

**UNDERPAID, OVERWORKED, AND
UNDERAPPRECIATED: HOW THE
PANDEMIC ECONOMY DISPROPORTIONATELY
HARMED LOW-WAGE WOMEN WORKERS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
CRISIS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MAY 17, 2022

Serial No. 117-81

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Reform



Available on: *govinfo.gov*,
oversight.house.gov or
docs.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

47-667 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

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Tuesday, May 17, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 12:06 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom; Hon. James E. Clyburn (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Clyburn, Velázquez, Foster, Raskin, Krishnamoorthi, Scalise, Jordan, Green, and Miller-Meeks.

Mr. CLYBURN. Today our select subcommittee is holding a hybrid hearing where members have the option of appearing either in person or remotely via Zoom. Let me make a few reminders about hybrid hearings.

For those members appearing in person, you will be able to see members appearing remotely on the two monitors in front of you. On one monitor, you will see all the members appearing remotely at once in what is known in Zoom as gallery view.

On the other monitor, you will see each person speaking during the hearing when they are speaking, including members who are appearing remotely.

For those members appearing remotely, you can also see each person speaking during the hearing, whether they are in person or remote as long as you have your Zoom set to active speaker view. If you have any questions about this, please contact committee staff immediately.

Let me also remind everyone of the House procedures that apply to hybrid hearings. For members appearing in person, a timer [audio malfunction].

Mr. SCALISE. Mr. Chairman, are you still on the call?

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. I also lost audio, so it's not just you.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, we can't hear.

Mr. CLYBURN. OK. Did you hear that?

Mr. SCALISE. I hear that. I don't see you, but I'm picking up your audio.

Mr. CLYBURN. Was that the ranking member speaking?

Mr. SCALISE. Yes, this is Ranking Member Scalise.

Mr. CLYBURN. Can you hear me now?

Mr. SCALISE. We can hear you, we just can't see you.

There we go, I can see you too. Hear you and see you now. Perfect.

Mr. CLYBURN. OK. I even see me. OK. Thank you for that.

Now, members who are not recognized should remain muted to minimize background noise and feedback. I will recognize members verbally, and members retain the right to seek recognition verbally. In regular order, members will be recognized in seniority order for questions.

If you are remote and want to be recognized outside of regular order, you may identify that in several ways. You may use the chat function to send the request, you may send an email to the majority staff, or you may unmute your mic to seek recognition.

Obviously, we do not want people talking over each other, so my preference is that members use the chat function or email to facilitate formal, verbal recognition. Committee staff will ensure that I am made aware of the request, and I will recognize you.

Now, at the request of the House Recording Studio, I will count down from ten, and the livestream will begin when I get down to one. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

Good afternoon. The committee will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

The coronavirus wreaked havoc on our entire economy and much of our work force. The harm, while broadly shared, fell disproportionately on the shoulders of women workers.

Women bear a disproportionate share of the care-giving responsibilities in our country. Many more women than men are the exclusive childcare providers for their households. And in households where care responsibilities are shared, they are often shared unevenly.

As a result, when the pandemic disrupted normal life in 2020, many working mothers were left unable to balance their jobs with their increased responsibilities to take care of their children, ailing parents, and others for whom they had taken on this essential work.

During the early months of the crisis, women all over the country are losing their jobs because of a lack of childcare and other care assistance.

Women working low-wage jobs were hurt particularly hard. Women in low-wage jobs are more likely to be the sole or primary breadwinner for their household. This means they often must balance the burden of making sure their household has enough food on the table, with the challenge of taking care of children or elderly parents.

For these women, there is rarely a rainy day fund to fall back on. Every day's wages are necessary to make sure that they can pay their rent and put enough food on the table.

Far too often these workers face the difficult choice of either taking care of a sick child or going to work, or to try to earn enough to support their family.

These women also tend to have fewer guarantees of job security or steady income from week to week. Low-wage jobs tend to have higher turnover.

Excuse me. Will you please close that door? Thank you.

These workers are more likely to get fired, forced out, or voluntarily leave because the stress of balancing the job with other obligations is simply too high.

Even when low-wage workers are able to remain on the job, the precariousness of their employment takes a mental toll.

These jobs are also less likely to provide critical benefits, like paid family and medical leave, and less scheduling security, or flexibility, making it more difficult for workers to manage caregiving responsibilities.

The select subcommittee has conducted a survey of 12 of the Nation's largest private sector companies that reportedly experienced significant work force reductions during the crisis, to understand, among other things, who was laid off, who got promoted, and who may have been forced to leave the work force by other burdens.

Our analysis found that in 2020, women working in hourly positions experienced disproportionate harm compared to men working in hourly positions at the same place of work when it came to firings, layoffs, voluntary quits, changes in wages, and promotions.

Disproportionate harm exacerbated preexisting gender disparities, further straining the families who rely on those women's wages to make ends meet.

Despite a record-setting 8.3 million jobs added to the work force since President Biden took office, low-wage working women continue to face disproportionate challenges to participating in the work force.

As of February, the female labor force had declined by 1.1 million workers since the pandemic began. The economy will suffer lasting consequences if women continue to face obstacles to full employment participation, too often forcing them to choose between caring for a family member or going to work.

To build an equitable and thriving economy, we must take further action to address underlying disparities and eliminate barriers to work force participation.

We must ensure working women, especially low-wage women, can support themselves and their families through times of personal or economic upheaval while remaining in the work force.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being with us today. I look forward to hearing more about the challenges facing low-wage, working women and what can be done to enable them to contribute to our Nation's economy to the best of their ability.

I now recognize the ranking member for his opening statement.

Mr. SCALISE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'd like to also thank our witnesses who are joining us today.

I think it's obvious that the COVID lockdown policies that were adopted harmed parents and kids disproportionately. As more time passes, we see study after study confirming that tremendous damage was done personally and emotionally and economically by these lockdown policies, and much of it was entirely unscientific and unnecessary.

Some states, mostly led by Democrat Governors, stayed in lockdown for much longer than others, prolonging the pain and exacerbating the damage. I wish we would've had this hearing much earlier on the pandemic so maybe we could've learned how to pre-

vent some of the unnecessary harm that was inflicted on American parents and kids.

But nonetheless, I'm glad we're having it now so that Americans can see how their policymakers failed them, and hopefully we, as a country, can do better and not repeat the mistakes that were made if another public health crisis actually hits.

In my opinion, one of the worst consequences from the pandemic was the impact that school closures had on kids.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that you please hold a hearing on the topic of the damage that was done to our young kids by these closures of schools.

In fact, one of our witnesses, Mary Katharine Ham, is well versed on this as a CNN contributor but also wrote an opinion piece that I think would be a must-read for everybody. And the opinion piece was, Democrats support for school closings comes back to bite. And we'll hear from her later.

But multiple studies have been released that compare test scores of kids, based on how much time they spent with remote learning, compared to those whose schools provided in-classroom learning. The numbers are heartbreaking.

And this isn't new, we've talked about this, myself, many of the other Republicans on this subcommittee have highlighted this over and over again, pleading that we get our schools open, when we saw the Biden administration manipulating the science to side with union bosses against our students.

A working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that student pass rates declined dramatically in districts with fewer days of in-person instruction. The researchers found, and I quote, passing rates in math declined by 14.2 percentage points on average. We estimate this decline was 10.1 percentage points smaller for districts fully in person.

Changes in English language, art scores were smaller, but were significantly larger in districts with larger populations of students who are Black, Hispanic, or eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, close quote.

New evidence also proves exactly what we suggested would happen, low-income students were hit the hardest by this policy failure. According to a recent Harvard study, low-income kids had more remote learning, and high-poverty kids were impacted the most.

The study found that, quote, within school districts that were remote for most of 2020 and 2021, high-poverty schools experienced 50 percent more achievement loss than low-poverty schools.

In contrast, math achievement gaps did not widen in areas that remained in person.

A co-author of the Harvard study told a *New York Times* reporter that, quote, this will probably be the largest increase in educational inequity in a generation.

The New York Times article goes on to explain, quote, there are two main reasons. First, schools with large numbers of poor students were more likely to go remote. Why? Many of these schools are in major cities which tend to be run by Democrat officials, and Republicans were generally quicker to reopen schools.

This is *The New York Times* article. This isn't me here. This is *The New York Times* article. I'll say that again. Why? Many of these schools are in major cities which tend to be run by Democratic officials, and Republicans were generally quicker to reopen schools.

