastructure investment also presents the opportunity for our government to address pressing needs—both environmental and social. We are concerned about the future of our environment and climate, as well as how current policies and climate change are affecting our brothers and sisters around the world. Innovative energy policies that protect the economies and livelihoods of communities dependent on fossil fuels would ensure successful adaptation to changing conditions and create good jobs here in the United States, without throwing millions of fossil fuel workers and others out of work. These policies will take innovation, compassion and an understanding of the many valid concerns involved. We are the

"A lot of the good-paying jobs that we used to rely on—especially in manufacturing and other industries—have been offshored. We don't have a structure in place—a robust workforce development strategy in this country."

—AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer
Elizabeth Shuler

generation with the ability to craft those policies, but without government investment in innovation and infrastructure, all of our hands are tied.

Similarly, we see smart infrastructure investment could help lower-income communities, alleviate traffic congestion and create good jobs—we need improved mass transportation. As wealthier, whiter populations return to urban centers, lower-income residents, especially lower-income people of color, are pushed out of the city into inner-ring suburbs. At the same time, more outer-ring suburbs are being developed. This has created a transportation nightmare, making it difficult for people without cars to get to work or even find an accessible job, while those who live even further from the city center find themselves sitting in traffic. Investment in smart, clean and fast mass transportation in metropolitan areas is a simple solution to these problems. Transportation investment in high-speed rail and safe, modern highways and bridges also would help rural populations and allow for faster, safer travel throughout the country. These investments would create jobs, alleviate problems for millions of people, and present new economic opportunities for consumers, employers and workers.

Buy America legislation is another simple step to support the American economy and job growth in the United States using taxpayers' own money. Preferences for public procurement of goods or services made by American labor keeps taxpayer money circulating in the economy while creating jobs and spurring innovation in the United States. Buying American-made products for public construction projects and procurement also prevents problems caused by

counterfeit and low-quality products, and avoids the human rights abuses and poor working conditions experienced in many exporting countries.

Another action the federal government can take to create more jobs in the United States is closing the offshore loophole, which gives a tax incentive to U.S. corporations to open plants overseas, where workers can be exploited more easily and which makes it more difficult for workers in nations with higher labor standards to compete, resulting in a race to the bottom among nations and workers. The government should not incentivize corporations to ship American jobs to countries where workers are vulnerable to exploitation and to put downward pressure on international labor standards.

Care must be taken in crafting trade agreements and enforcing existing agreements to ensure protection of U.S. jobs and prevent exploitation of workers in other countries. Closing the massive U.S. trade deficit through strong industrial policies would boost the economy as a whole while providing opportunities for more young workers to start down the path to good, middle-class careers.

Both public investment in infrastructure and support for American manufacturing will strengthen the economy by supporting consumption by workers, which in turn supports stronger job creation in the private sector.

3 We call for dramatically increasing access to postsecondary education and training for all who seek it.

Since its inception, the AFL-CIO has advocated free, high-quality postsecondary education for all, and the AFL-CIO and the Young Worker Advisory Council continue to forcefully make that call. High-quality public education is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, a moral imperative and a fundamental civil right. Without the foundation a strong education provides, our other rights never can be fully realized. The United States needs a well-educated and trained workforce to remain competitive in the global market. It is imperative we ensure that attaining a higher education is equally affordable and accessible at every stage in life for all who seek it.

“We can’t create wealth. I think these [problems] are going to be the long-term effects of the economic downturn that will continue if we don’t do anything about it soon.”

—Michele Gillam, Transit Workers Union,
Local 100

Schools—from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary—should be well-funded and staffed to allow for high-quality, affordable and accessible education and skills training for all students. Education is a public good, and should not be a source for private profit. Education programs must be designed to improve the learning experiences of students without compromising the working experience of educators. “Market-oriented” education experiments have harmed students and educators, which can destabilize the infrastructures of our communities and our entire economy.¹³

State and local investment in higher education fell to a shocking low of only \$5,900 per full-time equivalent student in 2012, marking a 23% reduction in state and local funding in just the past five years.¹⁴ Meanwhile, federal aid has failed to make up for the reduction in state and local funding. This has led to costs of postsecondary education increasing almost 1,200% over the past 35 years.¹⁵ And those costs are borne by the students who must take out loans to finance their education.

