# AFF

### My value is morality for two reasons

1) The resolution’s use of the word ought implies a moral obligation

2) Morality allows us to perceive what is inherently good or bad. It’s the value upon which we can conceptualize all other values, thus it must be prioritized.

### My criterion is minimizing structural violence

**Structural violence outweighs all impacts – it destroys access and overwhelms individual’s abilities to live**

Ansell 17 (David A. Ansell, Senior Vice President, Associate Provost for Community Health Equity, and Michael E. Kelly Professor of Medicine at Rush University Medical Center (Chicago), holds an M.D. from the State University of New York Upstate Medical University College of Medicine, 2017, “American Roulette,” The Death Gap: How Inequality Kills, Published by the University of Chicago Press, ISBN 9780226428291, p. kindle 307-363)

There are many different kinds of violence. Some are obvious: punches, attacks, gunshots, explosions. These are the kinds of interpersonal violence that we tend to hear about in the news. Other kinds of violence are intimate and emotional. But the deadliest and most thoroughgoing kind of violence is woven into the fabric of American society. It exists when some groups have more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, including health and life itself. This violence delivers specific blows against particular bodies in particular neighborhoods. This unequal advantage and violence is built into the very rules that govern our society. In the absence of this violence, large numbers of Americans would be able to live fuller and longer lives. This kind of violence is called structural violence, because it is embedded in the very laws, policies, and rules that govern day-to-day life.8 It is the cumulative impact of laws and social and economic policies and practices that render some Americans less able to access resources and opportunities than others. This inequity of advantage is not a result of the individual’s personal abilities but is built into the systems that govern society. Often it is a product of racism, gender, and income inequality. The diseases and premature mortality that Windora and many of my patients experienced were, in the words of Dr. Paul Farmer, “biological reflections of social fault lines.”9 As a result of these fault lines, a disproportional burden of illness, suffering, and premature mortality falls on certain neighborhoods, like Windora’s. Structural violence can overwhelm an individual’s ability to live a free, unfettered, healthy life. As I ran to evaluate Windora, I knew that her stroke was caused in part by lifelong exposure to suffering, racism, and economic deprivation. Worse, the poverty of West Humboldt Park that contributed to her illness is directly and inextricably related to the massive concentration of wealth and power in other neighborhoods just miles away in Chicago’s Gold Coast and suburbs. That concentration of wealth could not have occurred without laws, policies, and practices that favored some at the expense of others. Those laws, policies, and practices could not have been passed or enforced if access to political and economic power had not been concentrated in the hands of a few. Yet these political and economic structures have become so firmly entrenched (in habits, social relations, economic arrangements, institutional practices, law, and policy) that they have become part of the matrix of American society. The rules that govern day-to-day life were written to benefit a small elite at the expense of people like Windora and her family. These rules and structures are powerful destructive forces. The same structures that render life predictable, secure, comfortable, and pleasant for many destroy the lives of others like Windora through suffering, poverty, ill health, and violence.

### Contention 1- Poverty

#### *Striketober* has seen a massive increase in labor activity but it’s not sustainable

Greenhouse 21, 10-23-2021, "‘Striketober’ is showing workers’ rising power – but will it lead to lasting change?," https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/23/striketober-unions-strikes-workers-lasting-change US labor unions have been on the defensive for decades but this October JW

