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Editor's Note:

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Cornell Policy Group, I am excited to publish the twenty-first edition of the Journal of Affairs, the successor of the former Roosevelt Review.

Within this journal, we have compiled fifty-three proposals embodying an exceptional level of creativity and insight across numerous policy areas. Our analysts proposed innovative solutions to pressing sociopolitical issues and have demonstrated outstanding intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. It has been particularly impressive seeing our newest class of policy analysts develop into stronger writers and researchers in this semester. Characterized by a relentless desire for intellectual growth and a dedication to promoting justice, our newest cohort is emblematic of the principal values of our organization. I am confident that the Cornell Policy Group will continue to flourish, owing to their excellence.

An independent student organization born anew, the Cornell Policy Group has embraced its newfound dynamism and freedom. We have spearheaded a novel publication format, the video essay, and are excited to expand the reach of our policy ideas. Furthermore, we have renewed our New Analyst Training programs, successfully strengthening the writing and research skills of our new members. Similarly, the Cornell Policy Group has expanded its professional development resources and is excited to have further aided our analysts in the pre-professional sphere. Lastly, our organization has remained committed to its strong engagement with guest speakers from Congress, federal agencies, academia, and the private sector.

After a transformative past semester, the Cornell Policy Group has emerged as a dynamic, youthful organization. I trust that our club is well-poised for a strong future and place my complete faith in the soon-to-be-elected executive board and center directors. I extend my most sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported the Cornell Policy Group and this publication. It has been a true honor and pleasure serving as this organization's Editor-in-Chief for the past two academic years. I hope you enjoy our policy proposals from this semester, and I thank you for your time spent reading them.

Sincerely,

Franklin Zheng
Editor-in-Chief

DOMESTIC POLICY

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Closing the Gender Gap: Advocating for Government-Funded Childcare for Working Mothers

By Sophia Arnold, asa243@cornell.edu

The United States Government ought to implement a federally funded childcare voucher program to support mothers in re-entering the workforce, narrowing the gender pay gap while simultaneously fostering early childhood development.

Background

The issue of accessible and affordable childcare is emphasized by stark statistics that highlight its impact on workforce participation, particularly amongst working mothers. In the United States, 26% of mothers remain outside the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, as they lack adequate support in the form of accessible childcare.¹ Moreover, the gender pay gap persists, with women earning approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men, a disparity worsened by the challenges mothers face in balancing work and caregiving roles.² The absence of comprehensive government-funded childcare or daycare programs further exacerbates these challenges, placing economic strain on families and impeding the ability of parents, particularly mothers, to fully participate in the workforce. With over 60% of households with children under the age of six having both parents in the labor force, the need for accessible and affordable childcare options only continues to grow. The burden of caregiving responsibilities disproportionately falls on working mothers, who face significant barriers to accessing affordable and high-quality childcare while balancing their professional aspirations alongside caregiving.³ This reality furthers gender inequalities in the workforce, including disparities in wages, limited opportunities for career advancement, and economic stability for women.

Private childcare alternatives often come with exorbitant costs, with the average annual cost for center-

based childcare at \$18,886 per child.⁴ This financial burden can lead families, particularly those with limited incomes, to make difficult decisions regarding employment, career advancement, and financial stability. Furthermore, the absence of accessible and affordable childcare options has far-reaching implications for child development and early education. Research stresses the critical importance of quality early childhood education in promoting cognitive development, social-emotional skills, and academic achievement among children.⁵ Internationally, countries with robust government-funded childcare programs have demonstrated tangible benefits: increased workforce participation, reduced gender inequality, and greater economic prosperity.³ By investing in accessible and affordable childcare, the US government has the opportunity to promote gender equity, support working families, and foster the healthy development of children. Government-funded childcare, guided by data-driven approaches and evidence-based policies, has the potential to address the systemic challenges faced by working parents, enhance gender equity in the workforce, and promote economic growth for families.

Policy Idea

To address the critical need for accessible and affordable childcare, the United States should implement a policy of federally funded childcare through vouchers for working parents. This program would support families,

particularly working mothers, by providing them with financial assistance to cover the costs of childcare services. By issuing vouchers, the government can provide families with access to quality childcare options that fit their needs without overwhelming costs. This policy would not only facilitate workforce participation and career advancement for parents but also promote children's development and early education. Through this policy, the federal government can increase women's participation in the workforce, reduce the gender pay gap, and improve economic stability for families.

Policy Analysis

Government-funded childcare in the form of vouchers offers a practical and evidence-based solution to address the challenges faced by working mothers and families in the United States. Research shows that for every 10% increase in childcare enrollment, maternal employment rises by 2–3%.⁵ Countries with robust government-funded childcare programs have seen tangible benefits, such as higher rates of women in the workforce and reduced gender wage gaps.⁵

By providing financial assistance through vouchers, the proposed policy aims to ease the financial strain on families, especially for working mothers who often struggle to find affordable childcare options. Studies indicate that accessible and affordable childcare significantly boosts women's participation in the

labor force, enhancing economic productivity and reducing reliance on social welfare programs.⁶ Additionally, investing in early childhood education yields substantial returns, estimated at \$7–12 for every dollar spent.²

Beyond economic advantages, government-funded childcare has a positive impact on child development outcomes and contributes to reducing inequality. High-quality childcare during early years is essential for cognitive development, social-emotional skills, and academic achievement.⁷ By supporting accessible and affordable childcare through vouchers, the United States has the opportunity to promote gender equity, assist working families, and foster the healthy development of children.

Highlights

- The gender pay gap persists, with women earning approximately 82 cents to every dollar earned by men, a disparity that is exacerbated by the challenges faced in balancing work and caregiving roles.¹ The absence of comprehensive government-funded childcare or daycare programs further compounds these challenges. In the United States, more than 26% of mothers remain unable to participate in the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, exacerbating existing gender disparities in wages and career opportunities.²
- Over 60% of households with children under the age of six have both parents in the labor force, and with the burden of caregiving responsibilities disproportionately falling on working mothers, the demand for accessible and affordable childcare options is only growing.³
- The high price tag of private childcare, with an average annual expense of \$18,886 per

child, often forces families, especially those with limited income, to make difficult decisions regarding employment and financial stability.

- The U.S. Government should provide federally funded childcare through a voucher program to help ease financial burdens on families, especially working mothers, in order to enable parents to participate in the workforce, combat the gender pay gap, and support early childhood development.^{5,7}

Implementation

Within Congress, influential members and committees would likely play a crucial role in supporting this policy. Members of relevant committees, such as the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and Labor would spearhead the effort to draft and edit proposed legislation. Meanwhile, prominent lawmakers such as Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Rosa DeLauro, known for their advocacy on family welfare issues, would be candidates to champion the policy at the federal level.^{8,9} Interest groups such as the National Council on Family Relations and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, would also offer valuable insight into the importance of government-funded childcare and its potential impacts.^{10,11}

Research based on data from think tanks such as the Center for American Progress and New America would provide expert testimony and data to support the need for government-funded childcare and its positive impact on working families.¹² In addition, input on policymaking from working mothers, childcare providers, and subject experts through potential forums and public hearings to gather input would help emphasize the importance of affordable and

accessible childcare. Integrating public opinion into policymaking on childhood education and workforce participation can provide valuable insights into the benefits of the voucher program.

Fiscal conservatives may express pushback concerning government spending, and childcare providers may be wary of regulatory changes. Additionally, some individuals or groups may perceive the policy as infringing on parental choice or market dynamics. To mitigate backlash, shifting focus to the long-term benefits of government-funded childcare in promoting gender equity, economic benefits, and child welfare is crucial. By providing federal support to alleviate the financial burden associated with the cost of childcare, more mothers can enter or remain in the workforce, expanding the labor pool and stimulating the economy, leading to higher tax revenues and reduced reliance on welfare programs.

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Crop Tops and Climate Change: Requiring Supply Chain Transparency in Fast Fashion

By Rachel Baron, rlb399@cornell.edu

In light of the poor labor and climate practices commonplace in fast fashion, major fashion retailers should be required to report on their supply chains. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) should administer clothing tags for satisfactory retailers.

Background

The fast fashion industry, defined by its quick, inexpensive, and trendy production of apparel, is notorious for its capitalization on poor working conditions abroad and contributions to climate change.^{1,2,3} Despite these concerns, fast fashion totaled \$122.98 billion in 2023 and is forecasted to grow by 50 percent by 2027.⁴

At the start of the supply chain, garment workers are often forced to work 14–16 hours a day for seven days a week while being subject to verbal and physical abuse and in close exposure to toxic chemicals without ventilation.³ In addition to such exhausting hours and hazardous conditions, only two percent of the 75 million workers in the textile industry make living wages.⁵ Child and forced labor are also commonplace in cotton harvesting and sweatshops: 60 percent of workers at Indian textile mills were under 18 years old when they started their employment.^{6,7,8}

Fashion is the second-most-polluting industry and is projected to increase its greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030.^{2,8,9} Of this pollution, 10 percent of total global carbon emissions is sourced exclusively from fast fashion alone.² The industry also heavily contributes to water scarcity by consuming between 79 to 93 billion cubic meters of water annually.¹⁰ Fast fashion's high production and low garment lifespans pollute Global South landfills with 100 million tons of clothing annually and leach chemicals into the air, soil, and groundwater.^{9,11}

Currently, little legislation exists to regulate fast fashion. New York State lawmakers have authored the New York Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act, which would require major fashion companies operating in New York to map their supply chain and disclose their environmental and social operations on their websites.¹² Although the bill has not passed yet, it serves as an important precedent for regulating the fast fashion industry.

Policy Idea

The United States Congress should direct the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to require all major fashion retailers operating in the United States to conduct supply chain investigations and publicly report their environmental impact and labor conditions. Retailers would be eligible for a regulated tag on their garments and a notice on online storefronts contingent upon meeting a variety of predetermined standards. These standards would include, but not be limited to, satisfactory wages for garment workers, moderate or low carbon emissions and water consumption per garment produced, no child labor, and safe working conditions. In order to acknowledge the large undertaking of supply chain investigations, the policy would only apply to major fashion retailers that can afford such costs.

Policy Analysis

The clothing tags and online storefront notices would improve corporate transparency and enable

consumers to make more informed choices about their clothing choices. There is already a concerted effort on behalf of consumers to consider the social and environmental impacts of their clothing. Generation Z, who are individuals born between 1997 and 2012, reported that their largest reason for wanting to reduce their consumption of fast fashion is concerns over sustainability.¹³ Moreover, 53 percent of consumers reported that they would be willing to spend more for sustainable goods.¹⁴ Therefore this policy would enable buyers to make consumption choices that better align with their social and environmental wants.

Despite this demand for more sustainable clothing, fashion executives report that the top reason they struggle to improve their brand's sustainability image is consumers' inability to identify sustainable practices.¹⁵ By certifying sustainable and labor-friendly retailers through an informational tag, this policy would solve this knowledge gap, address executive concerns about brand image.

This policy would also address false claims of corporate responsibility by requiring supply chain transparency and externally verifying conformation with labor and environmental standards. Greenwashing, the practice of falsely portraying a company's environmental output to be better than reality for the purposes of marketing, is rampant among fast fashion brands.¹⁶ Only 18% of fashion retailers are on track to achieve their emissions targets.¹⁷ External confirmation of acceptable practices would verify or

refute corporate claims to enable consumers to better identify the environmental and social impact of their purchases.

Highlights

- The fast fashion industry capitalizes on stolen, underpaid, unsafe, and child labor in the Global South, the under-regulation of which is continued through a lack of external incentive to investigate supply chains.^{5,6,7,12}
- Although the large majority of fashion retailers are failing to stay on track with their plans to improve their labor and environmental standards, they nonetheless profit off of a false image of corporate sustainability.^{16,17}
- Major fashion retailers should be required to conduct supply chain investigations and publish their findings for the public, subject to FTC review and eligibility for a regulating clothing tag that indicates the satisfaction of various environmental and labor conditions.
- Verification of environmental and labor practices of fashion companies will allow socially and environmentally concerned consumers to make more informed choices about where they want their money to go as well as prevent corporate greenwashing from misleading the consumer and absolving companies from accountability.

Implementation

In light of the currently limited regulations on the fashion industry, the two aspects of the bill should be introduced in both the House and the Senate in order to maximize attention and visibility. This bill should be introduced in the House Committee on Energy and Commerce in the Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee and the Senate

Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security.

There are a multitude of Congressional caucuses that this bill might interest. Alongside the Congressional House Textile Caucus, caucuses for China, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and the Philippines should all be contacted for their support, as fast fashion primarily uses the labor of workers from these countries.¹⁸ Each caucus' combined numbers and bipartisan membership would be effective in mobilizing support across both chambers. In addition, environmental and labor justice interest groups, such as the Carbon Advocacy Group and the Global Labor Justice - International Labor Rights Forum should be mobilized on the bill to lobby Members of Congress and advocate for their cosponsorship.^{19,20} These coalitions may overcome the lobbying that would be expected to be done by major fast fashion companies.

Millennials and Generation Z should be mobilized in support of this bill through social media campaigns. Millennials are the average consumer of fast fashion giants like Shein, thus they likely have the largest vested interest in the affairs of their favorite brands.²¹ Similarly, Generation Z is the most likely to be concerned about the environmental output of fashion. A comprehensive advocacy campaign in favor of the bill should be dispersed on social media platforms with Millennial and Generation Z audiences, including Instagram, TikTok, and X. Although competing with fast fashion's own domination of social media, this campaign would nonetheless raise awareness and mobilize a constituent base of support.⁹

Upon passage of the bill, the FTC will be directed to create a set of quantitative measurements by which to determine environmental and labor standards that must be included in each supply chain report, such as median worker pay, level of exposure to toxic

chemicals, and average carbon emissions per garment. The FTC would also be responsible for determining the supply chain qualities that must be met in order to be eligible for a clothing tag and online notice, enforcing a deadline for supply chain reports, and granting access to the clothing tags and online notices upon satisfaction of their standards.

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Adjusting Child Labor Provisions in Agriculture

By Peri Dunn, pmd97@cornell.edu

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) should be amended to raise the minimum legal working age from 12 to 14 years old and the minimum age to operate hazardous machines from 16 to 18 to reduce the number of child injuries and deaths from working in agriculture.

Background

Child agriculture-related injuries and deaths are an ongoing public health concern. There are hundreds of thousands of children who work in America's fields and orchards as hired labor.¹ In most non-agricultural jobs, children cannot work until they are 14–16 years old, depending on the specific industry and local regulations.² In contrast, children as young as 12 years old can legally work in non-hazardous agricultural jobs outside of school hours with parental consent. At age 12 and 13, minors may work outside of school hours with parental consent or on the farm where their parents or guardians are also employed.³ In some cases, even younger children aged 10–11 years can work with special permits for specific tasks under limited circumstances. For all industries other than agriculture, the Department of Labor requires all people to be 18 years old or older to operate a hazardous machine. Evidently, the Department of Labor holds agriculture to a different standard than other industries, allowing it exceptions to child labor regulations that the department imposes on almost all other industries.

The agriculture industry ranks second in worker fatality rate with “22.8 per 100,000 full-time equivalents compared to 3.4 per 100,000 across all industries.”⁴ The deadly industry affects children even more drastically, as more US child workers die in agriculture than in any other industry.⁵ Each year, about 115 children succumb to agricultural-related incidents, while nearly 12,000 endure non-fatal injuries. The main causes of fatal injuries among these children include machinery-related work, such as with

tractors (25%), the use of motor vehicles, including ATVs (17%), and drownings (16%). The United States Department of Agriculture released a report in 2009 that recorded 15,876 injuries to youths under 20 years of age who lived, worked or visited a farm.⁶ It must be noted that of these injuries, youth ages 10 to 15 incurred the highest number of injuries at 6,912, and youths under age 10 incurred 4,111 injuries. While the exact number is unknown, an estimated 30,000 to 79,325 children between the ages of 10 and 17 are exploited for their work on US farms each year.⁷

The FLSA specifies its child labor regulations into “agricultural” and “non-agricultural.”⁸ This distinction originates from the Jim Crow South, where the Southern lawmakers who wielded significant influence at the time strongly opposed federal regulations on agriculture, a cornerstone of the Southern economy. This opposition was often racially motivated. Many agricultural laborers in the South were Black sharecroppers or their descendants. By exempting agriculture, these lawmakers were able to perpetuate a system wherein Black children were essentially forced to work in the fields alongside adults to support their families. The effects of this biased decision are long-lasting and harm children across the United States. Children in agricultural jobs face a range of acute and chronic health hazards, including extreme weather conditions, agrochemical exposure, physical hazards, and infectious diseases.⁹ Heat, a lack of water, musculoskeletal strain, and pesticides also harm children's bodies.