This has resulted in a massive student debt problem that has forced many workers to struggle to make ends meet—trying to pay down student loans with stagnant or falling wages. This means many people with student debt are unable to make major purchases to fuel our economy. Even more troubling is that many potential students, especially those who would benefit most from postsecondary education, cite the fear of debt as their main reason for not enrolling in college or certificate programs that would make them more competitive in today’s tight job market.¹⁶ This problem must be met head-on through reinvestment in public education, regulation of for-profit schools and lenders, and better repayment and refinancing options for borrowers.

Performance metrics for federal and state financial aid programs should be written to recognize the very different lifestyles and experiences of today’s student body. Education policies and programs must recognize that students and workers are not two separate populations with distinct needs. Many high school and postsecondary students work while attending school, and many workers take classes during their time off to develop new skills or simply to enrich their lives. Four- or six-year graduation rates and low student need for

remediation classes are not realistic for many students who would benefit most from a certificate or degree program. When aid and funding are crafted to reward “success” defined in unrealistic and outdated metrics such as time-to-completion standards that ignore the experiences of today’s students, the people who stand to most benefit from postsecondary education can be cut off from access to the middle class.

These bad policies have been especially harmful to working- and middle-class families that bear the largest portion of the \$1.2 trillion student loan burden.¹⁷ Education funding and financial assistance must reflect the realities of the student body and the needs of the workforce.

4

We stand together for living wages, reasonable hours and a fulfilling work experience for all.

The past decade has seen a slow but steady erosion in American workers’ income security, but young workers have been especially hard hit. Since the Great Recession, the median weekly earnings of workers with full-time jobs ages 20–24 has slipped 6.6% since the second quarter of 2008. Teenage workers ages 16–19 saw the next highest losses at 5.7%, while workers ages 25–34 lost 3.5% of their weekly earnings. Older workers have experienced smaller losses, both since the Great Recession and during the last decade.¹⁸

Young workers are represented disproportionately among minimum and low-wage workers,¹⁹ and the value of the minimum wage has been falling since 1968, despite occasional increases in nominal value.²⁰ Only 35.5% of minimum wage workers have full-time status,²¹ but even if minimum wage workers are able to secure a full 40 hours a week for all 52 weeks of the year, their before-tax incomes would come to only

“We’re not making what our parents made relative to inflation.”

—Roy Houseman, United Steelworkers

\$15,080 annually, below the federal poverty threshold for a single parent with one child, and within 25% of the poverty threshold for an individual with no children.²²

The minimum wage must be increased and indexed to inflation. So-called “unskilled” jobs need not necessarily lead to great wealth, but no one who works full time should be left in poverty. Employers like Walmart and McDonald’s exploit the social safety net by paying so poorly that workers must rely on public assistance to provide themselves and their families with adequate nutrition and housing.

In fact, “reforms” made to social assistance programs in the 1990s enable this kind of exploitation by employers by requiring that recipients of food stamps and other aid be employed, which incentivizes some employers to reduce wages and benefits for their workers. This, too, must be undone, removing perverse incentives for employers to underpay their workers.

Contingent and precarious employment arrangements—not to mention unpaid internships—have created financial instability and insecurity for many young workers and made them vulnerable to workplace abuse and exploitation. Sacrificing well-deserved time with family and friends to work long and unpredictable hours has become the norm for far too many young workers. Flexible work arrangements should be available to those who want or need them, but all jobs must provide a living wage and be covered by employment and social protections.

Many workers, especially those in retail or food service, struggle to get the hours they need. The practice of keeping workers in part-time status in order to limit their access to benefits like health care must be stopped immediately. Workers hired with the understanding they would get full-time hours must be given full-time hours. On-call shifts and just-in-time scheduling make it hard for workers to schedule their lives as well as plan their budgets. Fair scheduling should be the rule, not the exception, for all workers—whether they work in health care or retail, food service or business administration.

Workers who are in school or have responsibilities outside of the workplace too often face conflicts between their work schedules and responsibilities

as parents, students or caregivers. Flexible work schedules and scheduling policies that allow workers to meet their obligations at work and at home without repercussions are crucial to creating good, modern workplaces. Paid sick and family leave must be provided to all workers.

