

AFL-CIO

**WORKING FOR
OUR FUTURE:**

Policies for a New Generation of Work



YOUNG WORKER PROGRAM

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Policies for a New Generation of Work

Every day, thousands of eager, motivated and energetic young union activists fight to form unions, organize first-rate contracts and pass legislation to provide opportunity, equality and justice for young working people.

Working for Our Future builds on that work by outlining the road map to a future that will allow younger generations to grow and thrive. You will see policies that reflect our values and worldview that we must rewrite the rules of the economy for the future of Millennials and generations after us.

We believe that by mobilizing young people at our workplaces, we will build power for working people by ensuring that all young people participate at all levels of democracy—not only within our unions, but also at the local, state and national levels.

NextUp young workers will support organizing and contract campaigns, encourage more young people to run for office, and elect people who will help balance our economy in a way that is rooted in the policies outlined here. This will ensure that when we work hard, we can get ahead.

We will keep hitting the streets, the doors, the phones and the Internet until we have an economy that is working for young people. We can, we will and we **MUST** change our future together.

In solidarity,

Young Worker Advisory Council

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Representative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's young workers, who have been disproportionately impacted by our out-of-balance economy, will be the center of the future. But our economy didn't just happen—it was manipulated by corporate CEOs who have a deliberate neoliberal policy agenda to change the rules of the economy to benefit the wealthy and corporations. While these powerful people try to use current economic conditions and the rapidly evolving technology our generation loves as excuses for bad ideas, their policies do not reflect our values and priorities.

Their attacks on unions make it harder for working people to negotiate together. Their push for lower taxes on the top 1% and corporate tax loopholes means our communities are starved of the resources we need to invest in the common good. Their suppression of wages makes it harder and harder for young workers to get ahead, no matter how hard they work.

There is no future of work without today's young workers. While today's young people can't predict the future any better than the pundits and trend-spotters, they do know what they want from the future of work and the future of our economy, and it probably sounds familiar.

15 percent of U.S. Millennials were born outside of the United States, and one in four U.S. Millennials speaks a language other than English at home.

Around 20 percent of Millennials live in poverty, up from around 14 percent of young people in 1980.

—U.S. Census Bureau

“The labor movement has to be committed to fighting for women, people of color, LGBTQ+ community, immigrants and all oppressed people. It’s about leveling the playing field and ensuring those of us who have been historically disenfranchised are also benefitting from the gains that our movement makes together.”

—NANCY LUC, Chair of Greater Boston Labor Council Futures Committee



WORK: Strengthening Workplace Rights and Protections

While older workers saw significant growth in income, the real median income of young working people has stagnated since 1980. Since 2000, the real incomes of workers ages 15 to 24 have fallen 9.5 percent. For 25- to 34-year-old workers, real income has fallen 11.2 percent.

We are the workforce of today and tomorrow. We believe that young people who work should earn a good living, with justice and democracy at work. We call for:

- 1.** Laws that support people coming together in unions and negotiating together.
- 2.** Labor and employment laws, policies and practices that provide living wages, a fair work-life balance and good benefits for ALL workers regardless of status or identity.
- 3.** Government investment in jobs and infrastructure.
- 4.** Strengthening social insurance programs like Social Security.



EQUITY: Ending Discrimination, Exclusion, and Violence Against Women, People of Color and LGBTQ People

Unions directly support race and gender justice by reducing wage gaps. Non-union black or African-American women are paid 40 percent less than the median white man; union membership reduces that gap to under 9 percent. White union women actually make more than the median white man.²

6.4 percent of adults under 30 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, more than any other age group.

—Gallup

We are the most diverse generation in U.S. history. Our unions help reduce inequality at work through collective bargaining agreements and by fighting systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. We demand:

1. Protections against discrimination, including ending so-called religious freedom loopholes.
2. Inclusive and safe workplaces and health care policies that encourage openness, and ensure safety and dignity.
3. Commonsense immigration reform that provides a path to full rights, equal protections and U.S. citizenship.
4. An end to mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline.



EDUCATION: Ensuring Post-Secondary Education Quality, Access and Affordability

Controlling for inflation, tuition and fees plus room and board at a public four-year college have increased by almost 400 percent since 1975. Average published tuition and fees for the 2015–2016 school year ranged from over \$11,000 at community colleges to almost \$44,000 at private four-year colleges!³

22 percent of adult Millennials have a college degree—up from 16 percent of young adults in 1980.

—U.S. Census Bureau

Post-secondary education is more important than ever, and the Millennial generation is the most educated—and most indebted with student loans—in U.S. history. We call for:

1. Increased public funding of public education, including community colleges and public colleges and universities.
2. Increased regulation of for-profit colleges.
3. Substantive and effective policies to address the \$1.3 trillion student debt crisis.
4. Increased access to joint labor-management apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.