Policy Idea

Congress should amend The Fair Labor Standards Act's exceptions for youth workers in agriculture to grant children in agriculture the same protections granted to them in other industries. The minimum legal age for working in agriculture should be raised from 12 to 14 in all states. Furthermore, the minimum age for operating hazardous machines should be raised from 16 to 18, as required by all other industries. These efforts will reduce the number of minors who experience serious injuries or death as a result of working in dangerous agricultural conditions.

Policy Analysis

Implementing more labor provisions against child labor produces a cost-benefit analysis with positive outcomes. Agriculture-related deaths and injuries inflict a huge financial toll on the American people. In 2021, childhood agricultural-related fatalities created an annual cost of \$605 million, while non-fatal childhood agricultural injuries amounted to \$1.4 billion.¹⁰ As for nonfatal injuries today, youth agricultural injuries cost society an estimated \$1.6 billion per year, and youth agricultural deaths cost society an estimated \$671 million per year. This multi-billion-dollar cost demonstrates the financial need for reform.

It is difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of raising the minimum age for child labor in agriculture because there are few points of comparison. The rest of the world also has a low standard for the minimum age to work in agriculture. As a result, a staggering 71 percent, or 108 million children, were engaged in child labor

within the agricultural sector, according to the most recent Global Estimates of Child Labour from 2017.¹¹ This trend makes agriculture the predominant sector for child labor worldwide. The majority of nations around the world have comparatively higher agricultural-related deaths and injuries for children compared to the United States. Regardless, this statistic should not discredit the need for reform. The United States should seize the opportunity to raise its minimum age to set an example for the rest of the world.

Highlights

- Congress should amend The Fair Labor Standards Act's exceptions for youth workers in agriculture to grant children in agriculture the same protections granted to them in other industries.
- Congressional members from the Jim Crow South passed The FLSA, now 85 years old, to ensure that jobs predominantly held by Black, brown, and immigrant workers were exempt from its protections at the time of its passing.¹²
- The agriculture industry ranks second in fatality rate among all workers, with "22.8 per 100,000 full-time equivalents compared to 3.4 per 100,000 across all industries."¹³
- Agriculture had the leading number of occupational fatalities across industries for youth aged 17 and younger from 2011 to 2020 in the United States.¹⁴
- Agricultural-related fatalities and injuries have created a multibillion-dollar incurrence, making the reform of labor provisions necessary.¹⁵

Implementation

To implement a raised minimum age for working in agriculture and operating hazardous

machinery, the bill's sponsors should begin a targeted outreach and public relations strategy that aims to raise awareness and mobilize support for the proposed bill. Intentional, clear communication with the farming community is crucial, given the cultural significance that family farming has. These families may feel that the government is overstepping if proposing drastic changes, so it is essential to be extremely transparent with the families affected by this reform. The strategy to ensure proper communication should include launching and organizing community forums and reaching out to relevant stakeholders, such as labor unions, agricultural organizations, and child advocacy groups. This outreach effort may include The Child Labor Coalition, Save the Children, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Bureau for Workers' Activities, and the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. Furthermore, making outreach readily available in all languages, particularly Spanish, is crucial, as Latin Americans make up a drastic amount of child laborers in the US.¹⁶ Framing the issue as disproportionately affecting Latin and Black Americans can help mobilize groups such as the Hispanic and Black Caucuses that can help with the proposed bill's success.

Politically, the policy should be introduced at the federal level through collaboration with supportive members of Congress and relevant committees, such as the House Committee on Education and Labor and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Engaging with members of Congress with a track record of advocating for labor rights and child welfare, such as Representatives Raul Ruiz and Raúl Grijalva, would be pivotal. These representatives have already proposed similar reforms on revising the definition of oppressive child labor to prohibit the employment of children under 14 years of age, demonstrating they have the resources to encourage

the bill's success.¹⁷ Additionally, congressional members should form alliances with influential organizations like the American Farm Bureau Federation and the United Farm Workers to garner support and build a coalition for the proposed amendments.

The proposed policy may face significant backlash from the powerful agriculture lobby. The agriculture industry is a major economic force with substantial financial resources at its disposal.¹⁸ Agribusinesses, large-scale farmers, and agricultural corporations contribute significant funds to lobbying efforts, enabling them to hire top-tier lobbyists, conduct extensive advertising campaigns, and make substantial campaign contributions to politicians who support their interests. To navigate potential backlash, proactive measures should be taken to address concerns from stakeholders, including agricultural industry groups and lawmakers. For example, gaining support from representatives from farming states like Congressman Ruiz is crucial. Having a representative voice from a farming state would demonstrate to the agricultural lobby how beneficial the bill would be for children on farms. Furthermore, gaining support from lobbyists in child welfare and labor reform will be financially and politically necessary to counteract that of the agriculture lobby. This campaign should involve commissioning research studies to demonstrate the economic viability of implementing the proposed changes and highlighting the long-term benefits for children's well-being and the agricultural workforce. Despite the challenges that the agricultural lobby may present, the combined efforts of lawmakers, organizations, and lobbyists should be utilized to help protect children from the demonstrated dangers of agricultural labor.

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Repealing Right-To-Work Laws in the United States

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Right-to-work laws give an illusion of freedom and personal choice to rank-and-file workers, but such laws make workplaces much riskier. The federal government should require that states allow union shops, effectively repealing right-to-work laws across America.

Background

The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 drastically restricted union and labor power on the federal level by limiting strikes, boycotts, and other acts of worker solidarity. The act also repealed federal law that allowed closed shops, or workplaces that required workers to be a union member before being hired.¹ With closed shops being outlawed on a federal level, states still have the power to choose whether to allow union shops. Union shops are workplaces where, unlike closed shops, non-union members can be hired, but they still must join a union upon starting in their new position. Union shops have union security agreements that require all employees in a workplace with a certified union to pay union dues, which cover the costs of worker representation, carrying out grievance procedures, and strike funds. Some unions, like those under the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), also use dues to promote their political agendas and labor activism.² In 27 states, “right-to-work” laws prohibit union shops and union security agreements.³ While these laws are advertised as giving workers political and financial freedom in the workplace, they diminish union power and inadvertently promote lower wages, poor working conditions, and income inequality.⁴ Despite American union density (percentage of union workers in the American labor force) falling in recent years, the majority of the American labor force supports the right of workers to unionize.⁵ With

income inequality in the US increasing by 20% between 1980 and 2016, it is evident that the American working class needs and wants more support in the workplace.⁶ Times are changing, and US labor management policies should too.

Policy Idea

The United States Congress should amend the Taft-Hartley Act to require that union shops be allowed in all 50 states, ensuring that union security agreements are allowed nationwide. This amendment would effectively repeal the current right-to-work laws in the 27 states that have them in place. Any employer that wanted to implement a union security agreement would be able to require their employees to pay dues for the union that represents them, thus ensuring that their union can provide the best services possible in their benefits packages and collective bargaining agreements.

Policy Analysis

The idea of repealing right-to-work laws is fairly new. Michigan recently became the first state to repeal its right-to-work law in over 60 years, having voted to repeal it in March 2023 with the abrogation taking effect in February 2024.⁷ Considering the limited precedent, the most feasible way to evaluate the potential impacts of this policy proposal is by comparing right-to-work and non-right-to-work states. States with right-to-work laws often have poorer living and working conditions than non-right-to-work states. On average, workers in right-to-

work states get paid 3.2% less than those in non-right-to-work states, holding other factors constant, which translates to \$1,558 less yearly for full-time workers.⁸ Furthermore, since right-to-work laws limit the financial bargaining power of unions, the efforts of unions in right-to-work states to provide better working conditions, benefits, and wages for their constituents are consistently undermined.³ Workers in right-to-work states have a harder time accessing healthcare and retirement benefits through their employers.³ In assessing the extreme differences, workers in right-to-work states have a workplace fatality rate that is 54% higher than workers in non-right-to-work states.⁹ When evaluating the disparities between right-to-work and non-right-to-work states, it is evident that repealing right-to-work laws would take a step in the right direction in addressing income inequality and worker’s rights.

Highlights

- Despite American union density (percentage of union workers in the American labor force) falling in recent years, the majority of the American labor force supports the right of workers to unionize.⁵ With income inequality in the US increasing by 20% between 1980 and 2016, it is evident that the American working class needs and wants more support in the workplace.⁶
- Currently, twenty-seven states have right-to-work laws.³ In

these states, workers get paid 3.2% less on average, yearly.⁸ Right-to-work states also have worse employer-provided health insurance coverage, working conditions, and benefits. Lastly, income inequality is higher in right-to-work states than it is in non-right-to-work states.⁴

- Congress should amend the Taft-Hartley Act, repealing all right-to-work laws in hopes of improving working conditions nationwide. Doing so would require all fifty states to allow union security agreements, which require all employees represented by a union to pay union dues.
- The fiscal implications of this policy are minimal, as states do not fund unions. The fiscal implications that would result from this policy would be because of public sector collective bargaining, but there are no direct costs associated with union security agreements.

Implementation

To push the amendment to the Taft-Hartley Act, stakeholders such as labor activist groups, national labor unions, and local politicians should lobby the United States Congress to draft and support a bill that requires union shops and union security agreements to be allowed in all fifty states. These efforts could be supported by organizations such as Working America, American Rights at Work, and Jobs with Justice.

Passing a bill can be a lengthy process, and a quicker way to implement this policy would be through an unfunded congressional mandate, which would immediately require that all states allow union shops and union security agreements. In addition to being unfunded, the negative fiscal implications of this policy will likely be minimal. Since

union dues are covered by the employee, state and local funding for this policy would be close to unnecessary. There may be costs associated with collective bargaining in the public sector, but no fiscal implications would come directly from repealing right-to-work laws. Workers ultimately have the choice to find a nonunion workplace, so they are not strictly required to pay union dues. Regardless of the manner of implementation, there should be a one-year grace period between either the bill's passage or the mandate's implementation and its effective date, mirroring the timeline of Michigan's recent right-to-work law repealing. This grace period would grant workers and employers time to prepare if their workplace decides to pursue a union security agreement.

Both methods of implementation have some limitations that are crucial to consider when evaluating the feasibility of this policy. First, the lobbying method relies on grassroots efforts and political support from both the House of Representatives and the Senate. If labor activists do not have a strong movement, the bill may not gain traction with representatives who have the power to draft the legislation and bring it to the House floor. If the bill gains traction, it may have trouble making it through the Republican majority House of Representatives. Also, if a Republican president is elected, the odds of this bill being vetoed are higher. If the policy is implemented through a congressional mandate, it would need the support of Congress to be implemented. Stakeholders should collaborate in campaign efforts with progressive politicians, but regardless of election results, this policy should be framed as one that improves the well-being of the American working class to garner as much bipartisan support as possible.

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Reducing Legislative Inefficiencies by Banning the Omnibus Spending Bill

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Policymakers should ban the utilization of omnibus spending bills to pass appropriations bills, thereby ensuring transparency, limiting pork barrel spending, and reducing the risks of government shutdown.

Background

When the federal government seeks to fund its annual functions, it can pass 12 appropriations bills, representing one appropriations subcommittee apiece.¹ Each subcommittee has jurisdiction over topic-specific funding measures, thus dividing the work of the House Committee on Appropriations amongst smaller bodies.² Congress largely followed this method of government funding up through the 1970s. Today, legislators increasingly introduce omnibus spending bills by merging multiple appropriations bills into a single bill. Throughout the fiscal years of 1989–2016, 43.6% of appropriation measures were passed in omnibus bills.¹ With their widespread use, it has become clear that omnibus bills inhibit the policymaking process and should be outlawed.

These omnibus bills are cumbersome, with drafts containing up to five thousand pages.³ Congresspeople may not have time to read these gargantuan bills prior to a vote. In 2018, representatives had 18 hours to read a 2,232-page omnibus bill, or 124 pages per hour—an unreasonable timeline to impose on congresspeople while expecting them to comprehend all sections of the bill.⁴ Furthermore, government agencies such as the Congressional Budget Office do not have enough time to research bill provisions and determine their costs.

Prolix omnibus bills also provide a window for legislators to hide pork-barrel spending, expenditures that direct federal funds to local projects to please a legislator's

constituents and promote their reelection. In the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act, there were 11,772 pork-barrel projects totaling \$15,780,623,000.⁵ This vast assemblage of pork-barrel spending, compounded by a lack of reading time, allows localized, federally funded projects to pass in an omnibus bill relatively unnoticed.

Expansive omnibus bills may impede the legislative process if lawmakers disagree with just one of the thousands of budget proposals. Nearly all agencies lacked funds during the 1986, 2013, and January 2018 government shutdowns, yet the issue of debate was confined to singular topics. Such topics included arms control in 1986, the Affordable Care Act in 2013, and immigration policy in 2018.^{6,7,8,9} All of these are individual policy topics confined to few agencies, yet a plurality of unrelated agencies were also shut down. When the government shuts down, agencies whose funding has been secured via an appropriations bill remain functional. Logically, a government shutdown would pose less of a threat if more appropriations bills are enacted for specific agencies. The proposal of an omnibus bill unnecessarily ties the needs of one agency to another, thus inhibiting many agencies' functions due to unrelated policy disputes.

Policy Idea

The United States Congress should mandate the passage of 12 individual appropriations bills, and—by extension—ban the introduction of omnibus spending bills. The impact of government shutdowns would be

decreased, as shutdowns would only affect agencies related to the issue at hand rather than extraneous departments grouped into an omnibus bill. The compartmentalization that comes along with individual appropriations bills would allow subject field experts to better analyze bill contents and root out pork-barrel spending.

Additionally, a one-week pre-vote reading period for appropriations bills should be codified into law. Currently, such stipulations are determined by the House Committee on Rules shortly after a new Speaker of the House takes the gavel.¹⁰ A permanent reading time is necessary to prevent the drastic changing of procedural rules from one session of the House of Representatives to the next. The implementation of a minimum reading period would allow both representatives and senators to gain a better understanding of appropriations proposals.

Policy Analysis

Throughout the history of United States government shutdowns, funding for agencies unrelated to Congress's points of tension has been unnecessarily kneecapped due to omnibus spending bills. The compartmentalization of the appropriations process as promoted by the proposed policy would facilitate the passage of department-specific appropriations bills, thereby allowing those bills with widespread agreement to be immediately implemented without being held up by disagreements over an omnibus spending bill's specificities.

The proposed policy would effectively improve the quality of policy analysis. According to a study by the Public Relations Society of America Inc., the average reading rate in the United States is 200 words per minute.¹¹ Fully comprehending past omnibus bills, as highlighted earlier, required a reading speed that well exceeds this average. Assuming legislators are held to the same reading standards, it is clear that the reading period must be increased to allow for improved comprehension.

A byproduct of increased reading time would be increased scrutiny of pork-barrel spending scattered throughout omnibus bills. The House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommends a variety of transparency measures when a legislator proposes pork-barrel spending, such as including connections between the project and the legislator in the bill, limiting eligible recipients, and more.¹² None of these recommendations can be implemented if oversight agencies do not have the time to review bills for potential ethics violations. By extending the allotted reading time, the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress's suggestions can reduce unethical governmental practices in appropriations bills.