In addition to raising wages, federal and state laws designed to protect workers must be expanded so all workers have the protections of minimum wages, overtime pay and the freedom to organize or join a union. Current legal definitions of “employer” and “employee” are too narrow to extend protections to all workers and should be defined more appropriately through legislation or regulation where necessary to include coverage of all workers by safety nets and workplace protections. All workers deserve dignity and respect on the job.

5 We call for strengthening—not cutting—the social insurance programs that protect the financial and health security of millions of families.

The millennial generation has been targeted by a campaign of misinformation about Social Security and Medicare. Young workers been told those programs will be gone by the time they retire, or that the cost of these programs is bankrupting our country.

But we know this isn’t the case. Corporate front groups like the Campaign to Fix the Debt have tried to push a dialogue of intergenerational warfare around the federal budget and earned-benefits programs. But those efforts not only are ill-conceived and destructive, they don’t reflect young workers’ interests and values. Reductions in benefits or higher ages for qualification means our parents and grandparents will be less financially stable, and that our own retirements will be less secure.

That’s not to say we are OK with the way things are going for our social insurance system. High youth unemployment and the different career pathways of young people mean we accrue credits toward benefits in different, sometimes slower, ways than previous generations. Social protection policies must recognize and be responsive to the realities of the modern workplace.

Any reforms made to these programs must aim at keeping the promise of a secure future for all workers, expanding coverage and strengthening benefits. We will oppose any effort to reduce benefits for working families and retirees.

One of the simplest ways to improve Social Security is by “scrapping the cap,” or repealing the statutory maximum contribution base, currently at \$118,500. This means the wealthy contribute a lower percentage of their income to Social Security than do working- and middle-class people. By scrapping the cap and taxing all income at the current 12.4% payroll tax rate without increasing benefit levels for those already at the maximum, the Social Security Trust Fund would recoup almost 4.5 times more money than it would by using the “chained CPI”—an accounting method that results in smaller estimates of the increased cost of living—to calculate annual benefit increases, a cut championed by the Campaign to Fix the Debt and its anti-Social Security friends in Congress.²³

Medicare’s financial woes are entirely a product of out-of-control price increases in our for-profit medical system. Medicare would be both cheaper and stronger if we eliminated the Bush-era ban on the government negotiating lower prescription drug prices for the program. Simply aligning the prices paid for drugs under Medicare with the prices paid for drugs under Medicaid would save the government \$137.4 billion by 2022.²⁴ A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that if U.S. government negotiations resulted in similar prices paid by other governments for prescription drugs, the savings for the federal government could amount to as much as \$541.3 billion over 10 years.²⁵

6 We are committed to smashing sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, xenophobia and bigotry of all kinds.

The workplace should be a safe place for all, and no one should worry about job security or their personal safety or well-being on the job based on who they are. We will advocate for and defend anti-discrimination laws and employment practices that include protections against discrimination based on age, gender identity

“We are talking about not just what we care about, but how we can do something.”

—Kevin Killer, South Dakota State Representative (27th District)

or expression, sexual orientation, race, ability, national origin and immigration status. Furthermore, we will push for policies that effectively address such *de facto* inequities as the gender and race pay gaps.

Anti-oppression training, beyond the currently required harassment training, should be the norm in the modern workplace. Unions are a natural resource for information about ending oppression and inequity, and how workers can combat those forces within themselves, their workplaces and in government.

Gender

Women still make only between 72 and 81 cents of every dollar paid to men in the same occupation,²⁶ and despite educational gains, nearly two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers are women, especially women of color.²⁷ Women are the majority of workers in the lowest-paid occupations.²⁸ We will continue to fight to close the wage gap between men and women and expand job training and educational opportunities, including opportunities for women in nontraditional sectors.

Furthermore, to ensure we all can meet our responsibilities on the job, at home and in the community, we will fight for such work-family policies as paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, affordable quality child care and contraceptive equity and health care that respects women’s choices and bodily autonomy, as stated in the AFL-CIO’s 2013 Constitutional Convention Resolution 18.