there has been a surprising burst of worker militancy and strikes as workers have gone on the offensive to demand more. Experts are predicting more actions to come but whether “Striketober” can lead to permanent change remains an open question. The scale of industrial action is truly remarkable. Ten thousand John Deere workers have gone on strike, 1,400 Kellogg workers have walked out, as well as a walkout threatened by more than 30,000 Kaiser Permanente workers, all inflamed by a profound disconnect between labor and management. Many frontline workers – after working so hard and risking their lives during the pandemic – say they deserve substantial raises along with lots of gratitude. With this in mind and with myriad employers complaining of a labor shortage, many workers believe it’s an opportune time to demand more and go on strike. It doesn’t hurt that there’s a strongly pro-union president in the White House and there’s more public support for unions than in decades. But some corporations are acting as if nothing has changed and they can continue corporate America’s decades-long practice of squeezing workers and demanding concessions, even after corporate profits have soared. This attitude doesn’t sit well with Chris Laursen, who earns $20.82 an hour after 19 years at Deere’s farm equipment factory in Ottumwa, Iowa. Laursen is upset that Deere is offering just a one-dollar-an-hour raise and wants to eliminate pensions for future hires even when Deere anticipates a record $5.7bn in profits this year, more than double last year’s earnings. “We were deemed essential workers right out of the gate,” Laursen said, noting that many workers racked up lots of overtime during the pandemic. “But then they came with an offer that was appallingly low. It was a slap in the face of the workers who created all the wealth for them.” Many Deere workers complain that the company offered only a 12% raise over six years, which they say won’t keep pace with inflation, even as the CEO’s pay rose 160% last year to $16m and dividends were raised 17%. Deere’s workers voted down the company’s offer by 90% before they went on strike at 14 factories on 14 October, their first walkout in 35 years. “We really showed up during the pandemic and kept building equipment for them,” Laursen said. “Now we want something back. The stars are finally lined up for us, and we had to bring the fight.” Thomas Kochan, an MIT professor of industrial relations, agreed that it was a favorable time for workers – many corporations have substantially increased pay in response to the labor shortage. “It’s clear that workers are much more empowered,” he said. “They’re empowered because of the labor shortage.” Kochan added: “These strikes could easily trigger more strike activity if several are successful or perceived to be successful.” Robert Bruno, a labor relations professor at the University of Illinois, said workers have built up a lot of grievances and anger during the pandemic, after years of seeing scant improvement in pay and benefits. Bruno pointed to a big reason for the growing worker frustration: “You can definitely see that American capitalism has reigned supreme over workers, and as a result, the incentive for companies is to continue to do what’s been working for them. It’s likely that an arrogance sets in where companies think that’s going to last for ever, and maybe they don’t read the times properly.” Kevin Bradshaw, a striker at Kellogg’s factory in Memphis, said the cereal maker was being arrogant and unappreciative. During the pandemic, he said, Kellogg employees often worked 30 days in a row, often in 12-hour or 16-hour shifts. In light of this hard work, he derided Kellogg’s contract offer, which calls for a far lower scale for new hires. “Kellogg is offering a $13 cut in top pay for new workers,” Bradshaw said. “They want a permanent two-tier. New employees will no longer receive the same amount of money and benefits we do.” That, he said, is bad for the next generation of workers. Bradshaw, vice-president of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union local, noted that it made painful concessions to Kellogg in 2015. “We gave so many concessions, and now they’re saying they need more,” he said. “This is a real smack in the face during the pandemic. Everyone knows that they’re greedy and not needy.” Kellogg said its compensation is among the industry’s best and its offer will help the company meet competitive challenges. Deere said it was determined to reach an agreement and continue to make its workers “the highest paid employees in the agriculture industry”. There are many strikes beyond Deere and Kellogg. More than 400 workers at the Heaven Hill bourbon distillery in Kentucky have been on strike for six weeks, while roughly 1,000 Warrior Met coalminers in Alabama have been on strike since April. Hundreds of nurses at Mercy hospital in Buffalo went on strike on 1 October, and 450 steelworkers at Special Metals in Huntington, West Virginia, also walked out that day. More than 30,000 nurses and other healthcare professionals at Kaiser Permanente on the west coast have voted to authorize a strike. Sixty thousand Hollywood production employees threatened to go on strike last Monday, unhappy that film and TV companies were not taking their concerns about overwork and exhaustion seriously. But seeing that the union was serious about staging its first-ever strike, Hollywood producers flinched, agreed to compromises, and the two sides reached a settlement. Noting that Kaiser Permanente, a non-profit, had amassed $45bn in reserves, Belinda Redding, a Kaiser nurse in Woodland Hills, California, said, “We’ve been going all out during the pandemic. We’ve been working extra shifts. Our lives have been turned upside down. The signs were up all over saying, ‘Heroes Work Here’. And the pandemic isn’t even over for us, and then for them to offer us a 1% raise, it’s almost a slap in the face.” Redding is also fuming that management has proposed hiring new nurses at 26% less pay than current ones earn – which she said would ensure a shortage of nurses. “It’s hard to imagine a nurse giving her all when she’s paid far less than other nurses,” Redding said. Kaiser said that its employees earn 26% more than average market wages and that its services would become unaffordable unless it restrains labor costs. On a smaller scale but in an industry in increasing demand, striking workers at one of the world’s largest bourbon producers were scheduled to vote on a new contract on Saturday, a day after announcing a tentative agreement with Heaven Hill, the producer of Evan Williams bourbon. About 420 members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 23D went on strike about six weeks ago, forming picket lines at the company’s operations in Bardstown, Kentucky, with the dispute revolving around healthcare and scheduling. Meanwhile, many non-union workers – frequently dismayed with low pay, volatile schedules and poor treatment – have quit their jobs or refused to return to their old ones after being laid off during the pandemic. In August, 4.2 million workers quit their jobs, part of what has been called the Great Resignation. Some economists have suggested this is a quiet general strike with workers demanding better pay and conditions. “People are using exit from their jobs as a source of power,” Kochan said. As for unionized workers, some labor experts see parallels between today’s burst of strikes and the much larger wave of strikes after the first and second world wars. As with the pandemic, those catastrophic wars caused many Americans to reassess their lives and jobs and ask: after what we’ve been through, don’t we deserve better pay and conditions? Professor Bruno said that in light of today’s increased worker militancy, unionized employers would have to rethink their approach to bargaining “and take the rank and file pretty seriously”. They can no longer expect workers to roll over or to strong-arm them into swallowing concessions, often by threatening to move operations overseas. Bruno questioned whether the surge in strikes will be long-lasting. He predicts that the improvements in pay and job quality will be long-lasting, adding that that was more likely than unions substantially increasing their membership. He said that if workers see others winning better wages and conditions through strikes, that will raise unions’ visibility and lead to more workers voting to join unions. Despite the recent turbulence, Ruth Milkman, a sociologist of labor at City University of New York, foresees a return to the status quo. “I think things will go back to where they were once things settle down,” she said. “The labor shortage is not necessarily going to last.” She sees the number of strikes declining once the labor shortage ends. In her view, union membership isn’t likely to increase markedly because “they’re not doing that much organizing. “There’s a little” – like the unionization efforts at Starbucks in Buffalo and at Amazon – “but it’s not as if there’s some big push.” A big question, Milkman said, was how can today’s labor momentum be sustained? She said it would help if Congress passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, which would make it easier to unionize workers. That law would spur unions to do more organizing and increase their chances of winning union drives. “That would be a real shot in the arm,” Milkman said

#### Strikes increase wages but institutional support is necessary

Bahn 19, 8-29-2019, "The once and future role of strikes in ensuring U.S. worker power," Equitable Growth, <https://equitablegrowth.org/the-once-and-future-role-of-strikes-in-ensuring-u-s-worker-power/> JW