Highlights

- Throughout the fiscal years of 1989-2016, 43.6% of appropriation measures were passed in omnibus spending bills, those which combine multiple appropriations bills.¹
- In 2018, representatives had eighteen hours to read a 2,232-page omnibus bill, or 124 pages per hour—an unreasonable timeline to impose on congresspeople while expecting them to comprehend all sections of the bill.⁴
- Nearly all agencies lacked funding during the 1986, 2013,

and January 2018 shutdowns as a result of omnibus spending bills, yet debates about the budget proposal were confined to singular topics unrelated to impacted agencies.^{6,7,8,9}

- The proposed policy mends the issues above by banning omnibus spending bills, allowing for greater governmental fluidity in the face of a shutdown, and extending legislative reading time to enable increased scrutinization of incoming bills.

Implementation

Despite the numerous benefits of this proposal, one limitation is that bad actors could hold all 12 appropriations bills hostage to pressure legislators to make changes to one or more of the bills. This tactic was used during the 2018-2019 government shutdown when President Trump demanded border wall funding. Trump refused to pass appropriations bills, even those unrelated to national security, until his demands were met.¹³ This tactic will cause economic harm if used, but there are heavy political incentives to not be a bad actor. For example, polling showed that 61% of U.S. adults disapproved of Trump's handling of the government shutdown after he blocked the remaining appropriation bills.¹⁴

Congress continues to show its commitment to preventing government shutdowns and avoiding subsequent voter backlash. Former Speaker Kevin McCarthy and his successor Mike Johnson both passed continuing resolutions on the eve of shutdowns to keep the government functioning during negotiations, showing the unwillingness of Congress to revert to Trump's tactics. Voter influence can deter bad actors in the policymaking process.

While requiring more congressional support to pass, multiple congresspeople have sought to legislate reading periods. Among these are

Senators Rick Scott, Roger Marshall, Joni Ernst, and Josh Hawley, all of whom introduced a bill to ensure members of Congress had enough time to read.¹⁵ The senators cited omnibus bills as one of their motivations for introducing the proposal. As of today, the bill has not progressed through the Senate. Additionally, low salience amongst the general population has prevented this issue from gaining traction.

One way to move an anti-omnibus bill onto the legislative agenda is through interest group pressure. Organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, each of which hold starkly contrasting political viewpoints, have denounced various omnibus bills for containing controversial provisions unrelated to the majority of spending stipulations.^{16,17} If interest groups from both sides of the political spectrum come together and reframe their frustrations into support for an omnibus bill ban, legislators could be compelled to prioritize such a law.

The enactment of this proposal would create a new precedent in the appropriations process consisting of adequate time to analyze policies, decreased pork-barrel spending, and a minimization of government shutdowns' impact on agencies and constituents. Through common-sense reform, the legislative process can become more efficient and better fulfill its goal of serving constituents.

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The Key to Addressing the Housing Crisis is Overhauling Restrictive Local Regulations

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The housing crisis is a consequence of restrictive local regulations that decrease the supply of housing. Policymakers should remove regulations that block the production of affordable housing. This policy would aid cost-burdened renters and decrease the inflation in the housing market.

Background

Since the 1970s, there has been an alarming increase in the mean and median housing prices.¹ In 2022, nearly half of renters are “cost-burdened,” meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent.² This issue of unaffordable housing is rooted in restrictive local zoning laws. These restrictive zoning laws force, and even incentivize, contractors to build large, expensive homes that increase median prices of homes and severely decrease the affordability of available homes. Not only do these laws affect new homeowners and renters as the supply of affordable homes decrease, the lack of affordable homes also affects current renters who may see an increase in rent prices. While the housing crisis affects all income brackets, the effects on low-income families are particularly dire. Currently, there is around a \$7 million deficit in affordable housing units, with over 70% of low income families spending more than half of their income on rent.³ The housing crisis trickles over to broader economic issues of affordability of housing and decreased living standards as well.

Current welfare programs and market-driven policies are underfunded and failing to alleviate the situation.⁴ There is a need for a stronger, reformative policy that tackles the issue at its root by increasing the supply of affordable housing and alleviates the unprecedented price inflation and deficit in the availability of affordable housing.

Policy Idea

State legislatures should pass legislation that removes restrictions that build high-density housing, allowing contractors to create affordable, multi-family housing units which directly reduces the housing unit deficit. The policy should require states to take a more active role in overseeing zoning laws and construction in localities. States should either spearhead the removal process by reviewing the local zoning laws or require localities to review zoning and submit reports to their respective states.⁵ There are many different kinds of restrictive zoning laws; however, all restrictive zoning laws obstruct the construction of affordable, high-density homes by either 1) hindering developers from building affordable homes or 2) incentivizing developers to create unaffordable homes. Some common restrictive zoning laws include: **Height Restrictions** that bar the development of high-density housing such as apartment complexes; **Minimum Lot Size Requirements** which force developers to create large homes instead of affordable starter homes; **Single-Family Zoning** which requires developers to create detached, single family homes (cannot build apartment complexes, townhouses, duplexes, etc.); and **Parking Requirements**, which require a minimum number of parking spots per housing units, requiring large amounts of land for high-density housing that disincentivize developers to build.⁶ Additionally, some localities have even restricted the ability for homeowners to rent out parts of their home, such as

garages or detached rooms, also known as **accessory dwelling units (ADUs)**. This limitation therefore decreases the amount of affordable housing available.⁶

Policy Analysis

Market-based and welfare solutions have proven to be inefficient at solving the housing crisis. For instance, the housing voucher program and other assistance programs have been severely underfunded despite their social benefit in helping lower-income households find housing.^{3,7} Rent control has also proven to be ineffective; they create a negative economic externality, decreasing the value of the neighborhood.⁸ Increasing the quantity of affordable housing driven by the removal of restrictive zoning laws is a possible effective solution. After removing restrictive zoning laws, localities in Portland saw an increase in density from 4.3 units per acre to 7.1 units per acre, proving that removing these provides more people housing.⁹ By removing parking requirements and legalizing accessory dwelling units, localities in Minneapolis saw an uptick in housing, with over 90% of new units being built in high-density buildings.⁶

This policy would also address the need for state interference in these local issues, as local zoning boards are prone to bias. For example, community boards in New York City, a locality that has a large housing crisis, have blocked policy proposals that would increase the availability of affordable housing.¹⁰ Local zoning boards often benefit from promoting restrictive

zoning laws, as these increase their home value.¹¹ Lastly, scholastic data and findings have shown that the fragmented nature of local governments in the United States has greater implications in aggregate market concerns, pointing to the need for consolidation and state standardization of zoning laws.¹²

A key limitation of this policy is the time it will take for the effects of removing restrictive zoning laws to be seen. There will not be an immediate uptick in housing right after the removal of zoning laws, as markets have to adapt to this new change.⁶ The Urban Institute found that there was a 0.8 percent increase in housing supply within three to nine years of the removal of restrictive zoning laws.¹³ However, this delayed onset should not deter policymakers from implementing this policy, as removing restrictive zoning laws has greater long-term benefits on the housing market. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is the primary solution for regulating the inflation in the housing market—which benefits all income brackets, instead of just a few.¹⁴

Highlights

- The housing crisis is attributed to the deficit in the amount of affordable housing which is mainly caused by restrictive local zoning laws that bar the production of high-density, affordable homes.⁶
- Current market-based strategies to solve the housing crisis are inefficient due to structural and financial weaknesses.^{3,7}
- State legislatures should pass legislation that removes restrictive zoning to increase the amount of affordable homes.
- Increasing the availability of affordable housing by removing restrictive zoning laws has shown to be productive as seen in localities in Portland, where density

increased from 4.3 units per acre to 7.1 units per acre.⁹

Implementation

The proposed policy is a long-term policy solution whose implementation take up to a year in addition to additional time for the effects produced by more housing to appear. This policy would require collaboration between state and local governments to collect data on the amount of housing, the median price of housing, and the median household income in specific localities. Based on this data, states can determine which areas need an increase in housing supply. Restrictive zoning laws can then be removed from those areas, and contractors can start developing plans for construction of new homes.

Many communities oppose development because of the construction noise, obstructions, and traffic.¹⁵ It may be beneficial for localities and contractors to also consult urban planners to best plan housing that addresses the needs of the community while preserving the cultural or environmental integrity of the area. Urban planners should take into account communities' needs, such as those of an aging population versus families with children. Additionally, aspects like bike-lanes, community gardens, and mixed-used communities can be implemented by urban planners, increasing the value and social benefit of an area.¹⁶

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Tackling the Opioid Overdose Epidemic Through Treatment Expansion

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Congress should pass the Examining Opioid Treatment Infrastructure Act of 2024 to require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report the availability and unmet need of recovery services, including information on specific demographic populations.

Background

Congressman Bill Foster introduced the Examining Opioid Treatment Infrastructure Act on February 7, 2024, emphasizing the pressing need to expand opioid treatment on the federal level. Opioid overdose deaths are a leading cause of injury-related deaths in the United States.¹ More than one million people have died since 1999 from a drug overdose, and more than 75% of those deaths involved an opioid.² The coronavirus pandemic only further exacerbated this issue. As the proliferation of illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF) has increased, opioid death rates have skyrocketed among minority populations, including Blacks and Hispanics. In recent years, there has been a growing disparity in overdose deaths, particularly among Blacks aged 45–54 years (from 19.3 to 41.9 deaths per 100,000 population) and 55–64 years (from 21.8 to 42.7 deaths per 100,000) in large metropolitan areas.³ The opioid crisis continues to be an issue in rural communities. Although there are fewer reports of illicit drug use in rural areas, the effects of misuse appear to be more drastic.⁴ Since more individuals are falling into addiction, especially among marginalized and rural populations, more recovery resources need to be built to prevent opioid related fatalities. According to the National Institute of Health, 56% of rural counties do not have a provider who can prescribe buprenorphine, a treatment for opioid abuse disorder.⁵ In addition, residents in rural communities face barriers to healthcare, including lower incomes,

lack of health insurance, and lack of public transportation when compared to urban populations. Similarly, Black and Brown communities are disproportionately unable to afford or access care for substance abuse related treatment. Black patients are half as likely to be referred to or access treatment as non-Hispanic white patients.⁶

Policy Idea

To address the opioid abuse crisis, vulnerable communities need greater support and expanded access to substance abuse facilities. Therefore, Congress should pass The Examining Opioid Infrastructure Act of 2024, which would mandate the GAO assess the need for recovery programs across the country.⁷ This effort would highlight the pressing need for substance abuse treatment facilities in the most rural areas of the US. The federal government and states should work together to distribute naloxone and medication assisted treatment for opioid addiction.

Policy Analysis

Almost 75% of drug overdose deaths in 2020 involved an opioid.⁸ Furthermore, 70,630 people died from drug overdoses in 2019, and 1.6 million people had an opioid use disorder in 2020.⁹ Medication-assisted treatment has increased in recent years. Since 2016, the number of clients receiving buprenorphine in recovery facilities increased from over 2,000 to more than 76,000 as the treatment became more accessible.¹⁰ However, opioid treatment facilities are limited in

number in minority and rural communities. Black Americans in the US are less likely to receive buprenorphine compared to whites, and individuals with private insurance constituted nearly 74% of buprenorphine recipients from 2012–2015.¹¹ Moreover, nearly one third of non-Hispanic white people in need of opioid use disorder treatment received medication, compared to 20% of non-Hispanic Black people and 15% of Hispanic people. Recovery efforts can be immensely beneficial in helping opioid addicts recover from their addiction. According to a study performed by Dr. Sarah Wakeman, opioid treatment with buprenorphine or methadone led to a 32% decline in serious opioid-related use at 3 months and a 26% decline at 12 months compared with no treatment.¹² Expanding accessibility of opioid treatment facilities, particularly in rural areas, can immensely improve the wellbeing of communities around the country.

Highlights

- According to the Health Resources & Services Administration, there are over 130 deaths each day due to opioid-related drug overdoses.¹³
- Prescription opioids were involved in nearly 24% of all opioid related deaths in 2020. This is an increase from only 16% of opioid related deaths from 2019-2020.¹⁴
- According to a study published by PLOS One, people with

lower incomes were twice as likely to die of an opioid overdose compared to more affluent individuals.¹⁵

- The fentanyl category of opioids accounted for 71,269 preventable deaths in 2022. This represented a 6% increase, as the total amounted to 67,325 in 2021.¹⁶

Implementation

Although the bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives, the Examining Opioid Treatment Infrastructure Act of 2024 needs to pass both the House and Senate with majority approval to be enacted into law. In order to expedite the process of the bill being passed, constituents should call, write, and organize hearings to learn more about opioid addiction.¹⁷ Further, mobilizing support for the bill can be achieved through community forums, opioid prevention groups, and community outreach to legislators, helping expedite the legislative process. By placing pressure on elected officials, the likelihood of the bill being passed rises.

Since the bill is currently standing in the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Natural Resources, Congressmen Foster should form alliances with members of these committees to increase the chances of the bill's passage.¹⁸ Moreover, lobbyists such as the Bloomberg Overdose Prevention Initiative (BOPI) should partner with other lobbying organizations to garner support for the bill. BOPI works with states to combat the overdose epidemic by promoting evidence-based policies and supporting implementation of practices that can be modeled across the country.¹⁹

To implement the bill's provisions, the GAO should extrapolate extensive data on the need for recovery services across the country. Federal officials should collaborate with local community groups, municipalities, and law enforcement to determine areas of

greatest need, and organize the implementation of opioid recovery efforts in those communities. They should also target specific demographic populations, such as low income and expectant mothers, to make a concentrated effort on helping communities most vulnerable to opioid abuse.

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Establishing Public Campaign Support Programs to Diversify State Legislatures

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To lower barriers of entry to the democratic recruitment process, states should establish comprehensive public campaign support programs to ensure equitable access to public office and diversify the socioeconomic make-up of state legislatures.

Background

There is a lack of working-class representation in the US legislatures. If working-class Americans—citizens working manual labor or service jobs—were a party, they'd represent over half of America's population yet hold less than 2% of all seats in Congress.^{1,2} Similarly, only 116, or 1.6%, of all 7,300 lawmakers in state legislatures come from working-class backgrounds.³ For perspective, if consolidated into one state's legislature, those working-class members couldn't form a majority in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, much less Congress.⁴

Besides the issue of unfair representation, the opportunity costs of excluding working-class voices from legislative bodies are immense. Working-class legislators bring local knowledge to debates and use them to inform their votes, counterbalancing the overrepresentation of wealthier lawmakers that legislate in favor of the upper class.^{5,6} Furthermore, increased working-class representation in legislatures increases trust in government up to 65% across working-class, non-working class, gender, and racial cleavages.⁷

Over the years, advocates have suggested various ways to increase representation by lowering political barriers of entry for working-class individuals. The two leading contemporary reform ideas are increasing lawmaker pay and bolstering public campaign finance programs that subsidize political campaigns in compliance with “clean election rules” (e.g., don't take special

interest group funds). To date, over 13 states and 20 municipalities across the country have adopted some form of public financing program.^{8,9}

The issue with public campaign finance programs, however, is that they don't address the full set of factors preventing working-class individuals from running.¹⁰ Robust interventions to increase the number of working-class candidates that run and win, then, should account for not only the monetary cost of campaigning but also the opportunity cost of taking time off work to campaign as well as disparities in candidate education.¹⁰

Policy Idea

States should expand existing public campaign finance programs into comprehensive public campaign support programs (PCSPs) that:

- I. Administer campaign finance payments to candidates who meet state-determined qualification requirements;
- II. Provide grant funding to non-governmental organizations to establish and administer campaign seed money and “political scholarship” programs; and
- III. Provide grant funding to non-governmental organizations to establish and administer non-partisan campaign training and education.

These PCSPs should go beyond public financing by systematically supporting low- and middle-income candidates. PCSP

activities, policies, and procedures should be strictly non-partisan and should be designed with auditing mechanisms for both individual and organizational recipients of aid. Furthermore, grants to organizations should be designed to constrain the use of funds for non-partisan candidate training and seed money operations; funds should be insulated from use by political entities for any other political end.