High-poverty schools are also more likely to have unionized teachers, and some unions lobbied for remote schooling. That was *The New York Times*.

And finally, *The New York Times* says, second, low-income students tended to face even—to fare even worse when schools went remote.

So, Mr. Chairman, that was a headline from *The New York Times*, which is not exactly a conservative publication. Look at the devastating impact on our next generation caused by Democrat leaders joining forces with union bosses to play politics with public health.

These little kids are probably going to struggle academically for years to come because of the overbearing and scientifically misguided Democrat lockdown policies. This did not have to happen.

By the summer and fall of 2020, the risks of keeping schools closed were well documented, as well as the roadmap for how to reopen them as safely as possible.

Yet even as teachers were prioritized for vaccines, some refused to return to the classroom and under the Biden administration, the CDC went so far as to allow high profile union bosses to rewrite the administration's school reopening guidance to make it easier to keep schools closed. We've, of course, talked about this at multiple hearings too.

I want to remind everyone that in the summer of 2020, Republicans, along with Donald Trump and CDC Director Redfield, were urging schools to reopen. Democrats chose union bosses over children. To me, that is unforgivable.

It's past time for Democrats to take responsibility for the devastation that they caused and finally to start working with us to fix it.

But instead of holding a hearing on this incredibly important topic, we are having a hearing today with a thinly veiled agenda to push for failed inflation-inducing policies like a new minimum wage and government subsidies for paid leave and childcare at a time when people are struggling to find workers. And pay is higher than we've seen it in a long time.

Of course not only would these policies worsen inflation, the biggest burden on American families right now, but they would also have zero support for Republicans and even lack of support from Democrats. There are a number of Democrats who oppose this, because if this was something that was whole-scale supported, it would've already passed in an overwhelmingly Democrat House, Senate, with the White House. And it didn't pass.

Mr. Chairman, I again ask that you please hold a hearing on the devastating impact of school closures, so that we can learn from these grave mistakes that were made and finally start holding the union bosses, and those in the Biden administration who did this, accountable.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CLYBURN. I thank the ranking member. We are going to—I'm really tempted, as you can imagine, to respond, but I'm not going to respond today. I'm going to move on with this hearing, because I expect for us to get a lot of good ideas today as of what to do going forward. I would hope we won't spend all our time today talking about yesterday. I'm concerned about tomorrow and the day after.

And with that, I would like to introduce our distinguished witnesses. Vicki Shabo is a senior fellow for paid leave policy and strategy at New America's Better Life Lab, where she works closely with policymakers, researchers, advocates, and business leaders on policy design and strategies to advance paid family and medical leave for workers.

Ms. Shabo has advocated for policies that would advance gender equity in the workplace for over a decade and has spent years researching and speaking about paid medical and family leave at the Federal and state levels.

Cynthia Murray is a fitting department advocate—or associate at Walmart of Laurel, Maryland, where she has worked for 21 years, while raising two children and a grandchild. Ms. Murray has experienced firsthand the challenges faced by women in positions paying low hourly wages, given minimal scheduling flexibility, and only provided limited benefits.

Ms. Murray is also founding member and board member of United for Respect which fights every day for dignity and respect for workers across the country.

Dr. Nicole Mason is president of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Dr. Mason is one of the Nation's foremost researchers on issues of women's work force participation, job security, and economic well-being.

One of the few women of color to lead a major D.C. think-tank, Dr. Mason coined the term "she-cession" at the start of the coronavirus crisis, to describe the disproportionate impact of the pandemic's employment and income losses on women.

Dr. Yana van der Meulen Rodgers is a professor at Rutgers University's labor studies department, where she conducts research on women's labor and market status.

Dr. Rodgers also serves as a faculty director for its Center For Women and Work, which focuses on promoting economic and social equity for women workers, their families, and their communities.

A scholar with three decades of experience, studying women's work and well-being, Dr. Rodgers has consulted for the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Asian Development Bank, and served as the president of the International Association For Feminists Economists.

Mary Katharine Ham is a CNN political commentator and co-host of the parenting podcast, Getting Hammered.

Will the witnesses who are present please stand, and will all the witnesses please raise your right hands. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

You may be seated.

Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record. Ms. Shabo, you are recognized for five minutes for your opening statement, and if I've messed up your name, you may correct me.

STATEMENT OF VICKI SHABO, SENIOR FELLOW, PAID LEAVE POLICY AND STRATEGY, BETTER LIFE LAB, NEW AMERICA

Ms. SHABO. That's fine. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. My name is Vicki Shabo, and I'm a senior fellow at New America, and I want to thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic.

Yesterday we marked 1 million lives lost. Though the economy is strong overall, millions of families are still in crisis. At the beginning of the pandemic, Congress invested in paid sick time and childcare, and this made a big difference. But now most relief has ended, and despite the house Democrats passage of the Build Back Better Act, Federal policymaking is now stalled.

Inaction poses grave risk with respect to women, work, and care. Women have borne the brunt of the last two years. For Black, Latina and immigrant women, the pandemic has been particularly challenging, and for women who are paid less than \$15 an hour, it has been brutal.

According to research by the National Women's Law Center, among low-paid women workers, 41 percent say they have lost or quit a job. Nearly half report having their hours cut. Nearly 3 in 10 also have caregiving responsibilities for an older or disabled family member. And yet less than one-fifth low-paid women workers have paid sick time, paid family and medical leave, or even paid vacation time to care.

The U.S. work force is still missing nearly 1 million women, disproportionately Black and Latina women, and too often work and care are incompatible, which is why women with caregiving responsibilities were more likely to exit the work force.

Pundits and business leaders often speak of a labor force shortage, but what we really have is a shortage of policies, practices, and supports. This deficit forces too many people into impossible situations at high costs to their economic security and health, to businesses, and the economy.

So, let me talk briefly about four things we must do, all of which are not only good for workers and families but also are proven to boost labor force participation, help businesses, and respond to the inflationary pressures that we're hearing so much about these days.

So, first, paid sick time. To stay safe and healthy at work, people must have paid sick days. Even the limited temporary intervention Congress enacted early in the pandemic, through 2020, prevented an estimated 15,000 cases of COVID per day nationwide.

To be frank, we haven't seen the private sector step up, large companies that weren't covered by that emergency-paid-sick-days requirement. Some provided COVID-specific paid sick time early on, but many didn't, and put hurdles in place that could make using sick time very difficult.

And as the pandemic has continued, large profitable companies that offered COVID paid sick leave has cut it back—have cut it back just as Omicron surged.

And now with another wave rolling through and more predicted to follow, Amazon announced that it is eliminating COVID emergency paid sick time entirely, leaving workers with just five days per year, for all COVID and non-COVID purposes.

And these workers are lucky. About half of service sector workers don't have any paid sick days at all.

We can't answer an endemic new normal without paid sick days as a public health mitigation and preventive health strategy. This isn't a nice-to-have, this is a must-do.

Second, paid family and medical leave. The pandemic also showed that access to paid leave for more serious personal or family health issues, or to allow parents to care for a new child, is essential. Paid leave has important economic and health benefits for workers, children, people in need of care, and families, as well as benefits for business.

And again, here the market, the private sector, has fallen short. Just 23 percent of private sector workers have paid family leave through their jobs, and the highest paid workers are seven times more likely to have paid family leave than the lowest paid. But even 60 percent of the highest paid don't have paid family leave.

For workers in the service sector, there's a significant unmet need. Only half of all service sector workers and just 37 percent of Black service sector workers took a leave that they needed. The inability to pay bills, the risks of losing jobs and health insurance loomed large.

A national paid leave policy is long overdue. It helps families afford the income shock of missed weeks of work, which is especially important in a period of high inflation. It saves lives, support jobs, yields cost savings, and boosts the economy.

Next, childcare. Workers' loss of access to childcare was perhaps the most acute barrier to work for parents during the pandemic. McKinsey reports that 45 percent of women who left the work force cited childcare as one of the reasons, compared to 14 percent of men.

And even before the pandemic, access to childcare was challenging. About half of the population lived in childcare deserts, and now it's even worse, with 9 to 10 percent of childcare program spaces having been lost.

Cost is also a significant barrier, and for low-income families with children under five, childcare expenses are 35 percent of their income.