In the United States, Labor Day, which falls on the first Monday of September, is when we honor the history of the U.S. labor movement in striving for benefits and empowerment of workers across the economy. Strikes play an important role in empowering workers vis-à-vis their employers. By withdrawing their labor power, workers are able to balance the scales against the owners of capital, who rely on workers for production and providing services. Strikes have declined in frequency, popularity, and success over the past four decades, yet today, amid rising economic inequality, they are once again becoming an important tool in exercising worker power to ensure that the gains of profitability and economic growth can be broadly shared. Washington University in St. Louis sociologist Jake Rosenfeld examines the role of work stoppages in his recent book [What Unions No Longer Do](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674725119), and finds that strikes at large firms began declining in the mid-1970s, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Work Stoppages file. Rosenfeld then digs deeper to estimate the trends of strikes at firms both large and small by calculating a broader measure using data from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service from 1984 to 2002. He finds a peak in strikes in the late 1980s and then a stark decline after. The decline of strikes is a result of a variety of factors. One is the increased use of replacement hires, especially after [the PATCO strike of 1981](https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/05/reagan-fires-11-000-striking-air-traffic-controllers-aug-5-1981-241252), when President Ronald Reagan summarily fired 11,000 air traffic controllers who were striking for higher pay and a reduced work week. President Reagan quickly replaced those striking workers with 4,000 air traffic control supervisors and Army members, sending a powerful message to U.S. workers about the use of strikes in labor disputes. But even before this historic turning point, [the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947](https://www.nlrb.gov/about-nlrb/who-we-are/our-history/1947-taft-hartley-passage-and-nlrb-structural-changes) limited the ability of workers to strike. This included restrictions on [secondary boycotts and picketing](https://www.nlrb.gov/rights-we-protect/whats-law/unions/secondary-boycotts-section-8b4), both of which make striking especially difficult in today’s increasingly fissured workplace, where you cannot strike against the corporation that is at least partly responsible for your workplace conditions but not technically your direct employer. For example, workers at the franchises of McDonald’s Corporation who attempt to unionize are not protected by the Fair Labor Standards Act when picketing against McDonald’s because they are, most commonly, the employees of a franchisor, rather than of the main corporation. These factors, along with a general increasing [business hostility toward unions](https://onlabor.org/captive-audience-meetings-a-backgrounder/) and lack of enforcement of labor protections, have ultimately made strikes less effective as a tool for collective bargaining in the United States. At the same time, there is an increasing consensus today that unions are a positive force for increasing worker power and [balancing against economic inequality](https://equitablegrowth.org/examining-the-links-between-rising-wage-inequality-and-the-decline-of-unions/). In polling of support for unions and specific aspects of collective bargaining, Equitable Growth grantee Alex Hertel-Fernandez of Columbia University, along with William Kimball and Thomas Kochan of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, find that [support for unions](https://equitablegrowth.org/what-kind-of-labor-organizations-do-u-s-workers-want/) has grown overall, with nearly half of U.S. workers in 2018 saying they would vote for a union if given the opportunity. This is a significant increase from one-third of workers supporting unionization in 1995. According to their research, workers primarily value unions’ role in collective bargaining and ensuring access to benefits such as healthcare, retirement, and unemployment insurance. Strikes have historically been one of the strongest tools used by unions to ensure they have power to engage in collective bargaining. But striking was viewed as a negative attribute in the survey done by Hertel-Fernandez, Kimball, and Kochan. Yet, when they presented workers with the hypothetical choice of a union exercising strike power with other attributes of unions, such as collective bargaining, support increased. But strikes, of course, do not take place in a bubble. The wider climate of worker bargaining power and institutions that support labor organizing plays a role in making this historically crucial tool effective again. So, too, does the power of employers to resist these organizing efforts when the labor market lacks competition that would increase worker bargaining power. [Monopsony power](https://equitablegrowth.org/understanding-the-importance-of-monopsony-power-in-the-u-s-labor-market/) is a situation in the labor market where individual employers exercise effective control over wage setting rather than wages being set by competitive forces (akin to monopoly power, where a limited number of firms exercise pricing power over their customers.) In a new Equitable Growth [working paper](https://equitablegrowth.org/working-papers/how-does-market-power-affect-wages-monopsony-and-collective-action-in-an-institutional-context/) by Mark Paul of New College of Florida and Mark Stelzner of Connecticut College, the role of collective action in offsetting employer monopsony power is examined in the context of institutional support for labor. Paul and Stelzner construct an abstract model with the assumption of monopsonistic markets and follow the originator of monopsony theory Joan Robinson’s insight that unions can serve as a countervailing power against employer power. Their model shows that institutional support for unions, such as legislation