Policy Analysis

As Dr. Nicholas Carnes, professor of public policy at Duke University, details in his book *The Cash Ceiling* public finance programs alone haven't leveled the electoral playing-field for working-class candidates.^{9,10,11} Public finance programs do provide a beneficial avenue for states to enforce “clean election rules,” but they must be paired with additional support to actually increase election rates for working-class candidates.¹²

To that end, Carnes raises campaign training programs and seed money programs (i.e., upfront donations to candidates) as promising alternatives, finding both produce remarkable results (e.g., New Jersey's AFL-CIO's Labor Candidates School expanding working-class representation in state offices by the thousands).^{10,13,14}

Though this work is spearheaded by non-governmental organizations that fund these programs through private donations, states could support NGOs' work and provide grants to qualifying organizations

offering working-class people training and seed money within existing public campaign finance programs. To overcome public goods concerns of using public monies to finance campaigns, past public campaign finance models have relied on voluntary, one-time contributions made by individual tax-filers that would be earmarked specifically for program use.¹⁵ A similar mechanism can be incorporated into PCSPs to fund institutional grants without placing a tax burden on the general public.

Lastly, the intrinsic challenge of implementing PCSPs in different states is that each state has its own political environment. However, this just means PCSP implementation avenues have to be explored on a state-by-state basis as opposed to generalizing implementation strategies for all states.

Highlights

- As of February of 2024, a mere 1.6% of all 7,300 state lawmakers in the United States came from working-class backgrounds.³
- Increasing working-class representation in legislatures has shown to increase trust in government up to 65 percent across working and non-working-class groups as well as different gender and racial identity groups.⁷
- Public campaign finance alone hasn't leveled the electoral playing-field for working-class candidates because it doesn't eliminate the upfront costs of fundraising or account for non-monetary costs associated with campaigning.^{9,10,11}
- Privately financed campaign training and seed money programs have proven successful at electing working-class candidates to offices.^{10,13,14} State legislatures can support these private ventures by providing grant

support to these non-partisan programs.

- Funding and legal precedents set by public campaign finance programs in the past can aid in the implementation of public campaign support programs (PCSPs) that provide grants for candidate support interventions.

Implementation

Discussion of program implementation can be differentiated by states' preexisting conditions for implementing comprehensive PCSPs (i.e., states with favorable conditions and states with unfavorable conditions).

For states with existing state or citywide public campaign finance infrastructure, the primary challenge is mobilizing resources to expand existing programs. An example is New York state, which modeled its match-funds public campaign finance program after that of New York City in 2022.^{16,17} Having just recently instituted its statewide campaign finance program, New York continues to debate the extent to which the public should subsidize political campaigns, alluding to the type of debates proposals to expand public campaign finance to subsidize candidate training programs would raise. To overcome this obstacle, proponent groups like Common Cause and the Brennan Center should lobby state lawmakers of both parties to develop PCSP's grant-making initiatives, the same approach they used to successfully implement initial state campaign finance programs.^{17,18}

The same issue of lobbying bipartisan support for PCSPs exists in states with unfavorable conditions, though with added complexity. Where states with preexisting campaign finance programs—or at least cities with them—have existing infrastructure to expand into a PCSP, states with unfavorable conditions (without existing campaign support infrastructure) would first need to rally

support for an initial public finance program before considering expanding into a full PCSP. Alternatively, states could start with grant-making programs supporting candidate training and support, though this strategy hasn't been tried in any state yet.¹⁰

Nonetheless, any state attempting to institute a PCSP will struggle with public goods concerns and legal challenges. In the same way the public can be hesitant to pay for political reforms like campaign financing, lawmakers may worry about funding PCSP grant programs.¹⁹ The voluntary contribution funding mechanisms explored earlier can be used here to minimize costs to the public.¹⁵ Furthermore, expansion efforts may raise legal challenges to the use of public funds to support political activities. A legal precedent of courts upholding the legality of public campaign finance at all levels of government gives credence to efforts to expand public financing programs to support non-partisan, non-monetary candidate support initiatives.⁸

By using creative funding mechanisms like voluntary taxpayer contribution models and navigating disparate political environments by individual state, America can reverse its low levels of working-class representation in politics by implementing comprehensive PCSPs to lower barriers of entry for the low and middle classes.

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Grants for Change: Awarding States Grants that Adopt Non-Voucher Discrimination Laws

By Emily Snider, ems459@cornell.edu

To decrease residential segregation and increase housing opportunities for minorities, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should award grants to state governments that prohibit voucher discrimination by landlords.

Background

Deep racial divides plague America's neighborhoods. Average white Americans live in neighborhoods that are 75% white and 8% Black.¹ In contrast, average Black Americans live in neighborhoods that are 35% white and 45% Black. These majority Black neighborhoods have disproportionately high poverty rates, with over 80% of low-income Black people living in "low-income" communities.¹ These residential differences lead to unequal adult outcomes along racial lines. Black students are seven times more likely than white students to attend high-poverty schools, which is linked to lower academic achievement.² The unemployment rate for Black Americans is 1.55 times higher than it is for whites.³ Black people have higher mortality rates than whites, and Black adults are about twice as likely as whites to answer that crime is a serious problem in their communities.^{4,5}

Housing discrimination and redlining were significant causes of residential segregation.⁶ In response to these phenomena, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968, which prohibited discrimination in the housing market based on race, religion, national origin, sex, handicap, and family status.⁶ Nevertheless, segregation still exists because of continued discrimination and the inertia of past policies. Throughout history, white people have accumulated more wealth through homeownership. In 2016, the median wealth for Black families was \$17,600, whereas it was \$171,000 for white families.⁷ This

accumulation perpetuates the cycle of inequality, as white people can afford to live in wealthier neighborhoods.

To assist low-income families in finding housing, the federal government established the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program in 1974. The Local Public Housing Agency (PHA) administers the vouchers, which can be used for most rental units, through federal funds from HUD. In theory, this program should have helped decrease residential segregation, as 65% of voucher users are people of color, who could then afford to move to different neighborhoods.⁸ Yet, many landlords refuse to rent to voucher users. Only 11 states and 50 cities/counties have laws prohibiting landlords from refusing to rent to voucher holders, so only one in three voucher families are protected by non-discrimination laws.⁹ Therefore, many people with vouchers still do not have access to most housing.

Policy Idea

The Department of Housing and Urban Development should provide grants to states that ban the discrimination of voucher users. These grants will incentivize such states to adopt this anti-discrimination policy. In these states, it would be illegal for landlords to discriminate against renters who use housing vouchers. These multi-million dollar grants should be used for infrastructure activities that could boost the states' economies and assist in the development of homes. The grants should also be used to facilitate landlord education around housing

vouchers and help to match voucher holders with landlords. Increased voucher protection laws would make it easier for low-income families, who are disproportionately minorities, to find housing in areas they otherwise would not be able to live. This greater opportunity would decrease residential segregation, thus equalizing adult outcomes.

Policy Analysis

More state laws banning the discrimination of voucher users would consistently protect more tenants. Tenants are rejected half as often and are 12 percentage points more likely to succeed in using their vouchers if they live in areas that have anti-voucher discrimination laws.^{8,9} Additionally, these laws enable voucher holders to acquire housing in higher-opportunity areas, thereby decreasing racial segregation.¹⁰ A voucher that is used to move an eight-year-old from public housing to a low-poverty neighborhood could boost the child's earnings by about \$302,000.⁸ Additionally, HCV is being used more frequently due to rising rents, especially because of COVID-19.¹¹ Therefore, a law that would help its use is imperative, now more than ever.

Half of the voucher holders in Los Angeles (a state without an anti-discrimination law) spent six months looking for a home that would accept their vouchers. However, the vouchers expire after six months, so the program "turned into the highest failure rate in city history," according to the Times Editorial Board.¹¹ Cities' funds would be much more efficiently allocated if

vouchers were easily accepted and used.

Additionally, segregation has negative impacts on all residents in the community. Decreasing segregation would increase public safety and educational attainment for all residents in the area. \$156 billion is lost from the devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods, so decreasing segregation would allow this money to circulate local economies. White people pay high prices to live in more exclusive neighborhoods, so desegregating these neighborhoods could also help them save money.²

Highlights

- Residential segregation in the US is high, which leads to unequal adult outcomes along race in education, employment, health care, and crime.¹
- The HCV program assists low-income families in finding housing that could decrease segregation. However, many landlords do not accept voucher users.⁹
- HUD should provide grants to incentivize states to ban voucher discrimination in the housing market. Voucher recipients who are protected by laws are 12 percentage points more likely to succeed in using their vouchers.⁹
- Those using vouchers would have more access to housing especially in higher-opportunity areas, which would decrease segregation, thus equalizing adult outcomes.⁹

Implementation

The state grants would be awarded directly from HUD, a part of the executive branch, which is easier to implement than a law or amendment that would need to be passed in Congress and the courts. In the 2023 fiscal year, Congress and President Joe Biden allotted HUD \$71.9 billion. \$32.1 billion was used for the HCV

program, and \$86 million was used for Fair Housing Practices.¹² HUD has discretion regarding how its money is spent, so it can use a combination of these allocations to fund the grants.

Typically, it takes weeks to months for a state bill to be passed into law. Therefore, the anti-voucher discrimination laws would be expected to be passed around the summer of 2024. Once they are passed, HUD can distribute the grants to states beginning in October 2024, the new fiscal year.

The main challenge in the adaptation of this policy is landlord opposition.⁹ Landlords may fear that voucher users will not pay their rent in a full and timely manner. Furthermore, they may have implicit biases against voucher users, as they falsely believe that they are more likely to damage the property.¹³ One way to dissipate these fears is by educating landlords on the voucher programs. Landlords should understand that rent payments are still reliable, as 70% of the payment comes directly from the PHA. They can also still use their regular screening criteria for tenant history and can charge security deposits, ensuring that voucher users are not more likely to damage their properties. Additionally, landlords can charge their regular rents, enforcing the idea that they will not lose money when renting to voucher users.⁹

Policymakers are more likely to support these voucher non-discrimination laws if there is support from landlords and housing agencies. Therefore, it is important for governments and agencies to be proactive in their education programs. In addition, key stakeholders like the National Fair Housing Alliance, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the Urban Institute should continue to advocate for and provide research on voucher non-discrimination laws. Communication between these advocates and rental industry stakeholders is important for the policy's success.¹⁴ This communication could further eliminate

landlords' unsubstantiated fears and ensure that the program works properly and in accordance with the new law.

Housing vouchers anti-discrimination laws enable tenants to choose safe, decent, affordable housing, landlords to get a stable source of rent from the PHA, and the community to deconcentrate poverty and improve diversity.¹¹ These laws would pave the way for a more equitable, prospering housing landscape.

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Granting Inmates Convicted for Non-Violent Crimes in New York State Prisons Voting Rights

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New York State should allow prisoners convicted of non-violent crimes to vote in elections and encourage their turnout by holding civic engagement campaigns in prisons.

Background

One of the core principles of democracy is that all citizens should receive a voice; however, the historical disenfranchisement of felons in the US contradicts this key principle of American political ethos. It is worth noting that the exclusion of felons from the electoral process began after the abolition of slavery. In 1850, prior to the passage of the 15th Amendment, which provided Black men with the right to vote, only 35% of US states had enacted laws disenfranchising felons. By 1870, after the passage of the 15th Amendment, the number of states with such laws rose to 75%.¹ The incarceration rate remains five times higher for Blacks than Whites as of 2021.² The denial of voting rights to felons leads to a cycle of gridlock on criminal justice reform issues, as they are the group most affected by unjust carceral policies. The denial of voting rights to felons also has acute racial implications—13% of African American men in the US are unable to vote due to felony status.³ In certain states, the number is even higher; in Iowa, over one-third of Black men are unable to vote.¹ While New York State allows former prisoners to vote, it bars currently incarcerated felons from voting. As of 2023, New York State has 36,553 residents who are unable to vote due to their carceral status.⁴ Prisoners are perhaps the group most affected by criminal justice policy, and yet their voice is the most suppressed.

Policy Idea

New York State should instate itself as a leader in the criminal justice reform movement and grant prisoners

convicted of non-violent crimes the right to vote via absentee ballot. This policy would not apply to prisoners convicted of violent crimes such as rape, murder, and hate crimes but rather to those incarcerated for non-violent offenses, such as drug possession, prostitution, or larceny. Prisoners should also be informed about their newfound voting rights through posters and courses on the importance of voting. Doing so would ensure that this law would increase civic participation in prisons by measurable amounts. Furthermore, civic education classes should be implemented in prisons to teach the importance of voting and potentially motivate inmates to push for prison reform through the ballot box. The courses added in this program should involve comprehensive nonpartisan political education as well as explaining the benefits of voting, particularly with regards to criminal justice reform.

Policy Analysis

The proposed policy is similar to ones previously enacted in Maine and Vermont. Maine allows all inmates of its state prisons to vote. While 34% of them were registered to vote in 2018, only 6% of them actually voted in the 2018 elections. However, people who were recently released from incarceration in Maine voted at similar rates in the same election cycle, at 5.5%.⁵ While allowing prisoners to vote in Maine has resulted in similar voting rates among incarcerated individuals compared to those outside of prison, these initiatives have yet to effectively mobilize prisoners as a

cohesive voting bloc. This trend suggests that while access to the ballot box is important, additional efforts such as civic engagement initiatives in prisons may be needed to engage incarcerated populations in the political process and harness their collective voting power. There have been instances where allowing prisoners to vote could have changed an election's outcome—in Nevada's 2018 attorney general election, a 36% turnout among incarcerated persons could have changed the electoral verdict.⁵

Highlights

- Following the ratification of the 15th amendment, state legislatures began enacting laws denying voting rights to prisoners. In the status quo, these laws remain in all but two states (Vermont and Maine) and disproportionately target minorities.¹
- Blacks are imprisoned at significantly higher rates than Whites, and a large portion of the Black male community is unable to vote either due to current or prior felony charges.² Therefore, the current laws precluding prisoners from voting have implicit racial charges.
- To rectify the injustices stemming from the disenfranchisement of non-violent prisoners, New York State should grant these inmates the right to vote.
- Analysis of voting participation in prisons reveals that prisoners still vote at

extremely low rates when granted the right to vote, indicating that future policies restoring voting rights for prisoners must go beyond simply giving them access to ballots.⁵

- To obtain higher voter participation rates among inmates, prisons should hold civic engagement classes and disperse posters explaining the importance of voting.

Implementation

To grant non-violent felons held in New York State prisons the right to vote, New York needs to amend its state constitution, which prohibits prisoners from voting.⁵ While doing so may sound challenging, it only requires a simple majority in both the State Senate and Assembly.⁶ As previously stated, this policy would solely grant voting rights to inmates serving time for non-violent crimes. Violent offenders, including those convicted for rape, murder, and hate crimes, would not gain the ability to vote under this policy until release. The New York Board of Elections would be responsible for adding ballot boxes in each of New York's 44 state prisons. This aspect of the policy is more straightforward and is relatively easy to implement. However, this initiative is a holistic policy aimed at increasing the general political activity of prisoners and requires further government action. The proposed policy would involve providing a \$20 million grant to the

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DoCCS) to oversee the implementation of civic engagement classes in prison education programs. This grant should be allocated toward the payment of professors, setting up classrooms, and employing administrators to oversee the programs. Should the grant prove insufficient, the DoCCS would be encouraged to apply for increased funding. Prisons throughout New York State partner with various universities such as SUNY Potsdam, Cornell University, University of Rochester, and Bard College to provide education to inmates.⁷ To enact this proposal, lobbying Democratic state senators and assembly members will be essential. Prison voting reform initiatives are unpopular among Republicans due to a perception that prisoners would overwhelmingly vote for Democrats. However, the political ideologies of prisoners fall across racial lines—the plurality of White prisoners identify as Republican while the plurality of Black prisoners identify as Democratic.⁸ Nonetheless, the large proportion of Black prisoners skews the demographic of prisons toward the Democratic party, making Republicans less likely to support this policy. New York State has a Democratic majority in the Senate and Assembly, and actively lobbying and informing its members of the benefits of this policy could lead to its implementation.

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ECONOMIC POLICY

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Revolutionizing Power in New York State: Implementing Triso Particles in Nuclear Energy

By Carson Appel, cla85@cornell.edu

The United States government should implement subsidies to cover the adaptation of nuclear reactors in New York State to utilize tri-structural isotopic particles in energy production.