The cost of childcare inflation exceeded annual inflation by four percent in 2020. Doing nothing on childcare at this moment is unacceptable. It's essentially telling tens of thousands of childcare providers, millions of parents, and millions of workers who lost jobs in this sector that their work and their interests don't matter.

It's depriving businesses of workers, and it's depriving the economy of a source of strength.

And briefly, scheduling predictably and flexibility in notice. Knowing when, where, and for how long one will work is key to planning our lives.

Yet too many service sector workers, especially people of color, face short notice about shifts, canceled shifts, expectation of on-call work, and more.

Shift Project research shows that the pandemic did nothing to improve these practices.

So in conclusion, more than any other moment in modern history, the coronavirus crisis has revealed the ways in which our current practices, systems, and policies fail workers, families, businesses, and the economy.

Inequalities by gender, race, and income have widened, particularly when it comes to people's ability to work and care. The current moment of gridlock and inaction is untenable in the short-term and will cause significant harm and danger and loss in the longer term. And we can't wait another moment for change. Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much.

We will now hear from Ms. Murray.

Ms. Murray, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA MURRAY, FITTING DEPARTMENT ASSOCIATE, WALMART

Ms. MURRAY. Good afternoon, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and members of the House Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Cynthia Murray, and I have been a Walmart associate for 21 years. I work at a store not far from where you're sitting today, just 20 miles away in Laurel, Maryland.

I'm here today on behalf of all retail workers who have been on the front lines keeping our country running during this pandemic. In the beginning, we were dubbed essential but treated as expendable.

Since the onset of the pandemic two years ago, large corporations like Walmart and Amazon have made historic profits at our expense, at the expense of our health, our families' health, and in many cases, our lives.

In return, we've seen little to no increase in wages, had to fight for basic protections, and are still dealing with inadequate paid leave and unpredictable scheduling that affects our work-life balance.

It took two decades at Walmart before I made even \$15 an hour. Even though I risked my safety and my son's safety day in and day out to keep my store running, Walmart is the largest private employer of American women and people of color in the country. And our fight for dignity has been going on since well before the pandemic.

As a founding member of United for Respect, I've been a huge part of our fight for respect at work since our founding in 2010. Next month, I will bring a resolution to Walmart shareholders that will create a first-ever National Pandemic Advisory Task Force at Walmart, made up of associates like me.

I'm doing this because we can't afford to wait for change. My fellow workers are suffering. Workers like Janikka Perry, who was a Walmart associate in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

Janikka clocked in for her shift on January 16. She felt sick that day but knew that calling in would likely result in retaliation, or worse, termination. Janikka finished her shift feeling ill and then went into the bathroom.

Paramedics found her unconscious on Walmart's bathroom floor two hours later. She was pronounced dead that night. She was only 38 years old.

And Walmart isn't the only company sacrificing people for profit. At Amazon, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in rapid growth, expansion in profits, but it's been a very different story for the workers who made that success possible.

Workers battled illness, injuries, and unpredictable schedules. Thousands of workers contracted COVID-19, and many tragically passed away.

Amazon was accused of concealing cases from workers and health agencies and retaliating against employees that advocated for their safety.

Amazon workers work in a high-tech sweatshop. Workers like Courtenay Brown and Daniel O., from the moment customers click the purchase button until the second the product reaches their home, Amazon workers like Daniel and Courtenay are monitored, timed, and punished if they don't meet super human standards for fulfilling orders.

These dangerous practices create high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among workers, and injuries that are more frequent and more severe than at competing businesses.

Daniel will make history this month by presenting a resolution to Amazon shareholders to end the punishing quotas and surveillance that drive Amazon's injuries.

I'm also testifying for workers at PetSmart, owned by the private equity firm BC Partners, workers like Isabella Burrows who struggles on just \$14 an hour and knows the emotional difficulty of trying to take care of sick animals while the store is understaffed.

Isabella just wants to receive the support, policies, and pay she needs to succeed at her job she loves.

I'm urging you today to act on behalf of workers like myself, like Janikka, like Courtenay, like Daniel, and like Isabella.

We are looking to you to move crucial policies that give us the time off, the dignity we deserve, like the Healthy Families Act, the Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights, and the Schedules That Work Act, just a few to name.

Thank you again for your time.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Ms. Murray.

We will now hear from Dr. Mason.

Dr. Mason, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DR. C. NICOLE MASON, PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

Ms. MASON. Good afternoon, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and members of the subcommittee.

My name is Dr. C. Nicole Mason, and I'm the President of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, an economic think tank focused on women's economic security and understanding women's labor force participation.

I thank you for the invitation to testify today about the long-term impact on the pandemic on women and how we might chart a path forward toward a full and equitable recovery for those most im-

pacted by job and income losses; specifically, women of color and lower-wage workers.

I ask that my written testimony be submitted for the record.

Two years ago this month, the national unemployment rate was 13.3 percent, and the number of unemployed persons was 21 million. For women, the unemployment rate was 17.8 percent.

During the early months of the pandemic, women lost four times as many jobs as men, triggering a she-cession, an economic downturn defined by income and job losses in sectors dominated by women—service, leisure and hospitality, education, and healthcare.

To put this in perspective, at the start of 2020, we were celebrating the gains made by women in the work force. At that time, women made up 51 percent of the labor force. This is no longer the case.

In April 2022—2022, 180,000 women left the labor force, compared to 131,000 men, and there are still close to 1 million fewer women than men working or actively seeking a new job in February 2020.

While the national unemployment rate has dropped significantly to 3.6 percent, the unemployment rate for Black and Latina women is still 1.8 and 1.4 times higher than the unemployment rate of White women.

The pandemic has also exacerbated and deepened many of the existing inequalities and disparities in our society—health, income, racial—and exposed the many—that many of our systems are failing women and families.

Prior to the pandemic, many women, especially those in the hardest-hit sectors, did not have health insurance, paid family and sick leave, job security, predictable scheduling, or flexibility. Many women had to choose between their pay or coming to work sick, or fear losing their job for taking care of themselves or their loved ones.

Now, two years into the pandemic in terms of women's mental health and economic well-being, one in four women report their families are worse off financially than they were a year ago, and almost one half are either very worried or somewhat worried about whether or not their total family income is enough to pay their bills.

Now, as women begin to return to the work force, we are seeing disparities between the policies women need to succeed and what is being offered by employers. In a recent IWPR survey of women workers and the future of work, we found there is a gap between the women—the benefits women desire, such as paid leave, health insurance, and fair compensation, and what—what employers currently offer.

For women reentering the work force, a living wage and health insurance are the top two desired benefits, followed by retirement benefits and job security. Paid vacation, family and sick leave are also top consideration. But at least one in three women workers say they lack these critical benefits, including paid leave, health insurance, or job security. And more than 75 percent of women surveyed said these benefits in particular are very important, or important when considering future job opportunities.

Prior to the pandemic, we did see some progress in terms of the enactment of policy—workplace—workforce policies that helped to facilitate women’s participation in our economy at the state and local level, but the pandemic all but wiped out those gains.

It also bought into sharp relief the fundamental needs of women in today’s work force, comprehensive paid leave and childcare policies, so women can take care of their families and pursue their education and/or professional careers.

In this moment, we have an opportunity to address these issues head-on. We can advance policies and programs, many that have been mentioned by my—by the other witnesses, at the Federal and state levels and in our workplaces to support women’s reentry into the work force and their career advancement. We can also fix the systems that weren’t working for women, families, and workers before the pandemic, while creating the post-pandemic policies and structures to build a fair and equitable economy for all.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Dr. Mason.

We will now hear from Ms. Ham.

Ms. Ham, you are recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MARY KATHARINE HAM, CNN COMMENTATOR
AND AUTHOR**

Ms. HAM. I am here as a couple of things. I’m a mom of three girls. I am a commentator and public figure, and I’m someone who watched, wrote about, and worked with a generation of parents, particularly moms, as they fought tooth and nail for months on end to get access to one of the most basic legally required public goods there is: School.

In 2020, American mothers were called upon to parent in crisis. One day in March, I was a newly married working mom of two with a first grader in my local public school. By Friday of that same week, the school we walked half a mile to was closed. It did not reopen its doors for more than a year.

My life changed. My career shifted. I was one of the lucky ones. One of the reasons I’m interested in this issue is because I know it was harder for other people. Had this happened when I was a single mom, I don’t know what I would have done.