protecting the right to organize, is necessary for this dynamic process of balancing employers’ monopsony power. In an accompanying [column](https://equitablegrowth.org/rethinking-collective-action-and-u-s-labor-laws-in-a-monopsonistic-economy/), the two researchers write that they “find that a lack of institutional support will devastate unions’ ability to function as a balance to firms’ monopsony power, potentially with major consequences … In turn, labor market outcomes will be less socially efficient.” In short, policies and enforcement that support collective action such as strikes not only creates benefits for workers directly but also addresses a larger problem of concentrated market power. Within the past few years, strikes have been revived as a bargaining tool. “Red for Ed” became the name referring to teachers strikes that took place across traditionally conservative right-to-work states. Beginning with the closure of all schools in West Virginia in 2018 following 20,000 teachers across the state walking out, this movement spread to Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, and Colorado, among other places. These strikes were led by rank-and-file union members, rather than by union leadership, rendering them illegal under the Taft-Hartley Act, which prohibits so-called wildcat strikes. These strikes led to [significant gains](https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/29/us/what-teachers-won-and-lost/index.html) for these public-sector workers through organizing against policymakers rather than direct management. Before Red for Ed, the “Fight for Fifteen” movement starting in 2012 and “OUR Walmart” starting in 2010 exemplified labor organizing in new mediums by conducting worker-led actions against large corporations that directly employ or control the employment (as in the franchisor-franchisee model) of low-wage workers. The efforts of [Fight for Fifteen](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/nyregion/15-minimum-wage-new-york.html) directly impacted New York state’s minimum wage increase to $15 per hour and has paved the way for a national movement for a higher minimum wage. OUR Walmart led [walkouts and Black Friday protests](https://www.thenation.com/article/great-walmart-walkout/) in the years leading up to [Walmart’s decision to increase wages](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/walmarts-hourly-wages-for-employees-will-go-beyond-15-probably-over-time-ceo-doug-mc-millon-160008612.html). Many structural changes, such as the fissuring of the workplace, have reduced the ability of private-sector unions to make gains against employers, yet these strikes and labor actions represent an opportunity for growth. With the U.S. labor market increasingly dominated by the services sector, these strikes were conducted by workers whose jobs cannot move elsewhere and whose work we interact with in our daily lives. Ruth Milkman of the City University of New York [describes these labor actions](https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/LISCenter/2019%20Inequality%20by%20the%20Numbers/Instructor%20Readings/Milkman-2.pdf) as similar to those that existed before the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 protected the right strike (before these rights were subsequently chipped away by the Taft-Hartley Act 20 years later) in order to unionize. With popular and successful strikes in unexpected places, what will the role of strikes be in the future? Will workers continue recognize the strength of the strike and other labor actions, and will policymakers and enforcers make it a successful tool for increasing worker bargaining power? Research by Alex Hertel-Fernandez, Suresh Naidu, and Adam Reich of Columbia University [looked at](https://onlabor.org/polling-the-teacher-walkouts-strong-support-for-the-teachers-unions-and-future-labor-action/) the response to strikes following the Red for Ed movement in conservative states and found that residents of areas affected by the teacher walkouts broadly supported the strikes, with 39 percent saying they strongly supported the walkouts and another 27 percent somewhat in support of the walkouts, including half of self-identified Republicans supporting the strikes. What’s more, the three researchers found that families that learned about them from their teachers or directly from the union had even stronger support for the strikes, compared to those who learned about them from other sources, such as talk radio. First-hand knowledge of strikes increases support for them. In addition to Hertel-Fernandez’s work showing broad support for unions generally and increasing support for bold labor actions, more policymakers and advocates are providing much-needed proposals on how to foster a robust U.S. labor market and strengthen institutions that would make collective action more successful. Emblematic of this is Harvard Law’s Labor and Worklife Program’s [Clean Slate Project](https://lwp.law.harvard.edu/clean-slate-project), led by Sharon Block and Ben Sachs of Harvard University, which gathers academic experts and labor organizers to develop strong proposals that would increase worker bargaining power. Multiple 2020 presidential campaigns have followed suit, with new proposals to boost unions. Unions in the United States are at their [lowest level of density](https://www.hamiltonproject.org/papers/the_shift_in_private_sector_union_participation_explanations_and_effects) since they became legal around 80 years ago, with 6.4 percent of private-sector workers in unions today. Yet there is increasing energy for bringing back this crucial force to balance the power of capital and ensure the fruits of economic growth are more broadly shared among everyone who creates it. Strikes are a compelling tool for dealing with [rising U.S. income and wealth inequality](https://equitablegrowth.org/the-federal-reserves-new-distributional-financial-accounts-provide-telling-data-on-growing-u-s-wealth-and-income-inequality/)—just as they were in an earlier era of economic inequality, when unions first gained their legal stature in the U.S. labor market.