DEMOCRACY: Restoring Our Right to Vote and Making It Meaningful

Millennials can swing the outcome of the popular presidential elections in Iowa, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Colorado, Wisconsin, Virginia, Florida, North Carolina and Nevada.⁴

Millennials—the most diverse generation in U.S. history—are part of the New Majority. This brings great civic responsibility. We will meet this challenge by:

1. Educating young people about issues impacting their lives and communities and the power they have through our democratic system to change the world.
2. Registering new voters and encouraging them to vote.
3. Fighting policies that disenfranchise the New Majority, from discriminatory voter ID laws to corrupt campaign finance laws.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Age–People (Both Sexes Combined–All Races) by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2014.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics, 2014–2015 Averages.

³ The College Board, Trends in Higher Education, Tuition and Fees and Room and Board over Time, 1975–76 to 2015–16, Selected Years; Average Published Undergraduate Charges by Sector, 2015–16.

⁴ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Top 10 States/Districts by Youth Electoral Significance (2016).

WORK

Creating Financial Security Through Good Jobs and Strong Workplace Rights and Protections.

Whether fresh from high school or newly burdened with student debt and (if lucky) a college degree, Millennials face a hostile labor market as they enter the workforce. While unemployment has fallen significantly since the Great Recession, we are far from full employment and it shows throughout the economy. The real wages of working people are depressed, leaving one in five Millennials in poverty despite being more educated than ever.¹

CEOs and the politicians who line their pockets try to sell working people involuntary part-time jobs and on-demand “gigs” as “flexible” options to solve our financial woes. But we don’t want piecemeal “solutions” that just cause more problems. We need good jobs with good benefits, enforceable worker protections and robust collective bargaining rights.

- The real median income of young working people has been stagnant since 1980, and has fallen since 2000. The real income of workers 15 to 24 years old has fallen 9.5 percent since 2000. For 25- to 34-year-old workers, real income has fallen 11.2 percent.²
- The union premium is highest for younger workers. For 16- to 24-year-olds, union membership means 21.75 percent higher wages, and for 25- to 34-year-olds, a union card means 19.19 percent more pay.³
- More than 35 percent of workers aged 20 to 24 work part-time. Of those, almost a quarter (22 percent) are working part-time jobs because they can’t find full-time work.⁴
- Despite positive feelings about unions, union density among 18- to 34-year-olds is only 7.7 percent and

#Winning

- **Voters in Missouri once again defeated anti-collective bargaining laws in 2015.**
- **17 states have increased and/or indexed their minimum wage since January 2014.**
- **California, Massachusetts, and Oregon have all passed paid sick leave laws since 2014.**

is declining. However, union density among young workers is declining at a slower rate than among the workforce as a whole.⁵

Young people are the workforce of today and tomorrow.

We believe everyone who works should earn a good living, with justice and democracy at work. We call for:

1. Laws that support people coming together in unions and negotiating together.
2. Labor and employment laws, policies and practices that provide living wages, a fair work-life balance and good benefits for ALL working people regardless of status or identity.
3. Government investment in jobs and infrastructure.
4. Strengthening social insurance programs like Social Security.

The point:

- Working people of all ages must be able to join together to create good workplaces and a strong, fair economy that works for all of us and gives us a shot at achieving our dreams.
- We have grown up with technology and we love it, but we refuse to use 21st-century technology as an excuse for 19th-century labor practices.
- Our government should invest in jobs by investing in transportation, infrastructure and other public works. Smart infrastructure investment can be a win for entire communities through project labor agreements, prevailing wage requirements and apprenticeship opportunities for young workers seeking to learn a profession.
- Everyone, regardless of their employment status, has a right to high-quality comprehensive health care and adequate and secure retirement income.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Press Release: New Census Bureau Statistics Show How Young Adults Today Compare with Previous Generations in Neighborhoods Nationwide (Dec. 4, 2014).

² U.S. Census Bureau, Age—People (Both Sexes Combined—All Races) by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2014.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Employed and Unemployed Full- and Part-Time Workers by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Affiliation of Employed Wage and Salary Workers by Selected Characteristics.

EQUITY

Ending Discrimination, Exclusion and Violence Against Women, People of Color, the LGBTQ Community, Immigrants and Other Groups

The Millennial generation (generally speaking, adults born after 1980) is the largest and most diverse generation in the United States. Fifteen percent of Millennials were born outside of the United States; one in four speaks a language other than English at home.¹ More adults under 30 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender than those of any previous generation.²

Despite the hard-won battles of those who came before us, Millennial women continue to be paid less than men, people of color are paid less than white people, and unemployment rates are higher for black and brown men than for any other group. Many people continue to face discrimination on the job. Mass incarceration, especially of young men of color, has devastated entire communities, breaking apart families and destroying economic opportunities.