Sometimes people don’t believe me when I tell them the schools were closed for a year. If you didn’t see it up close, it seems absurd, impossible even, but more than 6 million students in this country, mostly concentrated in America’s bluest metro areas and their suburbs, where I live, were deprived of in-person instruction for more than a year. They got the worst of it, but some 30 percent of American students missed more than four months of school. That’s another 15 million kids. Imagine how many moms.

The length and breadth of school closings are important to remember because, as you might imagine, functioning schools are pretty important to the participation of moms in the workplace. You guys have mentioned all the inequities. I have no quibble with them at all.

According to a Brookings publication, between February and August 2020, mothers of children 12 years old and younger lost 2.2 million jobs, compared to 870,000 among fathers. In the month of

September 2020 alone, 1 million people left the work force, and 80 percent of them were women.

The month is not a coincidence. September 2020 was the month that women had to make or break. They had to make the decision whether they were going to stay home with their kids when schools did not open or go back to work.

Their jobs—this pandemic had a way of exacerbating many of the issues we had before the pandemic, as my fellow panelists have pointed out. Women did more caregiving and housekeeping at the home. They did more once they had to be Zoom butlers for their children.

Childcare was expensive and hard to come by for young children before the pandemic. It became worse as daycares closed in many states and large cities obliterated the one stable source for older children as schools shut down for the foreseeable future.

This remains important because those schools, particularly the ones who shut down for the longest periods of time, remain incredibly unstable and not reliable as a source of putting your kid in an educational space due to quarantines and all sorts of other things. Normalcy has not returned.

While private schools functioned with safety and success just blocks from shuttered public schools, children most in need of both structure and education public schools formerly offered languished in virtual school. You heard about some of the results of that, and I will not belabor them. But the bad effects are compounding as those kids who missed most school have both emotional and academic tolls that make school harder on students, teachers, and parents alike. It did not have to happen, and we need to account for it.

In American cities, while children weren't getting an education, their moms were. They learned about teachers unions, that their first priority wasn't necessarily students. They learned how to FOIA. They learned that, if they asked for the public good that unions and school boards claim to value, they'd be accused of being racist, no matter how diverse their coalition was, or wanting to sacrifice children. They learned occasionally Federal law enforcement might look into them for the sin of attending and speaking at school board meetings. One Alexandria, Virginia school board official asked parents if they'd like their children to be alive or educated.

A friend of mine who advocated for children with disabilities to get their legally required aides was told by a school official she just wanted her brunches back.

Some moms learned they could be swing voters, something they never imagined, which certainly fueled the win of Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin in Virginia, who made concentrated appeals to frustrated parents.

The political part of this is not—I don't intend to use it as a cajole, but it's important to understand because there is a trust issue here. Democrats have lost a 15-to 20-point lead on the issue of education in the last two years that existed perennially for 20 years before that, because of alignment with teachers unions and because of support for vast spending on education. But it's gone.

And so, when we talk about structural change to help moms, we have to account for the fact that they were failed dramatically by bureaucratic debacles, politics, in the public good closest to their homes and most important to them. Many of them have looked elsewhere for solutions.

And I would just say, if we want to make structural change that makes life easier for working moms—and we should—we should note that 5 trillion has been out the door, and still the most persistent structural change is that these folks don't have a public school to send their kids to, in many cases, on a reliable basis.

If we wanted to come up with creative solutions and apply them to this generational problem, we need to earn that trust back by acknowledging it.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much.

Ms. HAM. Sure.

Mr. CLYBURN. The chair now recognizes Dr. Rodgers for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DR. YANA VAN DER MEULEN RODGERS, PROFESSOR OF LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS, FACULTY DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK, ON BEHALF OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Ms. RODGERS. Thank you.

Chair Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this invitation to address the issue of low-income women's experiences and gender disparities in the pandemic economy. As a labor economist, I've spent the past three decades studying women and work, and I now serve as the faculty director of a university research center that focuses on women and work.

In terms of women's work during the pandemic, we've already heard some of the statistics from Dr. Mason. Women were more severely hit in terms of higher unemployment rates, and disparities were even worse for women of color.

The gender wage gap overall remained about the same, but gender pay inequities worsened for Hispanic and Black women during the pandemic. Women were also disproportionately represented among frontline workers. Overall, 64 percent of frontline workers during the pandemic were women. And frontline workers were overrepresented by Black workers and Hispanic workers. And, as we heard from Cynthia Murray, they experienced a number of hardships. They were also more—less likely to be covered by health insurance, and they earned less on average than those working in nonessential industries, meaning their safety nets were especially weak if they were to contract COVID.

Men and women both allocated more time toward childcare and household chores during the pandemic, but the research does show overwhelmingly that women's workloads increased relatively more.

At the national level, in the spring of 2021, about 6.5 million families with children reported experiencing childcare disruptions, and research by my center at Rutgers shows that, specifically in New Jersey, 21 percent of low-income parents indicated that they had to cut their work hours because of childcare disruptions. And another 23 percent indicated that someone left or lost their job as

a result of childcare—the childcare crisis. That was low-income parents. These percentages were much lower for high-income families; only about 7 or 8 percent indicated these kind of losses.

Now, as Chairman Clyburn said, we do need to look forward at a host of policies that can support low-income workers, and first is that the Federal Government can help to incentivize employers to provide employment policies in the private sector that support and retain women, especially in the area of work-life balance, but also to develop resources, remove bias, and eliminate sexual harassment.

In addition, the government needs to work with employers to do more to help workers with unstable schedules. Scheduling instability leads to economic hardship because of limited opportunity for career growth and fluctuating paychecks. There is also evidence that scheduling practices have a role in perpetuating racial inequality.

The public sector needs to do a lot to support low-wage working parents. First and foremost is to develop national legislation that values care. Priorities for strengthening the care infrastructure include providing paid family leave and paid sick leave, creating universal free childcare and long-term eldercare, boosting pay inequity and job creation in nursing, and improving working conditions and pay for paid care providers. Investing in the care infrastructure can grow employment and reduce women's unpaid work burdens.

In addition, one of the most important policy levers for helping low-income workers is the minimum wage. Women are more clustered than men in low-wage jobs, so raising the minimum wage will help to close the overall male-female wage gap, as well as the racial and ethnic wage gaps. The Federal minimum wage is just \$7.25 per hour, which is not considered a living wage in most parts of the country. A number of states and localities have raised their minimum wages, and it's time for the Federal Government to follow suit.

The research shows that minimum wage hikes do not lead to big layoffs or to higher inflation. So overall, in summary, the best way for the government to shore up a supportive work environment in the future is to develop national legislation that values care, raise the minimum wage, and incentivize employers to adopt workplace policies that recognize the domestic responsibilities of their employees.

Thank you.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Dr. Rodgers. And thanks to all of you for your statements today.

And we will now move into a period of questions. And the chair recognizes himself for five minutes, and I think I will get to a question. But I must make a statement.

Today is May 17. It may not mean anything to anybody in the room but me, but it was 68 years ago today—I remember exactly where I was—when the Supreme Court handed down its 1954 Brown decision. Sixty-eight years ago today.

Now, I could spend the rest of my life talking about what happened before Brown, and all of us can spend the rest of our lives talking about what happened before COVID-19, or we can spend a little time trying to figure out how best to move forward from

whatever mistakes may have been made, whoever may have made them, or we can spend a lot of time assigning blame.

I would hope that, after listening to these statements here today, that we can come up with some recommendations that this committee can hopefully get the entire Congress to respond to so that we can do something about going forward. I was attending triple-shift school—not double shift, but triple shift—when that decision came down. But I have not spent all my life worrying about that. I'm trying to see what we can do going forward.

And so I'm going to ask this question. Ms. Murray, you work at a Wal-Mart. You shared with us some dramatic—two dramatic situations involving your fellow employees.

What would you suggest we do going forward?

Ms. MURRAY. We need quite a few things to move forward. One, we need to put in place for workers to have paid sick time off. We need to stop pushing workers to come to work sick because they get penalized for missing a day. That is one thing that we need—we need definitely in our country right now.

We need better healthcare for workers that work the hours that they work, and childcare. We need to do a whole lot better for our working mothers that have to take time off when they're sick, and then they become sick.

So, our policies overall have to change with our companies. Our companies have to stop pointing out our workers. Our pay has to become better for each and every one of us.

Thank you.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you.