#### **Crackdown on strikes in the past has proved catastrophic**

Jacobs 16, 2-3-2016, "Rising US income inequality was fueled by Reagan’s attacks on unions, and continued by Clinton’s financial deregulation," Work in Progress, <https://workinprogress.oowsection.org/2016/02/03/rising-us-income-inequality-was-fueled-by-reagans-attacks-on-unions-and-continued-by-clintons-financial-deregulation/> JW

What factors best explain the remarkable expansion in U.S. income inequality?  In a striking re­ver­sal in the long trend toward greater economic equality in the affluent democracies since 1900, the dif­fer­enc­es in U.S. family incomes accelerated sharply after 1980 (see Fig­ure 1) after experiencing only modest growth.  This de­par­ture, although present in other wealthy demo­cracies, has been less pro­noun­ced else­where.  Yet as the quotes above suggest, it is difficult to be­lieve that po­litics did not have a major influence on the rapid increase in income inequality after 1980.  To date, however, little syste­matic evidence for such a claim has been avail­able.  Yet political ac­counts are likely to mat­ter more in some per­iods as gov­ern­mental con­trol shifts from one political party to another. With these as­sumptions in mind, Lindsey My­ers and I con­ducted a longitudinal analysis of the factors that pro­duced yearly changes in family in­come inequality from 1951 to 2010. We find that the steep decline in union strength and deregulation of the financial industry that occurred after Ronald Reagan’s presidency began in 1981 has contributed to the stagnation of middle incomes and the rise of income inequality. One determinant of income inequality that is highly dependent on political decisions is union strength.  In a prior [study](http://asr.sagepub.com/content/74/5/842.abstract), Daniel Tope and I analyzed changes in union recognition elec­tions that de­ter­­mine if a U.S. work place will be unionized.  We found that soon after Ron­ald Reagan became president, a pre­cipitous decline occurred in these elec­tions (see Figure 2)—which are reg­ul­ated by the National Labor Relations Board, under close presi­dential control.  Why would union strength mea­sured by the per­cen­tage of union members matter?  Stronger unions decrease the differences in earnings within firms.  And be­fore the po­li­ti­cal­ly in­duc­ed steep decline in union strength that began in 1981, unions probably were the most ef­fec­tive pressure group that lobbied for policies helpful to less economically for­tunate U.S. citi­zens. In light of President Reagan’s aversion to unions and his distaste for political attempts to protect less prosperous citizens from destructive labor market changes, we suspected that we would find evidence for two conditional poli­tical relationships.  First, increased union strength be­fore Rea­gan’s presidency should reduce income in­equal­ity after adjusting for other determin­ants, but union strength should not matter dur­ing and after the Reagan administration’s tenure be­cause the then politically weakened unions no longer had much political in­flu­ence.  Second, Reagan’s resolute anti-union stance was partly based on sympathy for policies that ad­vantaged his political party’s affluent base.  These citizens wish to avoid higher taxes and often profit from cheap labor.  For example, findings show that tax po­li­­cies most helpful to the pros­per­ous—that at least indirectly increased tax burdens on oth­er citi­zens—became in­creas­ingly like­­ly after Republican presidents took office.  Republican macro­eco­no­mic poli­cies also favored the affluent by stressing curbs on inflation at the expense of high­er un­em­ploy­ment.  Such predi­lections enhanced the economic distance be­tween the least af­fluent—who suf­fer more from job­less­ness—and their more fortunate counterparts.  Be­cause the Rea­gan neo­liberal departure—which was endorsed by subsequent Republican presidents—in­creased the economic and political re­sources of bus­iness and the affluent, we expected to find that the pre­sence of Re­pub­lican ad­min­­istrations dur­ing and after Reagan’s pre­si­dency would pro­duce additional in­creases in fam­ily in­come in­equality. Our results support both hypotheses.  After many competing expla­na­tions are taken into ac­count, our findings suggest that in the per­iod before Rea­gan’s presidency, a 10 percent increase in union strength would have produced about a 2.7 percent decrease in in­come in­equal­ity.  Yet during and after Reagan’s tenure, because he and subsequent neoliberal presidents decreased union strength, fluctuations in this strength had no effect on in­equal­ity.  And again after adjusting for many plau­sible accounts, our findings show that a shift to a post 1980 Re­pub­li­can president increased in­come in­equality by about 3 percent

### Contention 2- Economics

#### **Millions of people are miserable at their jobs, leading to unproductivity**

Kelly 19, 10-25-2019, "More Than Half Of U.S. Workers Are Unhappy In Their Jobs: Here’s Why And What Needs To Be Done Now," Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2019/10/25/more-than-half-of-us-workers-are-unhappy-in-their-jobs-heres-why-and-what-needs-to-be-done-now/>

America boasts the highest level of employment in decades. The stock market is booming, but something seems to be amiss. With an historic and robust economic expansion and the all good news surrounding it, there seems to be large cracks in the system. The mood, for a lot of people in the country, appears angry, discouraged and resentful. There are claims of income inequality and unfairness. Many people feel underemployed, stuck in their dead-end jobs and not earning close to what they’re worth. People working in the gig economy—not by choice, but due to lack of suitable opportunities—are demanding to be considered employees and paid fairly with additional benefits. These issues raise the question over how many people are actually in “good” jobs. The sentiments voiced by the people around us have now been substantiated by a comprehensive study conducted jointly by the [Lumina Foundation](https://www.luminafoundation.org/), the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](https://www.gatesfoundation.org/), [Omidyar Network](https://www.omidyar.com/), and [Gallup](https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx). These prestigious organizations surveyed 6,600 workers and asked them about the factors that matter most for overall job quality, including compensation, job security, opportunity for advancement, benefits, stability and dignity. The study collected these factors into a job satisfaction index.  The study tackles some severe issues. The workforce in the United States has been subjected to swift radical changes over the last decades, including automation, globalization and go-nowhere jobs. The metric of the unemployment rate is not the best gauge to evaluate how workers are doing. We have many open jobs available to bolster the ranks of the employed. However, the study questions whether they’re meaningful, suitable and high-quality jobs that offer satisfaction—or are they McJobs?   Sadly, only less than 50% of U.S. workers feel that they are in good jobs. There is a nexus between the quality of one’s job and the overall quality of a person’s life. While a number of workers in good, mediocre jobs rate their overall quality of life as “high,” most of those in bad jobs feel the contrary. People who are at a lower-income level are less likely to be satisfied with all 10 aspects of job quality, including those unrelated to income. Comparatively, older workers, white workers and people with higher levels of education are more likely to be in good jobs than other types of workers. Employees at various income levels share one important commonality—having a sense of purpose is prioritized and they don’t want “just a job.” There is a strong correlation between race, ethnicity, gender and job quality. Black working people are twice as likely to be in bad jobs compared to white working people. It is more pronounced for black women. Employees in bad jobs are twice as likely as those in good jobs to be looking for a new opportunity. Those who are satisfied in their job tend to be more productive and loyal to their employers.  The results show that despite a perceived strong economy, most people self-report that their job quality has stagnated or gotten worse on almost every aspect. The conclusion is that there are some people—particularly those who tend to have a higher level of education and earnings—  who are happy in their work and it transfers over to their lives outside of the office. Living in a smaller town with less pressure, shorter commutes and lower taxes where their money goes further make people feel that they hold quality jobs. Workers in jobs that lack purpose—without an upward career trajectory—and feel unappreciated by management rank their roles low in terms of quality. There are pressing concerns that the aforementioned trends of the deployment of technology, relocating jobs to other countries and the lack of stability will further degrade the quality of jobs at all levels. CEOs and management need to take heed. As it's reported, employees who feel uninspired and left out will not be very productive nor will they seek out a new job elsewhere. This would hurt the future growth of the companies. As the best talent leaves, the ones remaining will maintain their unhappiness. It would be prudent for executives to make the effort to improve the quality of jobs and empower their employees, which would then significantly improve conditions and the chance of future success for both the workers and the company.