Race

Fifty years after the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, people of color in the United States still face discrimination. Weekly earnings of African American workers still are only 79.3% of those of white workers,

and Latino workers lag even further behind, making only 73.9% of white workers' earnings.²⁹

Various factors contribute to this inequity, including disparate access to resources like high-quality public education and health care and the mass incarceration of young men of color. At the end of 2012, more than 6.9 million people were under the supervision of adult correctional facilities.³⁰ Of that population, more than 2.2 million were in prison or jail.³¹

Immigration

Immigrants should not be made to live and work in fear, and should have the same workplace protections as workers born in the United States. A strong and vibrant democracy cannot function unless all men and women living and working within its borders, regardless of skin color or place of birth, can participate meaningfully in the democratic process, with full rights and equal protections. Our country and economy are strongest when no group of workers is exploited. And the union movement is strongest when it is open to all workers regardless of where they were born.

Any immigration reform must include a road map to citizenship for those who want it and ensure all immigrants are treated fairly at the workplace and need not fear retaliation from their employers for seeking to enforce their rights. Workers with work permits and guestworker visas should not be subjected to lower work standards simply due to their immigration status. Legally sanctioned programs that allow employers to pay immigrant workers lower wages are unacceptable, both because they are discriminatory and because they lower standards for all workers.

Additionally, undocumented youth must be allowed to pursue higher education with the same benefits as other students. States should lift restrictions barring undocumented youths from accessing in-state tuition and allow undocumented students access to state-based financial aid.

Finally, deportations must be brought to an end. There is nothing to be gained by separating families and sending people back to countries they do not know or where they are in danger.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex

While marriage equality is important, it cannot be the end of the battle for equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer and intersex people.

LGBTQI people who are not protected by collective bargaining agreements are especially vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in the workplace due to failure of current federal legislation to cover sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in existing anti-discrimination law. Because same-sex marriage is not fully recognized in many places, employers are not required to extend benefits to employees with same-sex spouses or partners the way they must do for employees in heterosexual marriages or partnerships.

At its 2013 convention, the AFL-CIO amended its constitution to include gender identity and expression among its protected classes, and passed a resolution to continue its strong support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. We will fight to ensure our queer brothers and sisters are treated as equals at work and under the law.

7 We will partner with the labor movement to invest in its future and in the economy by engaging and developing leaders among young workers.

Through collective action, especially through unions, workers have greater power to advocate for better policies in workplaces and in the law. By organizing or joining unions, young workers will be empowered to fight for and achieve the changes they desire at work, in their communities and in the law.

Attracting new members to unions is necessary for the survival of the labor movement. And for young workers to again see unions as relevant and attractive, unions must meet young workers where they are and address their needs and interests. Therefore, the AFL-CIO and affiliate unions must develop youth-oriented strategic initiatives that embrace young workers, their lifestyles, careers, work styles and values.

Over the last four years, the AFL-CIO's NextUp program has developed a network of young worker organizations across the country; partnered with its affiliates to strengthen young worker programming; and hosted conferences and leadership institutes to develop leadership at all levels of the labor movement.

Resolution 19, adopted at the 2013 AFL-CIO Convention, recognized the importance of union young worker programs and the need for programs and policies at all levels of the labor movement, including national, state and local initiatives. The National Young Worker Advisory Council will partner with the AFL-CIO State Federation and Central Labor Council Advisory Committee to fold young worker development into state federation and labor council strategic plans, with the goal of tripling the number of local young worker organizations over the next four years.

In addition to attracting new members through workplace organizing, the AFL-CIO committed to actively reaching out to existing youth organizations and community groups, not just to move its economic

policy agenda, but also to raise the profile of the labor movement among activist youth who may not be currently connected to the movement.

Digital strategies and social media communications are important tools in accomplishing our outreach goals. Tools including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and listservs expand outreach and strengthen our communications. The AFL-CIO, its affiliates, central labor councils and state federations all must commit to gaining and improving skills in digital outreach and communications as a way to improve organizing and public relations.

The AFL-CIO Youth Economic Policy Forum was a first step in addressing the needs and concerns of today's young workers. The Young Worker Advisory Council and the AFL-CIO will continue to consult with young members and partner with youth organizations to understand and elevate the concerns of young workers, and to empower them to find and implement the solutions to the economic struggles faced by their generation and the entire country.

This generation is the generation that will make the changes that need to be made.

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