Ms. Shabo, would you have some answers to the problems just expressed by Ms. Murray?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely. I mean, the situations that Ms. Murray described are horrible, and they're not unique. And we know that, when workers have access to paid sick time, they are more likely to take themselves out of the work force for a shorter period of time. They're more likely to get healthcare that they need in an acute way. They're more likely to get preventive healthcare. People are healthier. Contagions spreads less.

As I said, even the limited temporary policy that Congress put in place on a bipartisan basis at the beginning of this pandemic prevented 15,000 cases of COVID per day nationwide. And, if that policy had been expanded to businesses of all sizes, if the Department of Labor had enforced it, if the regulations that had been written had not been circumscribed, we would have been in a much different place.

And, if workers had had paid sick time without being penalized, we could have had a shorter pandemic, which would have actually produced better results for the country overall.

Mr. CLYBURN. So—

Ms. SHABO. We also do need child—I mean, childcare is a huge problem. It's something we have to do something about. It's something we needed to do before. Paid family and medical leave has long been an issue. Fair schedules, entirely beneficial to workers and to businesses, and yet we keep perpetuating these policies that hold people back.

Mr. CLYBURN. Dr. Mason, I'm interested in what your research may have found regarding this issue.

Ms. MASON. Much of our research supports what Vicki has said about the impact of the lack of paid sick leave on workers and the need for us to have and pass paid sick and family leave at the Federal level.

What we've found during the pandemic and some other of my colleagues pointed out that, because of the lack of childcare, because of the overrepresentation of women of color in the hardest hit sectors, what—they suffered disproportionately during the pandemic.

And so, when we look at policies that we will need, it's paid sick and family leave, it's health insurance, but it's also raising the minimum wage, because you noted yourself that, before the pandemic and during the pandemic, many of these women were hanging on by a thread economically, and the pandemic exacerbated their economic vulnerability.

So, in this moment, we've learned so much over the last two years, and we have an obligation to workers and to families to get it right this time around and create policies that are equitable, fair, and that move us toward our goal—I believe our shared goal of economic prosperity for all.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much.

The chair now recognizes—I think the ranking member—Mr. Jordan, you are now recognized.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CLYBURN. I'm going to give you six minutes.

Mr. JORDAN. That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ham, has the Biden administration—has the Biden administration done anything right?

Ms. HAM. On the issue of schools, they have—

Mr. JORDAN. Well, I'm saying in general.

Ms. HAM. In general?

Mr. JORDAN. I mean, seven out of ten Americans think the country—I don't know if I've ever seen wrong track numbers this high. Seven out of ten of our fellow citizens think—

Ms. HAM. I mean—

Mr. JORDAN [continuing]. this country is on the wrong track.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. they're pretty bad, which is one of the reasons I speak about this issue and bring the political part of it to bear, because great confidence has been lost in this particular demographic, with really good reason.

Mr. JORDAN. Yep. You're—

Ms. HAM. In order to improve one's political fortunes, one needs to recognize that that happened.

Mr. JORDAN. Now, you said you're a mom with, I think, two children. Is that right?

Ms. HAM. Three kids.

Mr. JORDAN. Three kids? Mom with three kids. Everything costs more? Everything costs more today?

Ms. HAM. Yes, that's correct.

Mr. JORDAN. Clothes cost more for your kids, food costs more, gas to take them to soccer practice, band practice, whatever your kids are involved in. That probably costs more, too, right?

Ms. HAM. That's correct.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes. And, if you're a mom who needs baby formula, that costs more, too, if you can even find it. I mean, everything costs more, right?

Ms. HAM. It—yes. If you can find it, which is another grave issue for many moms. And I would say, on the of issue of the—of economic issues and inflation, just like with the school stuff, the reason I care about these things is because, if it is hurting me, I know that it is hurting other people—

Mr. JORDAN. Yes.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. far more, because I have some amazing things in my employment. I have some flexibility. I don't have some of the things that you guys have mentioned, but I have some flexibility. I have abilities to work around this. I have the ability to teach my kids at home. I opened up my home to other people's families who did not have that ability—

Mr. JORDAN. Yep.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. because I knew that these trends were hurting other people who did not have the resources I had far worse than they were hurting me. And I deeply want those to be acknowledged and dealt with before we move to the solution, because the problem must be acknowledged before we move to the solution.

Mr. JORDAN. Well said. And let's talk about some of those people who were directly impacted in a much worse way than you.

Everything costs more today. They kept your kids out of school, I think you said for a year. But more than—for more than 6 million students in the country, mostly concentrated in America's bluest metro areas—I'm reading from your testimony—they were deprived of in-person instruction for more than a year. They got the worst of it.

But some 30 percent of American students missed four months. That's another 15—21 million kids missed 30 percent or more of their education.

So, everything costs more. They kept your kids out of school. And here is the thing that gets me. If you are a mom who showed up at a school board meeting to speak out against some of the things that were being done to your son or daughter, you might have been targeted by the Justice Department. I mean, I think you mentioned in your opening testimony, the election in Virginia, Mr. Youngkin, it was a huge issue last fall. But I've never seen anything like this.

We had whistleblowers come forward, over two dozen cases where this threat tag designation that Mr. Garland put in place, this apparatus and process he put in place. So, they keep your kids out of school. Everything now costs more for a mom, for a dad. And, if you go show up at a school board meeting to speak out against some of the things they're doing with your kids' education, oh, my goodness, you may get investigated by the FBI. Such a deal for the tax-paying moms of this country.

Ms. HAM. Yes, it's a problem, because—and, again, the reason I talk about this as often as I do is because a lot of families were hurt who have far more—fewer resources than I do. And, when they had the temerity to go before their public servants and ask for the public good, to which they are entitled and for which they paid the same amount of taxes, even when it did not exist, they

were pilloried, and, in fact, sometimes targeted by Federal law enforcement, which is a very, very big deal.

Mr. JORDAN. Now, Ms. Ham, you're a journalist, right?

Ms. HAM. Yes, I am.

Mr. JORDAN. And who do you work for?

Ms. HAM. CNN.

Mr. JORDAN. You work for CNN?

Ms. HAM. And I freelance various other places. I've written for The Atlantic and—

Mr. JORDAN. So, I just want to walk you through real quick, because I've never seen anything like this in my life. September 29, the last year, the National School Board Association sends a letter to the Biden administration saying, Use domestic terrorism acts and laws and statutes, the PATRIOT Act, to go after moms and dads.

Five days later, the Attorney General of the United States issues a memorandum where he actually puts in place a process—an apparatus to do just that. He sets up a—what he called a dedicated line of threat communication, what I would call a snitch line, so people could snitch on their fellow citizens who were showing up at these school board meetings.

And then, 16 days after that, the F—and he sends that memorandum, by the way, to every U.S. attorney in the country. And then, 16 days later, the FBI sends out an email to FBI agents around the Nation. And, as I said, we learned from whistleblowers that they used that apparatus to go after moms and dads.

So, from September 29th to October 20th, they put this in place. First thing I always say is I've never seen the Federal Government move that fast on anything. But, when it comes to chilling moms' and dads' speech, oh, my goodness, they can operate at record speed. That is frightening.

And as a journalist, I would think—and as a mom, you would say the same. Is that correct?

Ms. HAM. Yes. And, by the way, the sort of exodus from the National School Board Association by local school boards shows—and some—

Mr. JORDAN. And—

Ms. HAM [continuing]. State school boards shows that—

Mr. JORDAN. State of Ohio got out of it.

Ms. HAM. Yes. Shows that this was a—this was a misstep, and it became very public. And it is a betrayal of parents, who have the right to speak to their public servants—and, by the way, we're barred from doing so for much of the pandemic because they were not allowed to be in person, just like their children were not allowed to be in person.

And I also, as a free-speech enthusiast, would love—love for people—parents who disagree with me to speak—

Mr. JORDAN. Sure.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. vociferously—

Mr. JORDAN. That's called America. That's called the First Amendment.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. at all of these meetings as well. So, look, it's a problem. I think it, again, goes to the trust problem. And one of the reasons that parents will look with a highly skeptical eye on

the next solution coming down the pike for them is because this very basic service was taken away from them.

Mr. JORDAN. Yep.

Ms. HAM. And it was taken away from them in such a way that it was very hard to address. They were left with, as you guys note, very few safety nets in some cases. And they remain rightly skeptical that their local government or the Federal Government in some cases is going to be able to step in and solve these problems.