#### **Raising Wages increases productivity, saving lives in the process**

Jayachandran 20, 6-18-2020, "How a Raise for Workers Can Be a Win for Everybody (Published 2020)," NY Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/business/coronavirus-minimum-wage-increase.html#:~:text=Economists%20say%20they%20have%20been,the%20improvements%20in%20patient%20health> JW

Two new studies show that giving pay raises to low-wage workers is good for consumers, too. That finding could add momentum to efforts to help grocery store clerks, nursing home workers and delivery drivers who are being paid a [minimum wage](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/25/us/politics/federal-minimum-wage.html) despite their efforts being so essential during the current pandemic. The new research shows that raising the [minimum wage](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/us/politics/republicans-minimum-wage.html) improves workers’ productivity, which translates into businesses offering higher-quality service. Because many customers are willing to pay more when quality improves, a company can raise its prices without losing sales volume. That means that profits need not suffer even though employee salaries increase. Moreover, because companies are getting better performance from workers in return for paying them more, a higher minimum wage does not necessarily lead to fewer jobs. With a more productive work force, more economic value is being created and there is more money to go around, so a higher paycheck for one person does not imply another person’s loss. The federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour has not increased since 2009, though Democrats in the House of Representatives have tried to raise it. State and local governments can set their own minimum wage, provided that it is above the federal rate. For example, [Ohio’s](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/minimum-wage/state) minimum wage is $8.70 an hour and [New York](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/13/business/economy/minimum-wage-new-york-pennsylvania.html)state’s is $11.80. [San Francisco’](https://sfgov.org/olse/minimum-wage-ordinance-mwo)s is $15.59 an hour. The two new studies, one focused on nursing homes and the other on department stores, looked at the effects of minimum wage changes made at various levels of government. While they are both still working papers and have not appeared in scholarly journals, they were conducted rigorously, by my estimation, and the evidence they offer deserves consideration in the debate on the minimum wage, particularly during our current health and economic crises. The nursing home study, by the economist Krista Ruffini, a [visiting scholar](https://www.minneapolisfed.org/institute/visiting-scholars) at the Minnesota Federal Reserve, has [direct implications](https://equitablegrowth.org/better-workplace-conditions-for-long-term-eldercare-staff-are-key-to-promoting-resident-safety-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic/) in the current pandemic. The improvements in quality it found may be a very a big deal: They imply fewer medical complications and, perhaps, a longer life for patients. Ms. Ruffini analyzed hundreds of increases in the minimum wage across the United States from 1990 to 2017. In each case, she compared employment in neighboring counties that suddenly had different minimum wage levels. Her method expands on a[landmark](https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/20/nyregion/high-new-jersey-minimum-wage-doesn-t-seem-to-deter-fast-food-hiring-study-finds.html) study by David Card, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, and [Alan Krueger](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/obituaries/alan-krueger-dead.html), the former presidential adviser and Princeton economist, who found no drop in fast-food employment when New Jersey raised its minimum wage in 1992 above the level paid across the state line in Pennsylvania. Similarly, Ms. Ruffini found little change in employment levels in nursing homes. Many employees were paid the minimum wage or somewhat more than that. Even in cases of the workers —[nursing assistants](https://www.bls.gov/OOH/healthcare/nursing-assistants.htm) — who had been paid more than the minimum wage, an increase in that base wage rippled through the labor market and still raised their salaries Ms. Ruffini’s most startling finding was that higher minimum wages reduced mortality significantly among nursing home residents. Her research suggests that if every county increased its minimum wage by 10 percent, there could be 15,000 fewer deaths in nursing homes each year, or about a 3 percent reduction. How did pay increases translate into better patient health and longer lives? It appears that with better pay, jobs in nursing homes became more attractive, so employee turnover decreased. Patients benefited from more continuity in their care. In addition, the better paid employees may have simply worked harder, perhaps because they cared more about holding onto their jobs. Economists say they have been paid an “efficiency wage”: Employees become more productive when their wages are higher. The higher wage may also have attracted more skilled or industrious people to the job, but this seems to account for at most a small portion of the improvements in patient health. A crucial finding is that the benefits for workers and patients did not come with any apparent downside to nursing homeowners. Their profits remained steady because they were able to defray their increased costs by charging higher fees. That’s one reason these results [might not apply in all industries](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20171445). There are few alternatives to using a nursing home, so if the industry raises prices, it will not lose too many customers. But, equally important, patients were not charged more for the same service: Quality improved in measurable ways as wages rose. What unlocked these gains was government action: All nursing homes in a community had to pay employees more. That eliminated competitive disparities that might have made individual operators reluctant to raise wages unilaterally. Similar effects turned up in a second study, this one focused on department stores. It found that a higher minimum wage increased employee performance, with no significant change in store profits. A team of economists — Decio Coviello at the University of Montreal and my colleagues, Erika Deserranno and Nicola Persico at Northwestern University — used data for 2012 to 2015 from a department store chain that operated 2,000 stores across the United States. They did not disclose the name of the chain. The researchers measured job performance directly by calculating sales revenue per hour. Each week, an employee was paid either a commission, if her sales were good, or the local minimum wage. Most workers were paid the minimum wage at least some of the time. When the minimum wage increased, their job performance improved. The study has an important implication during a crisis like this one: When the labor market was weakest, a higher minimum wage led to the biggest improvements in job performance. A period of economic distress is precisely when workers really want to hold onto their jobs, so the “efficiency wage” effect is large. Supporters of raising the minimum wage usually make their case based on fairness and equity. That rationale is important, but the central finding of these studies — that a higher minimum wage can boost work force productivity and save lives — is a powerful one, too.