This is unacceptable.

- Unions continue to directly support race and gender justice by reducing wage gaps. Non-union black or African-American women are paid 40 percent less than the median white man; union membership reduces that gap to under 9 percent.³
- In 2015, the unemployment rate for black or African-American workers was 9.6 percent, 81 percent higher than the overall unemployment rate and more than twice that of the white unemployment rate.⁴
- There are no federal laws explicitly protecting the civil and human rights of LGBT people in the United States. It is legal to fire a person for being lesbian, gay or bisexual in 29 states—and 31 states allow employers to fire workers for being transgender. In 2016, more than 200 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced.⁵

#Winning

- In 2014, Maryland passed a law prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.
- Since 2014, at least four states have passed policies that effectively reduce or eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for drug violations.
- In 2015, California expanded workers' compensation protections for undocumented immigrants injured on the job.

We are the most diverse generation in U.S. history.

Unions help reduce inequality at work through collective bargaining agreements and by fighting systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. We demand:

1. Protections against discrimination, including ending so-called religious freedom loopholes.
2. Inclusive and safe workplaces and health care policies that encourage openness, and ensure safety and dignity.
3. Commonsense immigration reform that provides a path to full rights, equal protections and U.S. citizenship.
4. An end to mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline.

The point:

- We must have each other's backs to create a world in which we don't have to worry about our brothers and sisters being discriminated against because of their race, gender, ability, orientation or any other trait.
- Immigrant workers, documented or not, should not be made to live in fear. We are all stronger when no worker is exploited and the labor movement is open to all. We support immigration reform that provides a path to citizenship, strong worker protections and equal access to education.
- We must end the practice of mass incarceration and enact policies that support restorative justice for the communities devastated by generations of institutional racism and impoverishment.

¹ U.S. Census, Press Release: Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports (June 25, 2015).

² Gary J. Gates and Frank Newport, Special Report: 3.4 Percent of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT, Gallup (Oct 18, 2015).

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics, 2014-2015 Averages.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Age, Sex, and Race.

⁵ ACLU, Non-discrimination Laws: State by State Information—Map. <https://www.aclu.org/map/non-discrimination-laws-state-state-information-map>.

EDUCATION

Ensuring Post-Secondary Education Quality, Access and Affordability

Young people were told to go to college in order to get good jobs. But then the economic realities of public disinvestment and harmful education policies caught up with us. Now we're sitting on top of a \$1.3 trillion mountain of student loan debt while our wages stagnate or fall. We're preyed upon by for-profit colleges backed by the same Wall Street actors who've gutted the labor market.

Those who would most benefit from post-secondary education are the same people who have the hardest time accessing, affording and completing it. And even though union apprenticeships can be just as valuable as college degrees, too many young people are unaware of or cannot access these resources. The current system makes no sense. We need a highly trained and diversified workforce if we're going to succeed as a nation.

This problem demands our full and immediate attention because our country cannot afford to wait any longer.

- Controlling for inflation, tuition and fees plus room and board at a public four-year college have increased by almost 400 percent since 1975. Average published tuition and fees for the 2015–2016 school year ranged from over \$11,000 at community colleges to almost \$44,000 at private four-year colleges!¹
- Controlling for other factors, workers who complete registered apprenticeships can expect to make close to \$6,000 a year more than similarly situated workers who have not completed an apprenticeship. And they earn while they learn!²
- Almost 80 percent of the rise in tuition can be accounted for by state cuts to public higher education funding.³

#Winning

- **Connecticut passed a Student Loan Bill of Rights, which allows the state to regulate lenders and servicers, and help borrowers navigate the repayment process.**
 - **Only Montana, Wisconsin, Wyoming and North Dakota have restored public higher education funding to pre-recession levels.**
- The average amount of student debt held by graduates with bachelor's degrees has grown at twice the rate of inflation in just the last ten years. The average amount of student debt owed by a 2014 college graduate with loans was \$28,950.⁴

Post-secondary education is more important than ever,

and the Millennial generation is the most educated—and most indebted with student loans—in U.S. history. We call for:

1. Increased public funding of public education, including community colleges and public colleges and universities.
2. Increased regulation of for-profit colleges.
3. Substantive and effective policies to address the \$1.3 trillion student debt crisis.
4. Increased access to joint labor-management apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

The point:

- College graduates make almost twice the annual income of high school graduates, but the cost of attending college can be prohibitively high. Young people need labor unions, the apprenticeship programs they run and the economic opportunities they provide.
- We demand greater federal, state and local investment in public higher education and increased support for apprenticeship training programs.
- We need real regulation of for-profit colleges and the student loan industry and reforms to the federal student loan program that will alleviate the burden that \$1.3 trillion of student loan debt has created for families simply trying to make it.
- Past mistakes shouldn't bar someone from accessing high-quality education. We must eliminate the drug conviction bar to federal student aid and ensure everyone has the tools they need to achieve financial stability and engage to their fullest in our economy and our democracy.