Background

The average United States household spends \$141.41 per month on electricity (899 kWh per month), with rates of 15.73 cents per kWh. Each US household therefore spends more than \$1,690 per year on electricity based on the average electricity intake. In New York State, the average household spends \$133.32 per month on electricity even though their electricity use is more than 300 kWh under the US monthly average of 592 kWh per household. Moreover, New Yorkers pay higher rates at 22.52 cents per kWh, totaling just under \$1,600 per year.¹

Energy burden is defined as the percentage of gross household income spent on energy costs.² According to the Department of Energy (DOE), the national average energy burden for low-income households is 8.6%. In low-income households, the energy burden is almost three times higher than in households not considered low-income, where it is estimated to be around 3%.² Furthermore, a majority of low-income households are renters. Renting further complicates their situation as many landlords are not willing to pay for renewable energy improvements, leaving many potential savings out of reach.

The power generation distribution in the US is 60% fossil fuels, 21.4% renewable energy sources, 18.6% from nuclear power plants, and 0.2% from other sources.³ In New York, a higher portion of the state's power comes from nuclear sources at 24.9%. Yet, the state is still relying on natural gas for over 45.6% of its power.⁴ The burning of fossil fuels is

detrimental to the environment, adding high amounts of nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere, contributing to the formation of smog and acid rain, and causing harmful algal blooms in large bodies of water that overconsume oxygen and block sunlight from underwater ecosystems. These can release harmful toxins into the water, killing birds and animals or creating human illness that can lead to death in extreme cases.^{5,6}

Policy Idea

New York should implement tri-structural isotopic particles (commonly referred to as “triso fuel”) in nuclear power plants to aid in boosting a household's economic independence and counteract the environmental degradation of fossil fuels. A majority of nuclear power plants are privately owned, so the proposed policy would cover the funding to expand the Advanced Reactor Demonstration Program (ARDP), designated to help build the next generation of tri-structural isotopic nuclear reactors. The ARDP should cover half of the construction of small nuclear reactors in New York State, as modeled by their plans for a new tri-structural isotopic particle plant in Richland, Washington, to be finished in 2027–2028.⁷

Policy Analysis

The idea behind nuclear power is similar to that of alternative fuel sources: convert the heat created by nuclear fission into electricity. Typically, generating power must balance safety and efficiency. A nuclear reactor works best at extremely

hot temperatures, but when a reactor reaches too extreme temperatures it can overheat and melt down. To minimize the possibility of a meltdown, this new method of production uses tri-structural isotopic particles, otherwise known as nuclear “power balls.” These power balls use millions of submillimeter-size grains of uranium individually wrapped in protective shells to generate power. The particles cannot melt in a commercial high-temperature reactor, withstanding extreme temperatures. While an average nuclear power plant operates at temperatures around 1,000–2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, tri-structural isotopic particle reactors can withstand temperatures over 3,200 degrees Fahrenheit, eliminating the risk of reactor meltdowns.^{8,9}

Aside from areas with immediate access to low-cost fossil fuels, nuclear power provides a cost-effective method for electricity production. Producing a kWh of nuclear power costs one-tenth the price of a kWh produced using fossil fuels, costing on average 0.46 cents and 5 cents respectively.^{9,10} Comparably low fuel costs in nuclear power lead to higher efficiency levels and more effective operational cost reduction.

Tri-structural isotopic particle fuel has historically been too costly to mass produce. However, the DOE partnered with the company BWXT to produce tri-structural isotopic particles for testing and proved that they could be produced at a large enough scale to meet national demands.⁸ Through mass production, a company is more cost-efficient by producing more output with less labor and raw materials. Companies like TRISO-X are utilizing

more energy-dense high assay low enriched uranium that allows for longer periods of operations. The new triso material can be produced at a fraction of the cost.

By transitioning nuclear power plants to use tri-structural isotopic particles, plants can sell extremely cheap fuel to surrounding areas and generate fuel through safe methods of nuclear fission.

Highlights

- New Yorkers pay above-average rates for energy produced by environmentally detrimental methods.
- New York State Congress should offer subsidies to cover the transition of local and private nuclear power plants to new tri-structural isotopic particles.
- Utilizing tri-structural isotopic particles would minimize the risk of reactor meltdowns and environmental degradation.
- This policy would expand nuclear energy with the intent of minimizing consumer energy costs.

Implementation

This policy should cover the integration of tri-structural particles over several years. This form of nuclear power generation is still in the trial period, with only one plant currently under construction in Richmond, Washington. Assuming construction on the Richmond plant finishes by 2028, plans for an adaptation of tri-structural isotopic particles in New York reactors should be set for 2028–2029 when the trial power plant proves operational. Assuming tri-structural isotopic nuclear reactors take a similar timeframe as the current reactors, the adaptation of these new particles can be estimated to take 3–5 years.¹¹ Following this timeline, the first newly modified reactors should be operational in the year 2034 at the latest. Investing in this transition

before 2028 is imperative to meet these projections.

Support at both a local and national level of both political parties would be needed to implement such a policy. This proposal should be targeted at maintaining the use of nuclear power plants currently in operation. As Green Party activists press for the shutdown of New York nuclear facilities, it is important to invest in the education of this form of nuclear power generation. A majority of Americans (57%) are in support of nuclear power, but much of this support comes from the Republican Party. Since New York has historically been a blue state, it is important to target left-leaning citizens in education efforts. This model of a nuclear reactor can generate very cost-effective electricity for surrounding areas with very little environmental risk. Subsidies should be modeled after the ARDPs funding to cover 50% of the tri-structural isotopic nuclear power plants.

Backlash could result from increased taxes to afford the subsidies for this construction. Once the adapted plants were operational, the tax revenue generated could offset the increased taxes and even provide tax cuts for the surrounding area. The long-term beneficial effects of this policy would need to be communicated to both politicians and residents through an educational campaign designed to gain support for this policy. As energy production begins, the effects of this policy would decrease energy costs for the individual households in the plant's surrounding area.

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Bridging the Gap: Implementing Asset-Building Programs as a Solution to Middle-Class Financial Inequality

By Nathaniel Cain, nc482@cornell.edu

Income inequality in the United States has exacerbated disparities in ownership of assets between the upper class and the lower/middle classes, resulting in insufficient emergency savings for individuals and declining homeownership rates. Asset-building programs offer a promising solution by coaching individuals to accumulate wealth and providing initial deposits for loans.

Background

Middle-class Americans across all generations experience stark income inequality compared to wealthy Americans, who have significantly more financial assets in comparison.¹ A study by the National Institute of Retirement Security found that in 2019, only 14 percent of millennials' total financial assets were owned by those who were middle-class.¹ The numbers fare worse for middle-class Gen Xers and Baby Boomers, who owned a mere eight and six percent, respectively.¹ This trend poses an issue, as middle-class Boomers are starting to retire as their assets fail to reach what is needed to ensure financial security through old age.¹

Additionally, a significant proportion of Americans do not have the necessary resources to cover an emergency if it were to occur.² A 2023 Bankrate report found that as of May 2023, 20% of all Americans had absolutely no emergency savings.² A 2022 study by the Federal Reserve found that over a third of Americans wouldn't be able to cover a \$400 emergency expense.³ The Bankrate report also found that 63 percent of Americans claimed rising prices (as a result of inflation) have resulted in them putting less money into savings.² In fact, 36% of Americans had more money in credit card debt than their current emergency savings account balance.²

Homeownership is a fundamental goal of the American

Dream and is widely considered to be a pivotal societal achievement. However, the Federal Reserve's rise in interest rates in recent years has hurt homeownership rates.⁴ Although demand for housing has remained robust, 2023 was the "slowest year for existing home sales since 1995," according to a report by the U.S. Bank.⁴

As evidenced, a large proportion of Americans lack the assets needed to achieve economic mobility and stability. Both state and federal governments should take action to bridge the wealth gap in America and make societal goals such as home ownership and retirement more feasible for middle-class families.

Policy Idea

Congress should appropriate funding for asset-building programs that shall be distributed to states to utilize at their discretion regarding implementation. Asset-building programs refer to a wide range of initiatives implemented by governments, philanthropic organizations, NGOs, and financial institutions to aid individuals in acquiring household assets.⁵ Asset-building programs typically refer to "financial coaching" that can be focused toward several different goals, whether it be credit building, home ownership, equity building, savings deposits, or direct instruction related to home ownership.⁵ These typically consist of in-person or virtual one-on-

one meetings in which a coach meets with an individual and helps craft a budget, strategize methods to raise credit scores and obtain access to financial services.⁵ Asset-building programs may provide a seed deposit to individuals interested in opening a savings account, or match savings to help individuals build assets at a faster pace.⁵ Most asset-building programs focus on home ownership as the primary objective, as homeownership is typically the principal means by which American families build wealth.⁵

Policy Analysis

A 2019 study evaluated the effectiveness of the Boston Youth Credit Initiative, a financial coaching program for young adults aimed to assist in credit-building through financial literacy education.⁶ Using a randomized control trial model, the study found that the treatment group (those participating in BYCBI) were 10% more likely to have developed a credit score in comparison to the control group.⁶ 58.4% of the treatment group—those participating in BYCBI—had increased their credit score in six months, compared to only 45.3% of the control group.⁶ The treatment group was 5% more likely to have acquired a car loan compared to the control group and 13% more likely to have a history of making payments on time.⁶

A 2015 Urban Institute randomized control study assessed the impact of financial coaching programs

at two different nonprofits: the Financial Clinic based in New York City and Branches based in Miami-Dade County.⁷ At Branches, financial coaching participants were 22% more likely than the control group to report that they had made “some or a lot of progress” regarding savings unrelated to retirement.⁷ At the Financial Clinic, participants were 25% more likely than the control group to say the same.⁷ Participants were also 19% more likely to claim they had made “substantial progress toward paying down their debts” than the control group.⁷ At Branches, participants were 10% less likely than those in the control group to have “paid a late fee on a loan or bill” in the two months prior, and at the Financial Clinic, participants were 17% more likely than those in the control to have paid their bills on time.⁷

Highlights

- There is an excessively large wealth gap between the American upper class and lower-middle class. A large proportion of Americans do not have the money necessary to cover emergency expenses and are riddled with several forms of debt.^{1,2}
- Homeownership rates, measuring a significant asset associated with wealth accumulation, have taken a toll since the pandemic. Although demand for housing has remained robust, 2023 was the “slowest year for existing home sales since 1995,” according to a report by the US Bank.⁴
- Asset-building programs encompass a range of initiatives aimed at assisting individuals in accumulating household assets, often involving financial coaching tailored to objectives like credit improvement, homeownership, equity building, savings, and financial literacy. These programs may

offer seed deposits or matching funds to accelerate asset accumulation, with a predominant focus on homeownership.⁵

Empirical research indicates that asset-building programs aid individuals in developing a credit score, acquiring car loans, saving for retirement, paying down their debts, and paying bills on time.^{6,7}

Implementation

Financial coaching programs, the most common form of asset-building programs, are typically used by nonprofits, local governments, and financial institutions.⁵ Instead of directly providing the services themselves, local and state governments should outsource coaching programs to NGOs and financial institutions such as banks. Doing so will preserve efficiency throughout the implementation process and reduce strain on government resources. Once funding has been secured, substantial outreach must be done to low and middle-income communities to attract potential clients. The Urban Institute study found that getting clients into their first financial coaching session was a major hurdle experienced by providers.⁸ Each participant in the study initially showed interest in financial coaching sessions, but only 46% of individuals who were offered services attended at least one coaching session.⁸ The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recommends that providers should attempt to identify potential clients who are prone to actively participate and remain committed, such as clients with clear financial goals who are mentally stable.⁸ Outreach can be done in a multitude of different ways, from in-person gatherings, to digital advertising, to one-on-one conversations. Examples include hosting community town halls, advertising on social media, handing out flyers, or going door-to-door. In addition, once the contact information of clients has been received, follow-up

correspondence must be made to guarantee high retention rates.

This policy should be introduced in state appropriation bills, perhaps as an earmark to other large spending bills. Specifically, coordination with the Ways and Means Committees is crucial to ensure adequate funding for asset-building programs. Implementation would work best in a federal-state partnership, with federal funding being distributed to states to use in their own jurisdiction. Partnering with organizations that focus on shortening the wealth gap could help to garner additional support for the policy. Examples of these types of organizations include the Wealth Inequality Initiative, New America, and Prosperity Now. Potential opponents of the policy include wealthy individuals, many of whom may not want their tax dollars going towards wealth redistribution, which does not directly benefit them.

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Nurturing Economic Sustainability with a Farm-to-Food Bank Tax Credit

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With increasing human consumption, food waste has become a critical environmental concern and economic liability. The United States government should implement a federal policy to provide tax credits for farmers who donate their surplus to food charities in order to reduce waste and economic liability.

Background

About one-third of food produced for human consumption in the world is either lost or wasted, significantly contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and increasing landfills.¹ In the United States alone, it is estimated that 40% of food is lost or wasted, costing on average \$218 billion annually, or 1.3% of GDP.² The Business and Sustainable Development Commission calculated that \$14 billion in cost-effective solutions per year for the next decade would result in \$73 billion in annual net financial benefits for the US, create more than 51,000 jobs, reduce 75 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and conserve four trillion gallons of water.²

To accomplish this goal, New York has implemented a Farm to Food Bank Tax Credit that would allow farmers to donate their excessive food to food banks in return for income tax credits.³ The policy states that farmers with eligible donations such as fresh produce must show proof of donation through the receipt or written acknowledgment from eligible food programs to receive a refundable credit of 25% of the fair market value up to \$5000.³ Though individual states have their own version of the food donation tax credit, there is a lack of federal policy to standardize food donations across the United States for a tax credit, which could amplify the benefits seen at the state level.

Policy Idea

The United States government should implement a national farm-to-

food bank tax credit. All registered farmers and agricultural producers in the US who donate food to certified food banks, soup kitchens, and/or other charitable food programs should be eligible to file for a tax credit. The credit should be set at 30% of the fair market value of the donated food, and people can claim up to \$6000 per year from the credit. Eligible donations should include, but are not limited to, fresh produce, dairy products, meat, and other perishable goods; regardless, all donations should meet food safety standards. Donors should provide documentation with detailed descriptions of donated goods, their fair market value, and a written form of acknowledgment from the receiving organizations/programs.

Policy Analysis

Historically, policymakers have had an overwhelmingly positive perception toward tax credits, believing these credits will support farmers financially and provide incentives to donate food surplus, which can lead to a notable decrease in food waste and its associated costs.⁴

Results of the tax credit can be seen in New York, where the New York Farm Bureau reports farmers donated an additional 1.6 million pounds of fresh produce compared to 2017, equivalent to 9 million additional meals to provide for people in need.⁵

Since there exists a wide variety of food programs, the 30% fair market value is based upon the IRS minimum deductibility limitation to help ensure the diversity of included organizations.⁶ The application and

filing process should be overseen by the IRS and USDA. Farmers would need to submit their receipts or written proof to the USDA, which will be responsible for evaluating the product's fair value and price report and determining the eligibility status of farmers. With certification from the USDA, farmers would send their tax forms to the IRS for thorough determination of the exact tax credit and value.

This process builds based on the existing structure for a tax deduction. Many farmers do not generate enough income to benefit from federal deductions under the current federal food donation policy. Switching to tax credits can fill these eligibility gaps and offer tax breaks to a wider range of farms.⁷

Highlights

- The US government should introduce a federal implementation of standardized tax credits for food donations across the US based on an existing New York State policy.³ The policy would offer a more impactful and inclusive approach than current state-level policies and federal deductions to encourage farmers to contribute surplus produce to food banks, thus aligning economic incentives with social good.⁷
- Implementing this policy would encourage farmers to optimize crop production and agricultural practices,³ with the knowledge that excess can be

donated, promoting a more sustainable and waste-conscious approach to agriculture.²

- The application for the tax credits would utilize existing IRS and USDA structures to facilitate an easier certification process, ensuring a broad range of farms and individuals can benefit, especially those previously ineligible under deduction-based policies.⁶
- The goal of the policy is to directly address food insecurity by increasing the volume of high-quality, nutritious food donations to charities, providing essential support to vulnerable populations, and reducing hunger in communities across the country, as well as to decrease food waste by incentivizing farmers to donate rather than discard surplus produce, promoting environmental sustainability and resource efficiency.⁴

Implementation

Though this policy would be implemented through the federal government with the hopes of being introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate to speed up the process, a state-level engagement strategy—particularly in states heavily dependent on agriculture—serves as a vital step in mobilizing initial support.