#### **Raising wages saves the economy, leading to pre-pandemic work levels and solves for structural violence**

Schweitzer and Ross 21, 11-3-2021, "Higher Minimum Wages Support Job Growth as the Economy Recovers From COVID-19," Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/> JW

Many business owners and executives seem to share the belief that everyone is paid the true value of their work, whether that is $30 million a year or $7.25 an hour. In that vein, they often argue that minimum wage laws set an unnatural price floor that prevents people who would be willing to work for less from doing so, ultimately increasing business expenses and costing millions of jobs.[1](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-1) This argument conveniently ignores the human needs for food, shelter, and financial security that leave workers with little choice but to accept poverty wages in a society that does not adequately provide any of these basic needs.[2](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-2) Indeed, the U.S. economy largely rewards those same business owners with extraordinary profits garnered directly from the exploitation of desperate low-income individuals and families. Yet countless studies show that increases to minimum wages have not resulted in massive job losses.[3](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-3) While the federal minimum wage in the United States has been stuck at $7.25 for more than 12 years—losing 21 percent of its value during that time due to inflation[4](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-4)—many states and cities have raised their own minimum wages above the federal level without suffering serious setbacks to their economies.[5](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-5) Several states have also eliminated the tipped minimum wage, which has remained at $2.13 per hour federally since 1991, increasing pay and reducing poverty among workers in tipped industries.[6](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-6) This is particularly important given that tipped minimum wages are rooted in a history of racism and sexism[7](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-7) and subject many tipped workers to abusive working conditions. For months, U.S. employers—particularly those in the low-wage service industry—have complained of “labor shortages,”[9](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-9) laying most of the blame on the enhanced unemployment benefits that were passed under the American Rescue Plan and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. However, numerous studies and recent data show that unemployment insurance did not significantly discourage people from seeking or taking good jobs,[10](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-10) but actually stimulated the economy to the tune of billions of dollars in consumer spending.[11](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-11) Rather than an unwillingness to work, the so-called labor shortage has been driven by the ongoing pandemic,[12](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-12) a lack of affordable and accessible child care,[13](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-13) the market’s difficulty matching workers with the right employers,[14](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-14) and the need for better pay and working conditions.[15](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-15) Many businesses have found attracting workers much easier after [improving](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/20/dining/restaurant-wages.html)conditions and increasing wages.[16](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-16) In reality, the story of the U.S. economy in 2021 is not about a shortage of workers, but a shortage of good jobs. Employment in the predominantly low-wage leisure and hospitality industry has recovered faster in states that guarantee better pay for low-wage workers. A new analysis presented in this issue brief shows that having higher minimum wages and eliminating subminimum wages has not hindered job growth. Indeed, employment in the predominantly low-wage leisure and hospitality industry has recovered faster in states that guarantee better pay for low-wage workers. The fact of the matter is that successful businesses in the United States can easily afford to pay a living wage to all of their workers without being significantly harmed financially. One way to ensure better wages in leisure and hospitality and all industries throughout the country is for Congress to pass the Raise the Wage Act.[17](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-17) Under this bill, workers would receive a minimum wage of $15 per hour after several years of gradual increases, indexed to median wages thereafter; additionally, subminimum wages for tipped, disabled, and temporary teenage workers would increase over several years until they equal the default minimum wage.[18](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-18) States also have the ability to bring pay for workers up to a truly livable standard by passing their own versions of the Raise the Wage Act, as Delaware did this year by increasing its minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2025 The leisure and hospitality industry, which includes a high number of front-line workers vulnerable to COVID-19 exposure, was devastated by the onset of the pandemic. Between February 2020 and April 2020, the industry lost 8.2 million jobs, or 49 percent of its prepandemic total—significantly more than any other industry.[20](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-20),” available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=HEJf> (last accessed October 2021).] But widespread vaccine distribution beginning in early 2021 sparked a sustained nationwide economic recovery, growing employment between January 2021 and September 2021 by 3.4 percent overall;[21](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-21),” available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=HEJ2> (last accessed October 2021).] in leisure and hospitality, employment grew by 16.8 percent, or 2.2 million jobs, in that time.[22](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-22).”] However, job growth in leisure and hospitality has varied significantly across states, particularly when comparing by minimum wage and tipped minimum wage levels. As shown in Figure 1, states with higher minimum wages have seen faster job growth in the leisure and hospitality industry since January 2021. States with a minimum wage of more than $12 an hour saw industrywide employment growth of 25 percent, compared with only 7 percent growth in states still using the federal minimum of $7.25. Although there was some variation from state to state, there is a clear trend that states with higher minimum wages have seen more job growth. Similarly, Figure 2 shows that states that have already eliminated the tipped minimum wage had faster job growth in the leisure and hospitality industry than states that still retained subminimum wages for tipped workers. States without a tipped minimum wage had 29 percent growth in leisure and hospitality jobs between January and September of this year, while states using the federal tipped minimum of $2.13 only grew by 6 percent over the same period In many ways, the leisure and hospitality industry is the poster child for low-quality jobs. It is by far the lowest-paying industry, with an average wage for production and nonsupervisory employees of $14.91 per hour as of February 2020, which was more than $6 less than the next lowest-paid industry of trade, transportation, and utilities.[23](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-23) Benefits, too, are minimal and harder to come by: Only half of leisure and hospitality workers receive paid sick leave, and just 32 percent have access to health care benefits.[24](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-24) Wage theft, exploitive scheduling, and abuses such as sexual harassment are also rampant in the industry.[25](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-25) In the new economic reality created by COVID-19, $15 an hour is quickly becoming the minimum expectation for workers, especially for those in undesirable and even dangerous front-line jobs.[26](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-26) Since the start of the recovery in January 2021, average wages have been increasing across all industries, but especially in leisure and hospitality.