So, I think it's very important to look to the future. And one of the things we need to recognize is that, in the present, many of America's metro area schools remain unstable for the very women we're talking about—

Mr. JORDAN. Yep.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. because their children have to quarantine teen for 10 days because they saw a person at a soccer field that had COVID.

Mr. JORDAN. I'm out of time, but I just want to get one more question in if I could, Ms. Ham.

Do you support school choice?

Ms. HAM. I do.

Mr. JORDAN. God bless you. I do, too. And I don't think—I don't think Americans should vote for any candidate for any office if they're not in favor of letting moms and dads decide where their son or daughter is going to get the best education. That's so fundamental.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you, Ms. Ham.

Mr. CLYBURN. I thank the gentleman for yielding back. Just keep on living. You'll see how fast the government can work. It worked real fast before 1954.

With that, the chair recognizes Ms. Velázquez—

Mr. JORDAN. We'll deal with that later.

Mr. CLYBURN [continuing]. For five minutes.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Mason, women of color are overrepresented in the hospitality and service sectors, which tend to feature lower pay and fewer benefits. And these jobs saw some of the largest—saw some of the largest dropoffs in employment during the pandemic.

Dr. Mason, what kinds of challenges have women of color, particularly those who work in low-wage jobs, faced in participating in the work force during the pandemic?

Ms. MASON. So, thank you so much for this wonderful question, and I also want to say that I appreciate Ms. Ham's invocation of her experience as a mother and navigating the pandemic. I do want to say that I am, too, a mother, a single mother of 12.5-year-old twins.

And the caregiving challenges for me was exacerbated by school closures. And I understood that it was really important in this moment for us to really take the pandemic and its impact on—you know, on the public health really, really seriously. And, for many women of color, I was very fortunate to be able to work remotely. For many of the workers that we've been talking about today, that was not the case.

Many women of color, lower-wage workers, because of the lack of paid sick and family leave and the fact that, in order to get paid,

you have to show up physically to a location, had to drop out of the work force. And a lot of the conversation and narrative around who was able to drop off—out of the work force left these women out of that conversation.

But, in truth, Black and Latina women, because of caretaking responsibilities and demands, the lack of paid sick and family leave, were more likely than other women to exit the work force.

And, as I said, many of these issues around workplace flexibility, lack of paid sick leave, the high cost—high and exorbitant costs of childcare, were issues for many women of color in the work force, lower-wage workers. And the pandemic just exacerbated those challenges and that reality for many women.

And, when we look at the—even the policies that were passed to stem the pandemic, many workers—immigrant workers and lower-wage workers who worked at companies who were excluded from providing paid sick leave, were women of color.

So, you know, I just want to say, in this moment, as we are thinking about how we move forward, thinking about a comprehensive package of policies that will improve the working conditions, wages of lower-wage workers is what we need. The blame game and looking at who is to blame for what happened during the pandemic is counterproductive and doesn't get us to where we need to be.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you.

Ms. MASON. All right.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you.

Ms. Shabo, while policies like paid leave will benefit women greatly, these type of low-wages jobs are the least likely to provide access to these benefits.

How have differences in access to benefits like paid leave impacted the experiences of different segments of women workers?

Ms. SHABO. Thank you for the question, Ms. Velázquez.

We know from states that have paid family and medical leave programs in place—and there are now 11 of them, plus D.C.—Delaware just passed this past week, which is very exciting—we know from states like California that are going on nearly 20 years of experience that women are better able to stay employed. They have wages that go up over time.

The program has been particularly beneficial to Latina women, who are able to take a longer leave, which means that they're able to care for their new children. We know that women who are caregivers to older people or disabled adults are able to come back to work.

These are prowork policies that support women. They support families and the people who need care. They support businesses. And, in fact, businesses in New York, your state, and New Jersey became more favorable toward paid leave policies—public paid leave policies during the pandemic. These are our win-win policies for workers, businesses, families, and the economy overall.

And if I could just say one—one thing about this school closure. I just want to point out that, actually, Democrats' HEROES Act, which was passed in July 2020, included \$5 billion to upgrade schools for HVAC and ventilation. If that had passed with Republican support that it needed, we would have been past the school

closure issue much faster. We would have gotten kids back to school.

But I agree with Dr. Mason. And I'm a mother as well. We can't have kids be in schools that are unsafe.

But I want to pivot toward the future, and I really appreciate the question, Ms. Velázquez.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I know my time is up, but I just would like to add that, coming the midterm election, no one in this country should support any candidate who really talk about and support replacement theory.

I yield back.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you, Ms. Velázquez.

The chair now recognizes Dr. Green for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Scalise, and I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today.

The committee today is titled to have us discuss and focus our remarks and questions on the pandemic's economy's impact on low-wage working women. And I'm going to do just that. I'm going to speak about the No. 1 impact on low-income families across the board in our country.

The most important pressing economic issue facing American workers is inflation. Some of us have been warning that the massive amount of Federal spending pumped into the economy would lead to sustained inflation. I warned the fed chair in this room about this back in 2020.

Yet, in 2021, Democrats rammed through \$2 trillion spending package on a party line vote. And, unsurprisingly, United States is witnessing the highest inflation in four decades. Inflation is crushing the budgets of working families, who are now struggling to afford everyday expenses. In April, the consumer price index was 8.3 percent over the previous year. Think about that.

Prices are going up by over eight percent across the board on many of the most common household goods. Rent has increased 11 percent in the past year, disproportionately hurting low-income Americans. High gas prices are causing pain at the pump, with the average price of gallon of a gas up nearly 50 percent in the past year.

According to the Joint Economic Committee, inflation costs American households an average of \$569 each month. That's nearly \$7,000 a year.

Parents go to the grocery store and find that food prices keep going up. That assumes that what they are looking for, such as baby formula, is even in stock.

Even Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, a donor to the Democrat Party and liberal causes, warned that—and I quote—“this administration tried hard to inject even more stimulus into an already overheated inflationary economy, and only Manchin saved them from themselves. Inflation is a regressive tax that most hurts the least affluent,” end quote.

Bezos is right about inflation being a tax on the least affluent. Working Americans are bearing the brunt of Bidinflation, and each passing day makes it more and more difficult for them to afford everyday expenses. Working mothers have been especially hard-hit as

they try to provide for their children while their paychecks are eaten up by inflation.

The Biden administration has stubbornly chosen to ignore this reality. First, they said that inflation was transitory. Again, I remember asking the fed chair in this room. That's exactly what they said. It's transitory.

As it became obvious that inflation wasn't going away, President Biden tried to cast the blame everywhere else to avoid responsibility for a crisis that his policies have created in the past year. Meanwhile, inflation continues to rise, costing Americans hundreds of dollars every single month, and eating away at the value of their savings.

In conclusion, massive infusions of cash within this economy have actually taken almost \$7,000 a year out of the pockets of the poorest among us. This is the legacy of the past year, and it is academic truth.

Let me ask a question to Ms. Ham in the little bit of time that I have left.

What do you think are some of the impacts of this inflation on the working moms and, you know, folks that are—what we would call less affluent in our society?

Ms. HAM. Well, again, speaking—you read out all the numbers, and the numbers are very stark. And I'm sure that every single person here has felt them when you go to the grocery store.

It's not rocket science, and, again, I know that I have abilities and resources and flexibilities that other families do not have. And, if we are hurting, then other people are hurting so much worse.

And the idea that the solution to all of this always is more trillions of dollars, I think, is misguided, because we have put ourselves in a situation with the 5 trillion already out the door, and yet somehow couldn't get schools back open. Strangely, as I said, public schools all over the country, public schools in Europe, public schools in Scandinavia, in Britain, they all opened. The counterfactual exists where you could safely reopen.

That is not to say March 2020, right? This is not a reckless pursuit. But to note that the costs to children, particularly those who were already at a disadvantage, and their families would be greater and terrible from a year of closed school—the idea that that is improper to look at, to acknowledge, the idea that that is somehow only in the past when a generation of gains for minority students have been wiped out and then some, they will be dealing with this for the foreseeable future.

And my thought is, given that the 5 trillion couldn't handle opening schools properly, maybe we should concentrate on those issues, because the Federal Government is not that great at doing a bunch of things well.

Mr. CLYBURN. The lady's time has expired.