Initial outreach efforts to gain sponsorship should focus on states with leading crop sales, like New York, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska, which have also demonstrated interest in similar policies in the past.⁸ Engaging with Congress members and senators from these states, such as Senator Patrick Gallivan of New York (R) and Congressman Jimmy Panetta of California (D), of whom have supported agriculture-related financial support measures, will be pivotal.^{9,10}

With a history of agricultural support from both Republican and Democratic representatives, these states possess a politically conducive environment for introducing and advocating for the policy.

Furthermore, gaining support from the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Finance would be essential to generate the momentum to pass the policy. Committee members from these respective committees will have the expertise and influence to ensure the policy is presented in an effective manner while adding credibility and signal to other policymakers and constituents that the policy is worth considering.

Upon legislative enactment, the IRS and USDA will be tasked with developing comprehensive regulations and guidelines for the policy's implementation, as the process will include the creation of application forms, certification processes for eligible donations, and ongoing monitoring/compliance systems.

Understanding the broad impact of this policy, potential backlash may arise from fiscal concerns over impacting the tax credit on federal revenue. To mitigate such concerns, it is essential to emphasize the long-term savings from reduced food waste, environmental benefits, and the positive impact on food security. Engaging with fiscal conservatives early on to discuss these benefits and potentially cap the total annual tax credit expenditure could be a strategy to address these concerns.

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How Industrial Business Zones Can Spark Manufacturing Restoration in Upstate New York

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The upstate New York cities of Ithaca, Utica, Rochester, Syracuse, and Binghamton should all produce business-friendly Industrial Business Zones through zoning measures, revitalizing their manufacturing sectors and helping turn the tide on New York manufacturing decline.

Background

Manufacturing has suffered in the United States in recent years but has been of particular concern in New York State. In fact, New York, previously a pioneer rubber, glass, and textile production, has been a national leader in manufacturing decline since the 1990s, resulting in the loss of 40% of its blue-collar sector.¹ In the last few years, what little is left of New York's manufacturing and industry has been razed by COVID-19. As of the first quarter of 2024, New York State's general business conditions index fell by 29 points, a ground-floor number not seen since the early days of the pandemic.²

However, new business models implemented in New York City have produced promising results that could save manufacturing in the five boroughs. Industrial Business Zones (IBZs), introduced in the mid 2000s, are zoned areas designated for manufacturing efforts that both block competition from other industries and offer sizable advantages for manufacturing capital. For example, companies that agree to relocate to an IBZ are granted a \$1000 tax credit per employee and up to \$100,000 for further business development. As of today, there are IBZs scattered throughout New York's busiest areas: Brooklyn Navy Yard, Jamaica, Long Island City, and more.³

The progress of manufacturing growth in IBZs have trumped numbers put up elsewhere in the state. The zones contributed more than \$61 billion of GDP growth to the city in 2020 and saw \$270 million in venture

capital funding from 2016–2023.⁴ Meanwhile, upstate metropolitan areas like Utica-Rome, Syracuse, and Ithaca have been struggling with stagnation, losing roughly 5,000 jobs since 2020. Even in more prosperous regions like Buffalo–Niagara Falls, manufacturing losses have still been suffered, though masked by gains in service jobs.⁵

Policy Idea

The local governments of five modern manufacturing cities in New York State that have recently undergone declines in their respective industrial sectors—Syracuse, Binghamton, Rochester, Ithaca, and Utica—should immediately pass new zoning regulations establishing local IBZs. They should encompass roughly 350 acres of city land and serve no more than 500,000 individuals of a local population. In larger metropolitan areas like Syracuse and Rochester, the creation of two IBZs will help account for their more greatly populated urban and suburban areas. New York City's IBZ's should prove as the primary model, and tax breaks should be provided in line with those offered by the IBZs of New York City.

Policy Analysis

IBZs are zoned areas, which cost no money to produce. Still, the city governments would have to set specific requirements for zoning rules, offer accompanying tax credits, and bar areas from residential expansion.

Already existing in all five of the aforementioned cities are areas zoned for industry. The economic output of these areas has been stagnant

recently, but if these areas were turned specifically into IBZs, growth can be monitored and ideally expected.¹ By specifically allocating acres for an IBZ from a pool of pre-zoned industrial areas, cost to local residential areas would be minimized.⁶ Of course, adverse and extraneous impacts on neighborhoods should still be monitored by city council officials, but IBZs need not replace local housing. Rather, IBZs can serve to employ those already living there. For example, since COVID-19, New York State has lost roughly 34,000 manufacturing workers to unemployment; these workers can hopefully be brought back under the IBZ policy.⁶ The actual cost of IBZs thus comes from tax benefits.

However, in attracting commerce and industry, it is hoped that costs from a decline in tax revenue will be made up for by dollars generated from economic productivity. In creating jobs, the expected salary for the average manufacturing worker in New York is \$62,851 (all of which can be taxable), and from manufacturing itself, IBZ's in New York reported \$2.1 billion in taxable sales for 2022.⁷

Highlights

- New York State manufacturing has faced stagnation, a large fall from when New York was a powerhouse in the production of textiles, rubber, and glass.¹
- Despite this downturn, New York City has preserved its own manufacturing sector through the maintenance of Industrial Business Zones (IBZs) that foster business.³

- Through generous tax cuts and subsidies, IBZs can help turn the tide on New York State’s decline.
- IBZs should be established in now run-down manufacturing havens: Syracuse, Binghamton, Rochester, Ithaca, and Utica.
- A city zoning ordinance is all that is needed to open the doors for IBZs, which can bolster manufacturing and generate profits greater than the costs of tax breaks and subsidies, a main attractor of the IBZ system.⁷
- Meanwhile, residential life is preserved and sequestered from IBZs, providing for well planned cities with manufacturing that produces societal benefit.¹⁵

Implementation

While most zoning decisions must go through a zoning board, local governments have the latitude to make these sorts of decisions themselves. The intricacies should be broken up on a city-by-city basis:

1. Ithaca already has small sites that can become Industrial Zones upon a permit. The city should thus consolidate these zones and offer financial incentives for their operation.⁸
2. Utica has even less zoning infrastructure; manufacturers have to apply to use their land for that expressed purpose, but otherwise manufacturing is no different from residential or mixed-use buildings. Utica should create an IBZ in an area with heavy manufacturing presence and formally make manufacturing/industry a specific business zone.⁹
3. Rochester will perhaps have one of the easiest implementations, as it already has its own industry area, the M-1 Industrial District. While

an IBZ can be established here, Rochester does not expressly bar other industries (like retail, dining, etc.) from entering and causing competition for land, something they will now have to ban.¹⁰

4. Syracuse provides zoning areas for Light Industry, the bulk of which is manufacturing. However, Syracuse’s industry is also very disjointed, with the specifically zoned land being a densely occupied strip.¹¹ Given this, if Syracuse wants to attract new out-of-city business, it will have to produce its own IBZ (or two, depending on size) elsewhere. Syracuse specifically relies on large companies on the city limits like Lockheed-Martin and Biophan for their manufacturing jobs).¹² Thus, building an IBZ there might be the most prudent option.

5. Binghamton has the advantage of having a very concentrated section of the city devoted to manufacturing.¹³ However, this area is not formally an industrial zone, and thus an IBZ would turn this area into a concentrated zone of manufacturing prosperity.¹⁴

Backlash, like with most policies, may be expected. For example, environmental groups and residential areas may rally against the heightened sound of trucks and increased pollutants that could impact their neighborhoods. But, new practices like automation, robotics, and machine soundproofing can ease these problems by decreasing noise and environmental pollution.¹⁵

While the creation of a zoned area for an IBZ can happen instantaneously, it will take longer to attract business. Some areas, when introducing new business incentives, generated new jobs in a matter of

months: Austin, Texas, for example, enticed Tesla to break ground on a plant near the city mere months after Austin was declared a business-friendly town.¹⁶ Ultimately it is too hard to tell how quickly business will move in, but, perhaps more importantly, it can convince businesses to stay, keeping manufacturing in while attracting it at the same time.

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Navigating Conflicts of Interest: Randomizing Credit Rating Assignments using a Match System

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The unregulated, oligopolistic credit rating industry in the United States operates under an issuer-pays model that cares for conflicts of interest. The United States government should therefore establish a board to assign rating agencies to institutions seeking initial ratings for their structured debt.

Background

The United States' housing bubble popped in 2007, and by fall of 2008, the economy went into a recession. The key cause was the proliferation of high-risk mortgage loans creating a bubble in the housing market. As financial institutions bundled these risky mortgages into securities and sold them to investors worldwide, the economy became dependent on the buying and selling of mortgage-backed securities (MBS).¹ When borrowers began to default on their loans, the collateralized debt obligations (CDO), which were largely made up of MBSs at the time, plummeted in value, leading to massive losses for financial institutions, sending the United States and the global economy into the world's largest recession since the Great Depression in 1929.^{2,3}

Credit rating agencies (CRAs) had a significant, yet overlooked, role in the crisis. Fitch, Moody's, and S&P have been operating since the early 1900s, resulting in an oligopoly-like control on the credit rating industry.⁴ Their risk assessments of securities have made their way into regulatory frameworks and have established themselves a form of financial license.⁵ The license serves as the key to market access, with the language of the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 serving as a prime example.⁵ Additionally, the issuer-pays model creates conflict of interest, as companies can pay credit rating agencies to initially rate their security.⁶

The Dodd-Frank Act of 2010 served as method to mitigate the

control CRAs had over the financial industry by charging the Securities and Exchange Commission with more power to regulate these Nationally Recognized Statistical Ratings Organizations (NRSROs), a distinction given to regulated CRAs in 1975.⁷ But, large financial institutions lobbied out many of the necessary provisions to keep the financial industry in check, resulting in a skeleton law that left the same the CRAs with just as much power as before.

Policy Idea

The United States federal government, specifically the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Office of Credit Ratings (OCR), should establish a board of academic professionals to collectively determine the initial credit ratings of financial debt instruments by matching NRSROs with financial institutions for the initial rating. Doing so ensures that the issuer, sponsor, and underwriter of the instrument are not able to select the NRSRO that will determine the initial credit rating of the instrument. A company that wants its debt instrument rated would go to this board after paying a flat fee. A pre-approved rating agency should be matched with the instrument to rate the debt, depending on the agency's qualifications including rating methodology, history of success, and the number of rating failures. Once this process is complete, the issuing company can take the instrument to other agencies to be rated, but the initial rating will stand.

Policy Analysis

There are a few objectives that the creation of the board attempts to complete. First, the implementation of this board attempts to disrupt the rating industry's prolific use of the issuer-pays model. This policy would force companies with new debt instruments to receive their initial rating from the board, encouraging a model that lessens the number of conflicts of interests already in the financial industry.⁸ Second, the board ensures more initial accuracy of the credit rating to alleviate pressure on investors.⁸ After 2009, the International Monetary Fund found that only 10 percent of the original CDO tranches were still rated AAA whereas more than 60 percent were rated below B.⁹

Lastly, acceleration of competition within the rating market lessens the influence of the top three firms on the market, ensuring that the success of an agency depends on the quality and reliability. The European Union's establishment of the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) highlights how, before the pandemic, the market shares of S&P, Moody's, and Fitch dropped in the EU.¹⁰ Disruptions in the issuer-pays model, as with ESMA, lead to less conflicts of interest, a more competitive rating market, and a higher number of accurate and reliable initial ratings. The idea is that financial institutions no longer choose the rating agency for the initial rating of a security and instead have to go through this centralized panel to receive the initial rating.⁹ Existing ratings will slowly be phased out as securities

expire over time, and the panel's certification of a rating will become the norm.

Highlights

- The US government should create a centralized board within the SEC and the OCR to assign initial credit ratings for financial debt instruments through a matching process determined by the board that matches NRSRO to the instrument, aiming to disrupt the issuer-pays model, reducing conflicts of interest, and enhancing the accuracy of initial ratings.
- The panel would address the foundational issues that contributed to the 2008 financial crisis, such as rating flaws and the oligopoly of major CRAs, ensuring that initial ratings are less impacted by issuer bias and increasing reliability.¹
- The panel should use existing infrastructure of the OCR to establish a board and incorporate additional funding and academics and industry professionals to form the panel, ensuring that ratings are guided by evidence-based practices and independent oversight.^{9,13}

Drawing from the ESMA approach of financial regulation and rating oversight, the panel should be organized in a way to succeed; by mandating initial ratings be given through the matching process, the proposed policy encourages competition among CRAs, as seen in the EU, and ensures more accuracy for financial debt instruments overall.¹⁰

Implementation

Because the OCR has already been established, the necessary foundation required to institute a panel is already present under the SEC's and the OCR's enforcement power.

First, the OCR must find panel members to assist in the process of

matching a NRSRO to initially rate the security. Regulatory processes often face challenges with ensuring fairness and maintaining a balance between regulations and the free market. With the help of academics such as tenured professors and researchers, this gap can be bridged through scholarship in the field of financial regulation, offering a more balanced and evidenced-based approach to regulation and providing an independent perspective that is less likely to be influenced by external pressures.¹¹ This approach has been known to work in other countries. ESMA uses the opinions of academics in the field of financial regulation to advise officials to ensure fair regulation across the industry.¹²

Second, the OCR requires the necessary funding to begin this panel. The hiring of academic professionals will be expensive and much of Congress would not necessarily vote for allocating separate funds to implement this policy. Instead, the current budgetary allocations and responsibilities of the OCR can be adjusted. Currently, the OCR is the second largest office under the "Other Program Offices Category" in the SEC budget.¹³ The SEC has allocated sixteen million more dollars to the OCR for 2024, and with a portion of that, the OCR can hire the necessary individuals to begin panel operations.¹³ Additionally, the panel should obtain payments from financial institutions to rate their new securities and from NRSROs to obtain government certification.

Lastly, the panel should develop standards by which to match a NRSRO to give the initial rating for a security in addition to judging the confidence of the rating itself, *ex ante*. Technical standards have been devised by ESMA under a single direct supervisor. The four standards of rating the accuracy would be integrity of the CRA, the responsibility of the CRA, the corporate governance of the CRA's board, and the independence of the CRA's rating activities.^{8,14} By both judging the *ex ante* confidence of a

rating and using standards to match the necessary NRSRO, the panel would ensure that NRSRO strives to develop more accurate rating standards within themselves, while the public has insight into more information regarding the preciseness of the NRSRO's operations.

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Promoting Entrepreneurial Potential Among Homeless Youth

By Alice Lee, al2335@cornell.edu

The United States experiences a widespread lack of financial education among youth that often contributes to homelessness. The federal government should mandate entrepreneurial centers in each state, focusing on prioritizing professional income generation above informal businesses.

Background

An estimated 1.7 million youths under the age of 18 experience homelessness each year in the US, with an additional 450,000 youth adults aged 18 to 24 reportedly being homeless.¹ Unemployment rates among homeless youth range from 66 to 75 percent, with an average of eight months of joblessness each year.¹ Aside from these high unemployment rates in the formal sector, many homeless and disconnected youth individuals are engaged in a perpetual cycle of gig jobs, turning to survival behaviors for income like dealing drugs, selling blood, and survival sex.²

Historically, efforts to assist the homeless youth in the US focused on providing education, as mandated by the Mc-Kinney-Vento Act. This act ensures the right to a “free, appropriate public education for homeless youth, immediate enrollment without standard documents, and the choice of attending their school of origin”.³ In the fiscal year 2022, the US Department of Education allocated \$114 million for the program, requiring states to distribute no less than 75 percent of their annual McKinney-Vento funds to local school districts in subgrants.³

An overlooked component of these educational programs is financial literacy. Lack of financial education exacerbates the barriers homeless youth face in establishing a stable job. Without budgeting skills, debt avoidance, savings strategies, and understanding financial services, individuals can’t make informed decisions to stabilize their financial situation. Enhancing the accessibility

and awareness of financial literacy programs, paired with job training, can provide these youth with the necessary skill sets to break the cycle of unemployment and homelessness. Federal measures and outreach can foster financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills for youth seeking greater economic self-sufficiency.