¹ The College Board, Trends in Higher Education, Tuition and Fees and Room and Board over Time, 1975–76 to 2015–16, Selected Years; Average Published Undergraduate Charges by Sector, 2015–16.

² Mathematica Policy Research, An Effectiveness Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis of Registered Apprenticeship in 10 States, Final Report (July 25, 2012).

³ Robert Hiltonsmith, Pulling Up the Higher-Ed Ladder: Myth and Reality in the Crisis of College Affordability, Demos (May 2015).

⁴ The Institute for College Access and Success, Project on Student Debt, Student Debt and the Class of 2014 (Oct. 27, 2015).

DEMOCRACY



Restoring Our Right to Vote and Making It Meaningful

Young people have always been opinionated, passionate and idealistic. Yet their voting patterns don't reflect high levels of civic participation. It isn't apathy that keeps youth from the polls. It's a design feature of a rigged system.

Anti-democratic policies, many developed after the Civil War to keep black people from voting, disproportionately impact young people. Those interested in preserving the status quo have always found ways to try to shut young people out, from voter ID laws to felony disenfranchisement, from restrictions on voting times and places to the distribution of resources to voting precincts in ways that increase waiting times for people of color and young people. And don't get us started on the state of campaign finance.

We must change the rules in order to wield meaningful power at the ballot box.

The only way we can make our vision of the future a reality is by fighting for it—in the workplace, in the street, and in the voting booth. Young people are already facing a bad economy and social structures that we did not choose. We will not stand by and let CEOs and their politicians make more bad decisions.

- Millennials can swing the outcome of the popular presidential elections in Iowa, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Colorado, Wisconsin, Virginia, Florida, North Carolina and Nevada.¹
- Voter ID laws disproportionately impact the youngest and newest voters, and people of color, especially black or African-American voters. 16 million registered voters do not have a current government-issued ID. In states with voter ID laws, these people may be denied their right to vote.² And 16 states have instituted additional voting restrictions for the 2016 elections.³

#Winning

- **30 states now have online voter registration.**
 - **In 2014 California passed laws to pre-register starting at age 16, and to bring voter registration assistance into state juvenile detention centers.**
 - **Earlier this year, the governor of Virginia signed an executive order that restored the voting rights of more than 200,000 people who had been previously convicted of felonies.**
- 5.8 million U.S. citizens are barred from voting because of a prior felony conviction, including 7.66 percent of the black or African American population. 45 percent of those disenfranchised by these laws have already completed their sentence.⁴

Millennials—the most diverse generation in U.S. history—are part of the New Majority. This

brings great civic responsibility. We will meet this challenge by:

1. Educating young people about issues impacting their lives and communities and the power they have through our democratic system to change the world.
2. Registering new voters and encouraging them to vote.
3. Fighting policies that disenfranchise the New Majority, from discriminatory voter ID laws to corrupt campaign finance laws.

The point:

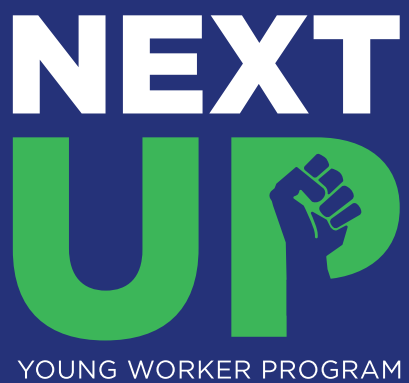
- Voting is a right, not a privilege.
- The Millennial vote will be critical in the 2016 elections and beyond. We will do everything in our power as young worker leaders to get out that vote for pro-worker candidates who support our values.
- We must vote because only we are in charge of our destiny. If we don't show up, politicians will make decisions that are good for billionaires and CEOs and harm the economic and political interests of everyday folks, especially young people who are just starting their lives.
- We must fight the racist efforts to disenfranchise people of color. "Voter fraud" is a hoax made up by anti-democratic fear-mongers looking to silence the voice of people of color and young people. We will fight these policies and shame politicians who forward them.

¹ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Top 10 States/Districts by Youth Electoral Significance (2016).

² Government Accountability Office, Elections: Issues Related to State Voter Identification Laws, Report to Congressional Requesters (September 2014).

³ Craig Newmark's craigconnects and the Brennan Center, Why Is It so Hard to Vote in America? And What We Can Do to Fix It (2016).

⁴ The Sentencing Project, Fact Sheet: Trends in U.S. Corrections (November 2015).



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