The chair recognizes Mr. Raskin for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The right to make your own reproductive decisions about your own body is a basic human right, but the GOP has been advocating for decades to take that right away from American women. And now we know that, after packing the Supreme Court with right-wing ideologists, they are about to get their way. If Justice Alito's

narrow majority holds and the Supreme Court strikes down *Roe v. Wade* and abolishes the constitutional right to privacy, access to safe and legal abortion will be abolished or dramatically curtailed in more than 20 states immediately.

But our colleagues say in Congress that abortion is murder, and they want a nationwide law making it a crime for women to have abortions anywhere in the country.

So, these bans will be terribly painful for women who work in low-wage jobs. And, Ms. Mason, I want to ask you that—what would a nationwide Republican law against abortion in the United States do to affect women’s ability to participate in the economy?

Ms. MASON. Thank you so much for this question. It’s actually a real travesty, the impending Supreme Court decision, and will have a devastating impact on women workers, especially workers of color.

IWPR did a study this time last year, and we found that, as a result of state-level abortion restrictions, not even thinking about the recent Supreme Court decision, states—state and local economies and women workers would lose \$105 billion annually because of these restrictions. And, with the impending Supreme Court decision, we know that those costs will be exacerbated.

And, when we talk about the losses—the economic losses to women, we’re talking about lost wages, lost productivity, and especially without paid sick and family leave as well as healthcare insurance, the costs to these workers are exponential, including the—potentially the loss of jobs.

And so, when I think about this ban and put it in context, what I want to point out for sure is that many of the states, Mississippi included, are—have been and historically been hostile to not only women, but women of color and people of color.

Mississippi ranks low—the lowest, or among the lowest states on every social indicator of well-being for women. This ban before the Supreme Court, as well as the other states that are considering similar laws, are all states that have not taken care and concern around women’s economic security, and this bill or these bans just, again, will have a devastating impact on women’s economic security, but also families’ economic well-being overall.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you for that.

You know, the same people who want to brand women in United States as criminals for exercising what is today, at least for a few more weeks, a constitutional right have consistently voted against paid family leave policies.

So, Ms. Rodgers, what will be the effect on women in the workplace if they have neither reproductive choice in the full panoply of healthcare that women enjoy today, nor paid family leave policies available to them?

Ms. RODGERS. I agree very strongly with what Dr. Mason just said, that there is no gender equality in the workplace without paid family leave, without access to affordable childcare, and without full access to reproductive health services, including access to safe abortion.

And there is now a large body of very rigorous empirical evidence showing that access to abortion services affects positively women’s investment in their education, women’s attachment to the labor

force. It also reduces their likelihood of living in poverty as a result of being denied an abortion. And access to these services reduces their likelihood of raising children in poverty if women are denied an abortion.

There is even evidence at the macroeconomic level showing that abortion rights and liberalizing abortion laws also positively improves GDP per capita. There is as much as an 11 percent increase in women's labor supply when we have a reduction in abortion restrictions, which could lead to an increase in GDP per capita of up to seven percent.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that, when you look around the world, giving women control over their own reproduction and fertility is the key to ending poverty, and we're moving in exactly the wrong direction today.

I yield back.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank the gentleman for yielding back.

The chair now recognizes Dr. Miller-Meeks for five minutes.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And, first, I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for coming before the committee to testify today.

And I think that we're all concerned with the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and school closures have had on children and parents alike. And, unlike some of what I've heard in this room today, there is not a blame game, but the reason you have to look back, as I can tell you, being a physician, a nurse, a 24-year military veteran, and a director of the Department of Public Health, if you don't—if you don't do a review of what you've done, that sets the precedent.

And, since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, I have written extensively—and even being sworn into Congress—written extensively and talked about the adverse consequences of locking down a society, that the pandemic was life versus life. It was never life versus the economy. And, if we don't want to recognize that, the precedent going forward for the next pandemic is that we do exactly the same thing.

Just last week, *The New York Times* reported on the high cost of school closures. Thank goodness they finally recognized that there was a cost of school closures on our most vulnerable population. They found it was very clear that remote schooling was not good for learning and that schools with large numbers of poor students were more likely to go remote.

They even link this finding to the fact that students typically live in cities run by Democrat officials, and even the World Health Organization last year said we should not continue locking down schools, that childhood poverty had increased by over 15 percent because of our response to the pandemic, and it would be decades until we recovered that loss.

Our great Governor, Governor Reynolds in the state of Iowa, with the concert and approval of our legislature—and I was a state senator at that time—decided in the fall—the end of the summer, fall of 2020, we would reopen Iowa schools to in-person learning and had no adverse consequences or effects.

Ms. Ham, can you talk how disproportionately low-income students and parents have suffered from prolonged school closures?

Ms. HAM. I mean, it's becoming painfully obvious in these studies of learning loss during this time. And this is the kind of thing—again, to your point and to your point, made eloquently, Representative Clyburn, about *Brown v. Board*, we do not fix things by not talking about this grave error, right, which was the pre-*Brown v. Board* era of schooling in American society, right?

We should never put that in the rearview mirror forever, because it then causes us to make the same mistakes in the future, which is a great reason for you to bring it up in this hearing.

The same goes for this, where we have made grave errors. And, as I said, these are not in the past. Schools remain destabilized. And the kids and the parents who have to deal with this learning loss, in Chicago in particular—I believe it was in Cook County, one county board member—a Democrat obviously—it's Cook County—said, like, in the last 18 months, that they've had two years of learning loss among those kids.

They will have to wrestle with that, and their parents, many of them single parents, will have to be doing the tutoring, finding the tutoring, floundering to get them back up to speed.

And my suggestion is simply that, when we are talking about solutions, let's concentrate a whole lot of it on clawing back what we gave away during the last two years, which were consistent and very good gains for minority students in places where they really needed help.

And we gave it away for no reason, because, after a very short period of time, the facts made clear that you could have kids in school safely and that it was, in fact, a safer place than many other places, because it did—it only reflected community spread and, in fact, was insulated from it a bit with other mitigations.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. And we talked a lot about the lack of child nutrition—nutrition when schools closed, with child abuse because mandatory reporters were not in school to see children.

We also—when I came into Congress and my first markup in Education and Labor happened to reveal that there was over \$60 billion that was allocated to schools that was not spent, and even after the ERF package COVID relief was passed for schools to reopen and teachers put at the top front of the line to get vaccinations, still schools remained closed.

So, we also note that, once schools reopened, some harmful policies have remained in place, such as forcing our children to be masked.

I recently introduced a resolution to express disapproval of the requirements in the Head Start programs to wear masks in the classroom. Three and four-year-olds continuing to wear masks, despite being very obvious now and research showing now on the negative impacts, the speech impediments on children having to wear masks in school.

So, Ms. Ham, we only have a few short minutes. Can you discuss the impact that masking in schools has had on our children?

Ms. HAM. Yes. I think there is a broader point here, which is that, you know, the experts say don't look backward, we need to spend more money on these problems in the ways that we have

proscribed. But the experts were wrong about sending kids back to school and whether it would be dangerous. And they told you that putting your kid on a screen for six hours a day would be an awesome idea and everything would work out fine, even though we knew from years of study that that probably wasn't a great idea.

They told you that covering your kids' face with a mask was the safe thing to do, and it was totally worth any of the interaction and socializing and speech therapy that they would lose as a result. In many cases, it wasn't, particularly for children with disabilities who suffered the worst from some of these mitigation processes.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you.

I yield back my time.

Mr. CLYBURN. There is a vote on, and we have to vote.

So, we would like to go to Mr. Foster for five minutes, and I'm going to try to get to Mr. Krishnamoorthi before we have to go vote.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the biggest factors pulling women out of the work force during the pandemic was needing to care for ill or loved ones or children learning from home.

The bipartisan Families First Coronavirus Response Act required employers to provide paid sick and family leave to certain employees that were—are affected by their coronavirus. Although the coronavirus is still circulating, that provision expired at the end of 2020.

Last year, I introduced the Pandemic Leave Extension Act, which would extend FFCRA's paid leave requirement until the end of the public health emergency.

Ms. Shabo, how would widespread access to paid family and medical leave for coronavirus-related issues make a difference for women workers?

Ms. SHABO. Mr. Foster, thank you so much for your leadership and for your question.

So, the FFCRA was a good first step. It prevented 400 cases per day per state, or more than 15,000 cases per day nationwide. And it was limited, as you know. It did not affect workers in larger businesses who had trouble.