Policy Idea

The Financial Literacy and Education Commission under the Department of Treasury should establish homeless entrepreneurial centers in each state, targeting the homeless youth population. These centers should be equipped with funds sourced from federal grants reserved for housing counseling programs, allocating around \$500 per youth individual. Such funds should be used to provide microloans, financial mentorship, and access to job fairs and online financial literacy courses. By collaborating with organizations like the National Business Incubation Association (NIBIA), these centers could bring in professional experts for workshops and learning programs. With funding from federal commissions and expertise from organizations like the NBIA, this policy would incentivize formal employment opportunities and develop entrepreneurial activities to help homeless individuals obtain a secure lifestyle. This approach would tackle a significant factor of homelessness: the lack of education and employment opportunities, and would help individuals establish a secure financial and educational expertise.

Policy Analysis

By mandating entrepreneurial learning centers across the country, the US can address youth homelessness in a sustainable manner while stimulating economic growth. The US Financial Literacy and Economic Commission, established under the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003, is a key figure in coordinating federal efforts to promote financial literacy, with representation from over 20 federal agencies.⁴ In the fiscal year 2021, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Housing Counseling Program allocated approximately \$51 million in grants to around 1,571 agencies, providing financial education to over a million clients: 38 percent received group education, 145,626 individuals improved their financial capacity, and 451,913 developed a sustainable household budget.⁵ The successful coordination of federal efforts and resources illuminates the impact of financial literacy initiatives, with significant improvements in economic capacity and management.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation’s Money Smart program has also demonstrated success, with nearly 70% of participants reporting an increase in savings and 53% experiencing a decrease in debt.⁶ Organizations like Homeless Entrepreneur are working to address this issue by promoting economic empowerment and poverty reduction through active citizenship.⁷ The Homeless Entrepreneur’s HELP Program is a holistic one-year program that addresses poverty in conjunction

with the organization's Housing Launchpad program.⁷ It centers on identifying and strengthening personal and professional skills, labor integration through interview and resume preparation, and maintaining stability and networking through preventive measures. By combining these federal initiatives with the expertise of organizations like Homeless Entrepreneur and the National Business Incubation Association, a more comprehensive approach to addressing youth homelessness can be achieved. This integrated strategy can enhance the employability, income potential, and overall well-being of vulnerable youth populations.

Highlights

- Many homeless and disconnected youth are limited to gig jobs due to high unemployment rates and lack of access to information about job opportunities.² Addressing obstacles such as the lack of financial mentors and shortage of technical skills is essential for helping homeless youth escape unemployment and homelessness.
- Mandating entrepreneurial centers in each state would tackle the lack of financial education among youth, which is a contributing factor to homelessness.
- These centers would utilize federal grants to offer microloans, mentorship, and access to job fairs and courses, targeting the root causes of homelessness such as lack of education and employment opportunities.
- Federal efforts to promote financial literacy through grants have been successful in the past; redistributing these federal funds to establish entrepreneurial centers has the potential to reduce youth

homelessness across the country.⁵

Implementation

The proposal's actualization as a bill and subsequently as a law will require coordination with Congress, particularly through the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Appropriations Committee.⁸ Federal departments like HUD and the Department of Treasury will have the authority to implement these entrepreneurial centers and allocate grants from their existing programs' funding. Following a top-down approach, state governments will also be responsible for overseeing the consistent operation of these centers, with frequent evaluations.

To bolster political engagement and support from representatives, this legislation can be led by key members of the Congressional Caucus on Homelessness, which plans to analyze complex factors contributing to homelessness.⁹ Rep. Sylvia Garcia (TX-29), who introduced the Studying Barriers to Housing Act which identifies challenges in homelessness reduction, and Rep. Cori Bush (MO-1), who reintroduced a resolution that calls for federal investments in homelessness prevention, can leverage their established relationships with stakeholders to amplify these efforts.^{10, 11}

To reach the target population of homeless youth, a combination of direct outreach, media campaigns, and collaborating with existing social services and schools is essential, especially considering the lack of access to many technological outlets. The policy will further seek support from established organizations like the National Business Incubation Association to provide direct expertise and mentorship efforts to be implemented in the centers. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, local school districts receive funding to support the education of homeless youth, which also calls for their role as key

stakeholders in integrating the centers with the institutions' existing educational support services.³

Potential backlash involves concerns about dramatic increases in federal spending on social services, such as Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX)'s public resistance to the \$468 billion government funding package recently passed by the House, which would further fund departments like HUD and projects focused on community development.¹² However, the long-term benefits of reducing homelessness in fostering self-sufficiency will be emphasized, framing the issue of homelessness as a nonpartisan concern that affects the entire economy.

This policy aims to reinforce a new, more holistic approach to reducing homelessness, focusing on long-term career development and financial stability rather than temporary solutions. By shifting from unstable gig jobs to formal employment opportunities, the policy illuminates the role of government assisting in this transition and prioritizes economic empowerment early on.

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Farming for the Future: Why the US Should Offer Tax Credits to Beef Farmers Who Implement Sustainable Agricultural Practices

By Kiran O'Kelly, ko355@cornell.edu

Beef products are a key part of the American diet and fiscally support millions of livelihoods, but their production poses severe environmental risks. The United States should grant federal tax credits to beef farmers who implement sustainable agricultural practices to minimize the impacts of climate change on farmers and their communities.

Background

Recently, beef products and their production have been negatively portrayed in the American media. The media's criticisms ignore the reality that beef production supports many American livelihoods and provides social benefits in rural areas. It can even provide environmental benefits when sustainably managed, such as supporting and maintaining threatened ecological habitats such as the American Great Plains grasslands.¹ While beef production poses enormous climate risks and is not exempt from the necessary adaptations all industries must make to combat climate change, it is not practical to assume that beef consumption will simply leave the American diet in a significant amount. Furthermore, abandoning beef would pose an enormous economic threat to the millions of Americans who produce and work around beef. Sustainable beef farming practices already exist and can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 90%, promote plant diversity, and act as carbon sinks.² Adding seaweed to cows' diets, rotational grazing (containing and moving grazing animals through pastures to improve soil health and overall biodiversity), and silvopasture (integrating trees and grazing lands to increase ecological health while maintaining economic productivity) are all methods that enact these positive environmental changes while yielding similar economic benefits.^{2,3,4} The main reason the federal government has not adopted these practices is due to cost barriers.⁵

Nonetheless, the US should consider implementing climate smart tax credits that enable cattle farmers to minimize their impact on the environment to ensure the futures of farming and urban communities across the country.

Policy Idea

The US federal government should offer a federal tax credit program that provides different benefits to incentivize implementing sustainable practices in beef production. These include:

- Giving farmers who purchase and use red seaweed in their cattle feed fully refundable tax credits relating to the cost of adding seaweed to cattle feed.
- Rewarding farmers who use rotational grazing systems and/or silvopasture with fully refundable tax credits similarly to Virginia's Conservation Tillage and Precision Agriculture Equipment credit and Agricultural Best Management Practices credit, respectively.

Policy Analysis

These tax credits would enable farmers to adopt sustainable practices by not only offsetting the additional costs associated with implementing these practices, but also making the whole process cheaper than traditional cattle rearing methods.

These sustainable practices are already being studied and there is ample scientific evidence to back up

the effectiveness of these practices. Cattle ranchers, farmers, and scientists at University of California Davis (UC Davis) have already been able to reduce methane emissions from cow burps by over 90% simply through adding 50 grams of *Asparagopsis*, a type of red seaweed, into cows' daily diets.¹ A recent study from The Clarity and Leadership for Environmental Awareness and Research (CLEAR) Center at UC Davis outlines how beef cattle promote native plant diversity, help produce abundant yields, and ultimately increase soil carbon sequestration when managed through systems such as rotational grazing.² Beef cattle farming can also be used as a deterrent to razing grasslands into farmland, which has fostered partnerships between the World Wildlife Fund and beef cattle ranches across the US and Canada.¹

Practices such as silvopasture, which is the integration of trees, crops, and livestock into the same areas of land are already growing in popularity.⁴ Ranches that administer these practices experience greater productivity, improved soil fertility, store more carbon, and can even provide some form of refuge to certain types of wildlife.⁴

Highlights

- Rearing beef cattle is climate-intensive, and beef demand is not significantly decreasing in the United States.⁶
- Implementing policies that make beef rearing more

sustainable will aid in reducing climate change's negative environmental impacts while ensuring a future for communities reliant on the beef industry.

- The federal government should promote sustainable beef production practices by offering farmers who use rotational grazing systems, add seaweed to their cattle's diet, or implement silvopasture a fully refundable federal tax credit modeled after pre-existing state-level tax credits.
- Implementing feed changes for cattle can reduce methane emissions from cow gas expulsion by over 90%.²
- Climate smart practices open up partnerships between the World Wildlife Fund and beef cattle ranches across the US and Canada.¹
- Practices such as silvopasture maintain profits while providing some form of refuge to certain types of wildlife.⁴

Implementation

This policy would be best implemented through the federal government as it would ensure a uniform set of standards and regulations for farmers nationwide. Climate change is a national concern, and the federal government would be able to increase the effectiveness of climate smart policies rather than a state by state approach which may have less significant benefits. Furthermore, federal funding will likely assuage the previous worries surrounding the costs of these programs. States where beef cattle production is more integral to the economy and community, particularly in the northern Midwest and portions

of the South, should garner particular attention. Much of the beef production industry in these states, especially in northern states, is often controlled by families who have significant influence over local politics. The most effective way to introduce this policy would be by appealing to these representatives who represent constituencies that are reliant on beef cattle rearing. If their constituents showed support for the introduction of the policy, there would be a strong likelihood many members of Congress would also support the policy.

While an individual state-by-state approach may provide the most relevant details for their beef industries, the sheer number of states involved necessitates a federal approach. Additionally, the purpose of the policy is to preserve natural habitats that cross multiple state lines, so a federal policy would be more effective. If implementing the policy is approached at the federal level, lobbying to key congressional representatives and the Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Subcommittee of the House Committee for Agriculture would likely be the best approach to implementation. Similar to the state-by-state approach, there would need to be widespread support from cattle ranchers to convince the beef-rearing community that this proposal is backed by actual farmers. This positioning would mean that Republican support would be essential from key house members as many states where cattle ranching is common and most productive are red.

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Lifting Residential Off-Street Parking Requirements in Ithaca, New York

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To increase housing affordability and reduce legal subsidization of automobile transportation, the City of Ithaca should eliminate minimum off-street parking requirements in the R-1, R-2, R-3, R-U, and MH-1 zoning districts.^{1,2}

Background

In Ithaca, New York, housing construction has not achieved levels prescribed by plans set out in its 2017 Housing Strategy for all types of housing except for student housing.³ This delay has contributed to a situation wherein house and rent prices have outpaced income significantly since COVID.⁴ As a result, more than 50% of renters, who comprise 74% of the city's population, spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent.⁴

Minimum parking requirements establish minimum quotas for parking spaces in new developments. In urban areas, they contribute to housing shortages by subsidizing car usage at the expense of potential space for housing units or other amenities. Ithaca's Common Council has moved in the past to weaken or eliminate parking minimums in certain zones, with the abolition of parking minimums in many business zones in 2023 being the most recent and sweeping.⁵ As of March 2024, the Council is reportedly evaluating removing parking minimums for residential zones altogether.⁴ If enacted, this removal would allow developers to construct new housing units with fewer parking spaces than mandated by current law or even no parking spaces, allowing the provision of more housing units or other amenities demanded by renters and homebuyers.

Policy Idea

Ithaca's Common Council should vote to lift the minimum parking requirements in the R-1, R-2, R-3, R-U, and MH-1 zoning

districts.^{1,2} The districts prefixed by the letter R comprise all residential zoning districts in Ithaca currently subject to parking minimums, and MH-1, the Mobile Home Zone District, also mandates two parking spaces per lot.² Before passing the rule change, analysis should be quickly conducted to determine the potential impacts of this repeal, with special attention paid to effects on people with disabilities and commuters. Using information from this analysis, the Common Council should develop a parallel strategy to improve public transportation options as parking space supply gradually decreases.

Policy Analysis

The removal of parking minimums in residential areas enables developers to respond directly to residents' actual demand for parking spaces rather than adhering to a minimum quota set by the city. As a result, developers will make more proposals that include fewer parking spots and thus more potential space for housing units.⁶ Residents can enjoy more affordable housing options, facilitated either through higher-density developments or lower construction and maintenance costs for a given residential unit. Being a regulatory change, this measure is almost costless to implement. The gradual increase in density is expected to have minor positive fiscal effects.⁷ In fact, a shift away from a car-centric approach can reduce expenditures on road maintenance, which had cost Ithaca over \$6 million in 2023, contributing

to a more sustainable and fiscally sound urban environment.⁸

However, specific demographics may be adversely affected by the removal of this major incentive for car usage without improvements in public transportation. Notably, people with disabilities could be impacted as the number of accessible parking spaces decrease. Additionally, commuters to Ithaca would find traveling to work more expensive, although the prospect of more affordable housing could incentivize many to reside closer to their workplaces in the city and benefit from currently available transit options. As Tompkins County's largest internal public transit provider, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc. (TCAT), reported in October 2023 that its weekly hours of service stood at only 70% of its pre-pandemic average, eliminating parking minimums may pose acute risks for those reliant on automobile transportation.⁹

Highlights

- Renters comprise 74% of the population of Ithaca, New York.⁴ More than 50% of renters in Ithaca spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent.⁴
- Minimum parking requirements contribute to housing shortages by subsidizing car usage at the expense of potential space for housing units or other amenities.
- The removal of parking minimums in residential areas

enables developers to respond directly to residents' actual demand for parking spaces rather than adhering to a quota set by the city.

- Being a regulatory change, this measure is almost costless to implement.⁷ However, without improvements in public transportation, specific demographics may be adversely affected by the removal of this major incentive for car usage.

Implementation

In order to combat the potential downsides of the policy on visitors, commuters, and people with disabilities, initiatives to restore and improve Ithaca's public transit capabilities should also be supported. In October 2023, an agreement between TCAT and Cornell University promised an increasing level of service from Tompkins County's main transit provider, as Cornell University committed to paying at least \$3.3 million per year along with further potential raises that are contingent on TCAT meeting at least 1,100 hours of weekday service during the fall and spring semesters on major campus routes.⁹ However, as these funding increase conditions are limited to routes mostly used by those affiliated with Cornell University, and as 70% of TCAT's riders are Cornell-affiliated people, TCAT is currently not incentivized to restore and expand service levels along routes used by

other Ithacans and Tompkins County residents who do not commute to Cornell's campus.⁹

To facilitate a comprehensive public transit expansion, detailed analysis of the geographic and economic profile of Tompkins County residents with high rates of car usage should be conducted before parking requirements are lifted. The effects of Ithaca's recent parking minimum repeal in commercial zones should be studied to determine potential impacts on commuters and visitors, and the substitutability of automobile transport for people with disabilities should be examined to identify potential transit shortages in the event that a total removal of parking minimums in Ithaca is enacted. Information from this analysis will inform policymakers of necessary parallel initiatives to address potential drawbacks of the policy and secure lasting public support for the rule change.

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Stacking the Deck in the Digital Age: Self-preferencing in E-Commerce

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Antitrust legislation has had mixed success in the United States. By implementing targeted reform towards ending self-preferencing, federal agencies can create a framework capable of protecting competition while ensuring customer protection in the digital age.

Background

The structure behind US anticompetitive policy was first established over a century ago with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. Congress sought to prohibit anticompetitive agreements and other attempts by companies to monopolize markets, with the legislation used to target industry giants like Standard Oil.¹ In 1914, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was created to enforce antitrust laws and protect consumers from anti-competitive practices.² With the rise of digital platforms and marketplaces, the agency's focus has shifted towards the realm of e-commerce in an attempt to prevent the erosion of competition.

