



Making a Commitment to America's Workers

An Overview of CAP's Blueprint for the 21st Century

By The Center for American Progress

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Despite the low unemployment rate, America's economy is still far from achieving full employment or delivering the wage growth that working-class Americans deserve. Indeed, if the labor force participation rate for 16- to 65-year-olds were to return to its 2000 peak level, their unemployment rate would rise from 4.2 percent to 8.7 percent. This jobs shortfall, primarily owing to insufficient demand for the labor of workers without a four-year college degree, has exerted powerful downward pressure on wages, employment, and economic opportunities for America's diverse working class. It has also led to persistent distress in communities that have not seen the gains from America's broader economic growth as well as in communities that have been persistently poor for decades, including because of racism and inequality.

The Center for American Progress proposes to address these significant economic challenges with the Blueprint for the 21st Century. This Jobs Blueprint will create approximately 4 million jobs—primarily for workers without four-year college degrees—while raising wages, increasing the power of workers in our economy, and making the physical and human capital investments that America's economy and society need to thrive in the 21st century. A summary of the plan's key initiatives is below.

[Nationwide investments that would modernize the economy and advance American workers](#)

Five large-scale investments would bring the U.S. economy into the 21st century; boost working-class economic security; and create more than 3 million jobs. These strategic investments include: 1) ensuring that all families have access to quality, affordable child care; 2) rebuilding America's infrastructure; 3) modernizing K-12 schools; 4) making homes and communities more efficient, solar-ready, and prepared for extreme weather; and 5) helping older Americans and people with disabilities thrive in their communities by investing in services and supports. The investments promise to boost wages and expand job opportunities for working-class Americans across the nation for at least a decade; increase families' economic security; and strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness.

Creating a promise to communities left behind

The United States has experienced real growth as the forces of globalization and technology have rewarded parts of the U.S. economy. But these forces are not helping all communities equally. Some areas have fallen behind due to automation, offshoring, market concentration, or extreme weather, while other areas have experienced persistent poverty or lack of opportunity for decades. The Jobs Blueprint proposes a federal job guarantee designed to help workers and communities overcome these challenges. In these communities—which comprise 10 percent of the U.S. population, including in urban and rural areas—the Jobs Blueprint proposes that all long-term residents who want to work be guaranteed a job. CAP estimates that 1.2 million workers per year in eligible communities will participate in the program, including both jobs created by the national investments and via additional publicly supported jobs to satisfy the guarantee.

Offering workers a ladder up

The Jobs Blueprint is a long-term commitment to Americans trapped in a cycle of low-wage work with little opportunity for advancement. Many of the jobs our proposal would create require training beyond high school, and the Jobs Blueprint will support paid training for participants in a relevant field. To raise standards for participating workers, all jobs and training opportunities created under the Jobs Blueprint would provide decent pay and benefits; allow workers the freedom to join together in unions; and include strong protections to prevent discrimination.

Raising wages and rebuilding economic power for all American workers

The Jobs Blueprint would enact bold reforms across the economy to shift economic power toward workers. These include reforms to strengthen unions and move toward industry-level bargaining to set minimum pay and benefit standards—policies that can also help to alleviate existing gender and racial wage gaps. Furthermore, the Jobs Blueprint proposes to raise the minimum wage for all workers to \$15 by 2024 and index it to the median wage thereafter.

Moving forward

The initiatives proposed in the Jobs Blueprint are just part of the changes that are needed to boost economic opportunity for working families. In the coming months, CAP also intends to offer additional proposals to address the growing concentration of economic power; support small business; create affordable housing opportunities; invest in rural America; and more. The Jobs Blueprint envisions a United States committed to economic security and upward mobility for working Americans.