[27](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-27) Newfound worker power resulting from the high demand for labor and changing standards for acceptable work conditions[28](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-28) have pushed businesses across the country to improve their compensation, incentives, qualification expectations, and work environments to attract and retain workers.[29](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-29) For example, some restaurants are now paying tipped employees a full minimum wage or higher, allowing workers to keep tips on top of that hourly rate.[30](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-30) While many low-wage employers have had to raise wages to attract workers during the economic recovery, businesses in states that already had higher minimum wages were able to staff up faster than those in lower-wage states, likely in part because businesses in higher-wage states did not have to raise pay by nearly as much to reach a sufficient wage offer. Likewise, in the eight states[31](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-31) that have eliminated the tipped minimum wage, businesses have more experience operating profitably in an environment where workers do not want their livelihoods to be totally reliant on customers’ generosity. Other factors, such as vaccine take-up rates, have likely affected job growth and the economic recovery as well. This analysis found some correlation between higher minimum wages and vaccination rates among states, although not between subminimum wages and vaccination rates. However, vaccination rates alone only partially explain the divergence in economic recoveries. States with higher and more equitable minimum wages are projected to surpass pre-COVID-19 employment sooner Furthermore, despite losing a greater percentage of jobs at the start of the pandemic, states that guarantee higher wages for low-income workers are on pace to surpass their pre-COVID-19 leisure and hospitality employment levels months before the lower-wage states, as figures 3 and 4 show below. States that guarantee higher wages for low-income workers are on pace to surpass their pre-COVID-19 leisure and hospitality employment levels months before lower-wage states. Based on the current trend of job growth in leisure and hospitality since January 2021, states with a minimum wage greater than $12 an hour would be expected to surpass their pre-COVID-19 employment levels in the industry by July 2022. States with a minimum wage between $10.01 and $12 an hour would be projected to reach pre-COVID-19 levels in August 2022. Meanwhile, states using the federal minimum of $7.25 would not reach prepandemic employment levels in leisure and hospitality until November 2022, and states with a minimum wage between $7.26 and $10 would not get there until December of next year. These estimations assume that current trends hold, without any major economic disruptions in the coming months. Nonetheless, the data so far are clear: Having higher minimum wages, and eliminating subminimum wages, has not impeded employment growth and, in fact, can play an important role in helping businesses attract and retain workers while supporting a thriving economy. Dispelling myths about raising the minimum wage Even though higher wages have not resulted in a wave of business closures, critics of raising the minimum wage and eliminating subminimum wages—namely business associations and conservative research and advocacy organizations—argue that doing so would result in massive layoffs and price hikes.[33](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-33) However, these arguments and potential negative effects are greatly exaggerated. Opponents of a $15 minimum wage often refer to a report from the U.S. Congressional Budget Office that estimates increasing the wage to that level would reduce employment by 0.9 percent, or 1.4 million workers, by 2025.[34](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-34) The report has since drawn criticism from economists who believe it overstates the potential job losses by placing heavier weight on studies that found more negative impacts, and that a more accurate estimate of job losses would be less than 500,000.[35](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-35) This is consistent with recent research trends that have found minimum wage increases to have little or no negative impact on employment,[36](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-36) and that any decline in income from potential employment loss would be more than offset by the greater earnings of millions of low-wage workers.[37](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-37) For individuals who do lose their jobs, it is important that they have access to a strong and modernized safety net system to support them while they look for employment.[38](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-38) While critics are also quick to argue that higher labor costs will be passed on to consumers through higher prices for goods and services, price increases will not be as disastrous as some claim. Recent estimates of price increases range from just 0.36 percent to 0.58 percent for each 10 percent increase in the minimum wage.[39](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-39) These minor increases—only a few cents extra on a $10 tab—would take place across several years and be more than offset by higher wages throughout the economy. A more legitimate concern is that business owners might reduce employee hours or replace full-time staff with part-time workers so they do not have to provide benefits such as health care or paid leave.[40](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-40) This is why it is also critical to pass fair workweek legislation at the state and federal levels—wherein employers are required to offer additional hours to existing employees before hiring new staff—to ensure that American workers are getting enough income to sustain themselves.[41](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-41) In addition, claims that the federal minimum wage should vary regionally depending on costs of living are misleading.[42](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-42) A $15 minimum wage is basically the lowest amount on which anyone can sustainably and healthily live in lower-cost states, and it still would not be enough to accommodate families of four or larger with two working adults both making minimum wage.[43](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-43) It must be the floor for the entire country, to be increased from that level as needed in higher-cost areas. A $15 minimum wage would give a pay increase to an estimated 32 million low-wage workers and lift 3.7 million people in the United States out of poverty.[44](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-44) Importantly, it would also address longstanding gender and racial inequities, as people of color, women, and women of color in particular are disproportionately represented among low- and minimum wage workers.[45](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-45) While Congress must pass the federal Raise the Wage Act, state and local policymakers should also take their own steps to ensure that every single one of their workers receives at least $15 per hour. In addition to eliminating poverty-level wages, providing workers with more economic opportunity, and decreasing the need to subsidize low incomes through the safety net to meet basic needs,[46](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-46) increasing the wage floor will provide an extra boost to the economy through the greater spending power of low-wage workers.[47](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-47) And on the employment side, raising the minimum wage would increase worker productivity and reduce staff turnover,[48](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2021/11/03/506891/higher-minimum-wages-support-job-growth-economy-recovers-covid-19/#fn-506891-48) which decreases the costs of frequently hiring and training new staff. It is long past time that every town, city, and state in the country be held to a higher standard that prioritizes people’s financial security and well-being. The enormous benefits of helping workers earn a living wage will ultimately spur stronger economic growth and a more equitable society as the United States continues to recover from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The question is: Are employers and lawmakers willing to see that?