If we were to bring back FFCRA, even if it's in its original form, it would have a significant effect on the spread of illnesses through workplace, particularly as masks have been removed, particularly as large companies are no longer telling people that there has been a spread in their workplace, particularly as they're rolling back, as Amazon has, all of their emergency paid sick leave. So, it would be tremendous.

In addition, if we still covered childcare leave, when workers do have children who are being asked to quarantine or stay home or when schools do have outbreaks, it would allow parents to maintain their jobs and take care of their children.

FFCRA was tremendous. It was helpful to employers. Actually, more employers filed for FFCRA tax credit relief than filed for some of the other employer retention tax credits and others.

So, this was an important first step. It was bipartisan, and I applaud Congress for that. And it's a real travesty, a misstep, and shortsighted that it expired, and in particular that the requirement expired. But now there is not even tax credits available either.

Mr. FOSTER. Yes. So—but it's fair to characterize it as a probusiness piece of legislation—

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely.

Mr. FOSTER [continuing]. In its effect?

Ms. SHABO. When workers have access to paid sick time, they're more likely to stay home, which means a shorter period of spread through their workplaces.

Actually, Ms. Mason's institution, IWPR, did a study of the H1N1 flu several years ago and found that the period of illnesses or contagion within workplaces was shorter. And, you know, we can't miss—misread the steps here. People need access to paid sick time.

And businesses need to know that their workers are healthy, that they're not coming to work at lower productivity, and that everyone is working as they should.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you.

I'd like to speak for a moment about the macroeconomic effects of this. Women's incomplete work force participation has economic consequences for everybody. Studies show that the labor market disparities cost our country trillions of dollars of potential GDP, let alone the impact on families—individual families' well-being. And this places the United States at a global competitive disadvantage, and it's left the United States ranking second to last in growth for women's work force participation among the OECD countries.

The pandemic has just exacerbated that trend. If labor force participation for American women was at rate similar to those of Canada, Germany, or the U.K. during the pandemic, the United States would have saved an estimated \$97 billion of GDP losses.

Now, so, Dr. Rodgers, could you explain how low female labor force participation and over a million women leaving the labor force during the pandemic impacts our economic growth?

Ms. RODGERS. That is such an excellent question.

One of the fundamental inputs into economic growth is the input of workers. We need both physical capital as well as human capital. And it's both the number of workers as well as their education that matters.

So, when women are withdrawing from the labor force because of constraints that they face, that is indeed a—puts a damper on economic growth, and there is a number of studies that have shown what you've just alluded to, that women's labor force participation, when that gap with men closes, gender inequality is reduced, and economic growth is promoted.

And we've also seen literature showing that, when laws are changed and companies are more inclusive, when women have greater rights around the world, including in the U.S., that also promotes economic growth.

One study that I did looked specifically at laws surrounding sexual orientation as well as gender identity, and we found that one additional right supporting inclusion in the economy contributes to an increase in GDP per capita of \$2,065 on average. These are large effects, and gender equality does matter for the macro-economy.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you. And I guess I can't let your reference to both human and physical capital slide without mentioning—giv-

ing a shout-out to the Cobb-Douglas production function. One of the fundamental macroeconomic papers of I guess all time, and authored—coauthored by Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois.

Ms. RODGERS. Absolutely.

Mr. FOSTER. I yield back.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Foster.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Krishnamoorthi for five minutes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. OK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ham, I'd like to turn your attention to an article that we found in *The Federalist* dated April 10, 2018. It's entitled "Equal Pay Day Hypes"—I'm sorry—"Equal Pay Day Hype Ignores the Facts and Women's Feelings About the Workplace."

I have this article in front of me. And I just want to draw your attention to page four of this article.

And, here, you say, quote, "Women are far more willing to give up higher pay for more comfortable work requirements."

You wrote that as part of this piece, correct?

Ms. HAM. Yes. The piece is about how, when you do the calculations of equal pay day in such a way that does not take into account people's desires for what their workplace looks like, you end up not accounting for the fact that women desire the ability—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Correct. I'm just—I want to turn our attention to this statement. Women are far more—this is what you said: Women are far more willing to give up higher pay for more comfortable work requirements.

And, you know, I'm just thinking about Ms. Murray, who has testified today, who spent over 20 years working at Wal-Mart, and to this day brings home just over \$16 per hour.

Do you really believe, Ms. Ham, that Ms. Murray doesn't get paid a living wage or higher than \$16 per hour because she chooses not to be paid more?

Ms. HAM. No, I do not believe that. The—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. And do you believe that she chooses—

Ms. HAM. The poll that—may I—may I—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI [continuing]. Comfortable work requirements over being paid more?

Ms. HAM. No. The poll—what I'm referring to in that article, which you clearly read, is polling on what women want in a workplace, which I think is important to all of us, and one of the things they do want—and one of the things that, by the way, we've taken out of the pandemic and can increase, to you guys' points, is more workplace flexibility.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. I'm looking at this—

Ms. HAM. I am not casting—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. I'm looking at this article.

Ms. HAM [continuing]. Aspersions on any particular worker at all.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. There is no poll. There is no polling that this is citing here for this very broad statement. I don't see any citation whatsoever to any polling data.

Ms. HAM. *The New York Times* and others have—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. In fact, there is data that underlies that very broad statement.

Ms. Murray, I want to ask you a very simple question. You are paid \$16 per hour. You've worked 20 years at Wal-Mart. Do you feel like you've chosen to get paid less than your male counterparts?

Ms. MURRAY. No, not at all. And a lot of male workers get paid more than the women do at Wal-Mart.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. For doing the same job?

Ms. MURRAY. Yes. And we've asked Wal-Mart to be opened about how they pay—how the pay rate is for men and women, and of course they will not show us that.

But, no, I don't choose to get paid less than men, and I don't stay at Wal-Mart because it's a comfortable position. It's not. I stay there now because I feel workers need a voice across the country, and the only way that's going to happen is through other workers, like me and other workers that speak up and speak out.

And that's why I'm asking for workers to be put on boards of big companies, workers that work inside stores, so that they understand what these workers go through, because they just ignore us. They don't come in and really truly look and see what's happening.

So, the only way we can make these changes is to ask your workers that are on the front line. We are deemed essential workers. Treat us like that.

We do not need just the 40 cents a year raise. That does nothing for any worker in the country.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. So, let me—let me turn to Dr. Rodgers for a second.

With regard to this statement, women are far more willing to give up higher pay for more comfortable work requirements, what is your opinion about that statement? And let's just say that there is polling that shows that some people make tradeoffs—

Ms. HAM. Of course they do.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Is this an accurate—

Ms. HAM. Of course they do.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Is this—is this an—

Mr. CLYBURN. Excuse me.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. But is this an accurate—

Mr. CLYBURN. Ms. Ham?

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY [continuing]. Statement to describe the entire—entirety of the situation with regard to women?

Ms. RODGERS. No, absolutely not. It's not a willingness to give up pay. Women face a whole structure of constraints forcing them to make decisions and difficult choices. And especially low-wage women or low-income women are not willing to give up pay in order to be able to care for their children. These are constraints they face.

Ms. Ham has mentioned several times that education is a public good that we need to be investing in, but I want to emphasize that health is also an incredibly important public good, and we need to invest in health.

That means investing in HVAC systems in schools and improving the health at schools when they are open. It also means investing in our paid care workers, investing in our nurses, investing in personal protective equipment, which, as you probably remember, was in scarce supply at the beginning of pandemic.

So, we really need to invest in health as well as education in order to achieve gender equality.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you.

Mr. CLYBURN [continuing]. Dr. Rodgers, and thank you Mr. Krishnamoorthi.

We are just a few moments before we have to go to the floor to vote, and I want to thank all of our witnesses here today for being here.

And of course I'm going to truncate my closing statement here today to say that every one of you that testified today expressed some kind of research that has been done. And we came to this hearing because of surveys, questionnaires, and getting information from, I think, about 20 employers, about who got laid off and why.

Now, we can spend the rest of our lives analyzing—in fact, I think when I was coming along, we used to call it the paralysis of analysis. At some point in time, we've got to stop analyzing and start making recommendations as to what we do going forward. For some reason, we want to keep studying the issue.

We don't need to study these issues anymore. We know what the problems are. We want your good minds to help us find some solutions, and solutions are what we're looking for with these hearings.

So, I want to thank you all for being here today. And, to the extent that we got some solutions, we're going to try to act upon them.

But let me just close with our standard statement.

Without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:48 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