In 2023, the FTC sued Amazon for stifling competition through the use of punitive and coercive tactics. The agency charged that Amazon abused its control of the ranking algorithm to prefer Amazon-produced goods, like Amazon Basics or Amazon Essentials.³ This practice, termed “self-preferencing,” is prevalent throughout numerous digital platforms.⁴ As of yet, no regulation or law prohibits this anti-competitive practice, with FTC relying on its interpretation of centuries-old legislation.

An example of a proactive approach to stopping self-preferencing can be seen in the European Union (EU). The Union imposed a \$2.7 billion antitrust fine on Google for using its dominant position in the market to artificially boost the ranking of its shopping service, “Google Shopping,” over other competitors.⁵ Shortly after this ruling, the EU

established the Digital Markets Act, which directly outlaws self-preferencing related to “ranking, indexing, and [web] crawling” that favorably treats a company's products or services.

Policy Idea

New regulation in the US is needed to stop self-preferencing on digital platforms and create a level playing field that ensures fair competition and consumer protection. These regulations should draw inspiration from the Digital Markets Act and judgments by the European General Court that have defined self-preferencing as conduct with active or potential anticompetitive effects and conduct that departs from what might be expected in normal competition.^{4,6,7}

According to a Harvard study, Amazon uses its ranking algorithm to boost its product line, outranking competitors with higher quality items and preventing market forces from determining the best product for consumers.⁸ Without any bias, these rankings would display products that were both frequently bought and favorably reviewed. Thus, regulators should explicitly prohibit preferential treatment on digital platforms in the pursuit of fair competition.

Policy Analysis

Prohibiting companies from both acting as a marketplace and operating within it would entail regulating companies like Amazon that actively use consumer and market data to undercut superior products. Due to a combination of low prices, vertical

integration, and self-preferencing tactics, one of the company's largest product lines, Amazon Basics, is a best-seller in 22 of the 51 product categories.⁹ These products are primarily budget-friendly products including tech devices, workplace essentials, and home appliances, and are heavily promoted throughout the site. In 2016, CNN compiled 1,500 reviews covering more than 70 items that “described products exploding, catching on fire...or otherwise posing risks.”¹⁰ The risk here is clear: Amazon abuses its market power to self-preference products that are often of lower quality and directly harm consumers.

Tech behemoths, including Amazon, Google, and Apple, have in recent years introduced voice assistants to their product lines and ecosystems.¹¹ These devices collect information on a user's voice, location, and interaction history, creating a user profile that allows for “determining and predicting user's needs.” as revealed by a House Committee investigating this technology. Companies also “systematically divert consumer attention towards favored products or services.”¹²

The consequences of self-preferencing are clear. Without regulation, companies will continue these anti-competitive practices, promoting low-quality goods or services that directly harm consumers.

Highlights

- Tech companies continuously abuse their size and ecosystem to direct consumers toward

their own products or services. This practice has only grown in prevalence over recent years, most notably in the Amazon e-commerce sphere.

- Favored products are consistently of lower quality and pose physical risks to consumers. In addition, services within a company's ecosystem, or a company's line of products or services, direct consumers towards other goods within the ecosystem, creating a cycle of consumption that directly harms competition and consumers.
- No bill or regulation exists prohibiting this practice in the United States, although a framework has already been established in Europe. The Digital Markets Act, a regulation recently passed by the EU, significantly addresses self-preferencing, along with other anti-competitive practices.
- Regulation is needed to prevent future abuse of power by these companies and to protect consumers and third parties. There is a clear and direct threat to consumers if nothing is done to limit the power of these digital platforms, and the adverse effects will only increase.

Implementation

Legislation is necessary to prevent the further erosion of competition in e-commerce. The main opponent to implementing self-preferencing regulation would be large tech companies that rely on this process to limit competition and profit from consumers. Lobbying groups like TechNet that directly represent Big Tech have the resources to lobby any legislation that could potentially harm the tech industry, as Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft spent nearly \$69 million in 2022 alone lobbying the federal government as a

response to increasing scrutiny by Congress.¹³ In 2021, Senator Amy Klobuchar introduced the American Innovation and Choice Online Act, alongside other legislation that sought to prevent anti-competitive conduct by tech companies. In response, over \$120 million was spent by the tech industry on political ads directly targeting the legislation, stalling progress and leading to its current limbo in Congress.¹⁴

New legislation should establish clear definitions of neutrality, appeal directly to consumers and small businesses, and include industry leaders in discussions. One of the largest flaws in the Digital Markets Act passed by the EU was its lack of direct recommendations on what neutral ranking/indexing/web-crawling is. A standard should be laid out detailing what discriminatory practices are defined as, such as preferential treatment or blatant bias. Furthermore, standards should include legitimate reasons why a company's products or services might receive a higher ranking, such as greater vertical integration by the company, horizontal differentiation, or price. Another key aspect of new legislation should be its emphasis on consumer and third-party protection. Many consumers rely on companies like Amazon for their shopping and should not be manipulated into purchasing products that are of poor quality. Third-party participants on these marketplaces or platforms, like small businesses, heavily rely on these companies to reach customers and should be able to fairly compete with each other, without being victims to discriminatory practices. Finally, new legislation should take a less antagonistic position against tech companies, and instead include them in conversations on regulation in regards to self-preferencing. Such collaboration would enable legislators to identify potential consequences of implementation that might harm consumers or third parties. Such a process would likely reduce lobbyist efforts and ad-spending by the

tech industry and would significantly increase the chance of enacting such legislation.

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EDUCATION POLICY

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Incentivizing After-School Bridge Camps to Combat Pandemic Learning Loss in Nevada

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Following the pandemic, Nevada's public schools have made a modest recovery in test scores. However, students are still behind the US national average. Incorporating remedial after-school programs can support a return to pre-pandemic proficiency levels, with a positive externality of mitigating statewide childcare crises.

Background

Nationwide, states observed a nosedive in test scores for both math and reading following the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ This trend should be no surprise, as pandemic disruptions have resulted in students losing half a year of math learning and quarter of a year of reading learning.² Nevada is no exception to this phenomenon, lagging nearly one year behind the 2019 national average in 2023, despite some modest improvements since the pandemic.³ The long-term disruptions in the learning environment have also become an equity issue. Sudden remote learning was especially detrimental to students of color in Nevada⁴. Since the pandemic, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native teenagers have faced steeper drops in math scores than their peers.⁵ One third of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students lacked access to broadband (high-speed, effective) internet prior to the pandemic, leading to a delay in adapting to remote learning.⁶ This digital divide, alongside the lack of relevant online resources and school-provided support for non-English speaking families, has disproportionately impacted English language learners, which is concerning in a state like Nevada where 13.55% of students are English Language Learners.⁷

Policy Idea

In order to remedy pandemic learning loss, Nevada state legislators should implement remedial after-school programs for struggling students entering the fourth through eighth

grades. “Struggling” can be defined as having math and/or reading scores which fall at least one grade level below the national average. Local education agencies and schools should offer and advertise these programs to families, and direct funding towards hiring experienced part-time tutors or current educators to lead these sessions.

Policy Analysis

Other states with similar social and economic climates have benefitted from incorporating extra learning time.⁸ For instance, Tennessee passed SB 7002, “Intervening to Stop Learning Loss”, which mandated and financially incentivized remedial interventions for programs such as summer camps and after-school programs in 2021.⁹ These programs were the primary target of education relief funding in the state. Since then, Tennessee’s test scores have been closer to reaching pre-pandemic levels than the national average, despite lagging behind the nation prior to 2020.³ Similarly, Alabama, the only state in the nation to have exceeded its pre-pandemic scores in math, attributes most of its test score gains to extra class time, especially for struggling students.¹⁰

The proposed policy aims to incorporate Tennessee’s method of after-school tutoring camps, which occur two to three times a week, starting at the beginning of the school year following this policy’s passing.⁹

Remedial after-school programs also have potential to mitigate an emerging childcare crisis in

the state of Nevada, which is considered a “childcare desert” across all counties.¹¹

Therefore, the positive spillover effects of this policy are incredibly broad, including the higher grades, attendance, and graduation rates boosted by after-school programming.¹² By gearing remedial programs towards the after-school period, Nevada schools can support struggling students while aligning their schedule with that of the parents’ traditional workday.

Highlights

Learning loss since the pandemic has caused major negative impacts on student progress.

- Nationwide, students have lost half a year of math instruction and a quarter a year of reading instruction due to pandemic-era disruptions to the classroom setting.²
- Nevada’s test scores still are one year behind the national pre-pandemic average.³

Pandemic learning loss is an equity issue in Nevada.

- Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students saw a steeper drop in math scores than their peers since the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵
- Pandemic impacts on Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students were especially severe in Nevada, who faced a disproportionate lack of broadband internet access.^{4,6}

Other states which implemented remedial after-school programs saw effective recoveries.

- Following a 2021 bill passed in Tennessee which financially incentivized and mandated summer camps and after-school programs for struggling students, test scores are reaching pre-pandemic levels at a quicker rate than the national average.^{9,3}
- Alabama, the only state with higher math test scores than before the pandemic focused most of its funding on increased instructional time, which included after-school programs.¹⁰

Implementation

Mandating an unfounded statewide total resource policy may not be as immediately feasible as it was during the pandemic. Implementing any education policy in 2024 and beyond sees the end of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, or ESSER.¹³ Therefore, these after-school camps should initially be piloted in Nevada's Lyon and Clark Counties, which faced the steepest drops in math and reading scores between 2019 and 2023.³ While an after-school tutoring mandate may not be immediately plausible, an experimental program targeting students who need the most support may motivate support from local and state constituents. Later funding increases can contribute to the expansion of these programs.

Fortunately, Nevada in particular holds potential for larger-scale funding as a result of a monumental education spending increase passed in 2023.¹⁴ If proven successful as a pilot program in high-need districts, the after-school programming can be a target of future funding and incentivized mandates.

Funds should prioritize hiring high-quality educators or experienced tutors to lead the programs in each school. Tennessee incentivized low-

teacher-student-ratio tutoring practices by forming a three-year Literacy and Learning tutoring corps program, which matched tutor pay with state grants to schools.⁹ Additionally, the position of tutor can be offered as an additional, higher-paid, part-time position for existing teachers for each school, as teachers in Nevada are currently ineligible for overtime pay.¹⁵

In order to measure the success of this program both in the pilot districts and beyond, math and reading scores should be tracked over the next five years. In addition, Nevada's Department of Education can distribute regular surveys to subject area teachers, asking questions about perceived student engagement, especially among the struggling students targeted by this intervention.

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Implementing a Comprehensive Sex Education Mandate in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Inconsistency in sex education is prevalent throughout the country, contributing to increased teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Given the benefits of sex education, Congress should implement a federal mandate requiring comprehensive sex education in schools nationwide.

Background

Across the United States, the implementation of sex education is inconsistent, with decisions regarding curricula often left up to individual states and school districts. Only 30 states and the District of Columbia require public schools to teach sex education, with only 28 mandating both sex and HIV education.¹ Given this trend, most schools nationwide do not teach the comprehensive list of sex education topics recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), further leading to increased teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.² According to a 2021 CDC survey, nearly 30% of high school students self-report that they have had sexual intercourse. Among those students, 48.2% of them did not use a condom the last time they had sex, and 67.3% did not use any form of birth control.³ The United States has a teen birth rate of 52.1 births per 1,000 people, the highest rate in the developed world, and is more than twice the average rate in Europe.⁴ Youth need appropriate information regarding their sexuality to help them stay healthy and make responsible choices regarding their personal sexual health and the sexual rights of others.⁵ Effective sex education curriculum leads to the development of healthy relationships, prevention of child sex abuse, avoidance of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and improved social and emotional learning.⁶ Implementing comprehensive sex education is crucial

given its influence on the development of young people.

Policy Idea

Congress should implement a federally funded mandate requiring comprehensive sex education in public elementary and secondary schools. This mandate should include a detailed outline of a sex education curriculum, including the CDC guidelines that state what curriculum is age-appropriate to teach students at different grade levels. The curriculum should cover all essential topics recommended by the CDC: benefits of being sexually abstinent, how to access valid and reliable health information, influences of peers and media, decision-making skills related to reducing risk, the importance of using contraceptives, how to use contraceptives, how to create and sustain healthy relationships, the importance of limiting sexual partners, preventative care measures, how STDs are transmitted, and STD health consequences.⁷ The funded mandate should also provide financial resources to help fund professional development and training on sex education. The federal funds should also be used to hire well-qualified and highly trained staff to teach the new curriculum.

Policy Analysis

Implementing comprehensive sexual health education is feasible, as demonstrated by the approval of Senate Bill 5395: Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Implementation in

2020. This bill successfully implemented a mandate that required all public schools K-12 in Washington State to offer comprehensive sex education by the 2022-2023 school year.⁸ Given its successful approval and implementation in Washington state, the bill should serve as an example for a similar nationwide initiative.

Detailed curriculum mandates also positively impact student achievement more than nonspecific mandate guidelines.⁹ Therefore, by outlining the curriculum based on the CDC's recommended comprehensive list of sex education topics, this mandate will have the greatest impact on students. Professionals created the CDC's list with medically and scientifically accurate information. Considering the list's credibility, implementing it into the curriculum is expected to yield successful results.

It is also important to note that younger students may not grasp detailed sexual health topics.¹⁴ Therefore, the incorporation of K-12 curriculum guidelines and grade-level outcomes is essential for the mandate's success. Implementing the curriculum with grade-level outcomes would reduce parental concerns about inappropriate content, and students would better comprehend the age-suitable topics.

Additionally, by issuing a federally funded mandate, states and school districts will receive the funding needed to carry out the mandate's logistics. This will reduce backlash

from states since no financial burden is placed on lower levels of government, making it easier to carry out the curriculum mandate effectively.¹⁰

Highlights

- Sex education in the United States is very inconsistent, leaving individual states and school districts responsible for making curriculum decisions.¹
- The majority of schools nationwide fail to cover the full range of sex education topics recommended by the CDC, contributing to a rise in teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.²
- Implementing comprehensive sex education in public elementary and secondary schools will effectively promote the development of healthy relationships, prevent sexual abuse, enhance social and emotional learning, and avoid teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.⁶
- Issuing a federally funded mandate will ensure that school districts receive adequate funding to hire well-qualified and highly trained staff, thus maximizing the mandate's effectiveness.¹⁰

Implementation

Given the current partisan polarization in Congress, particularly regarding decisions on sex education, a federal mandate is necessary to mandate comprehensive sex education nationwide.

The implementation of sexual education standards has wide Democratic support, as shown in the proposal of the Real Education and Access for Healthy Youth Act of 2023. This bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and in the Senate by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) on May 22, 2023. The Real Education and Access for Health Youth Act proposed increased funding for teacher training

in sex education and offered grants to public or private entities focusing on adolescent health and education for comprehensive sex education programs.¹¹ The bill has since been referred to the Subcommittee on Health and is awaiting a vote.¹² Given that there is significant evidence, benefit, and support for sex education curricula, this bill should be implemented at the federal level.

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal Title I program currently allocates funds to educational facilities. These funds aim to ensure that vital information is provided to all students, families, and communities, preparing them for success in careers and life.¹⁵ Considering the impact of sex education on life success, the federal government should increase the funds distributed under Title I to support the implementation of a federal mandate for comprehensive sex education. Furthermore, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program currently allocates an average of \$100 million per year towards funds for comprehensive sex education. This funding is intended to replicate evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs.¹⁶ The TTP should increase the funds distributed under Tier I funding for evidence-based programs on a larger scale to support the implementation of the federal mandate.

Additionally, although 90% of parents support sex education curricula in middle and high schools, it is a highly controversial topic and parental backlash is prevalent.¹³ Creating a detailed outline of age-appropriate sex education can help mitigate parent backlash. The outline should clearly specify the curriculum taught at different grade levels. Primary school students should be introduced to light topics like consent and self-identity, while secondary school students should delve into subjects such as anatomy, puberty, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual health. The age-specific curriculum should also

consider parental concerns, including addressing mature and inappropriate material too early and excluding religious values from lessons. These goals should be achieved by following the curriculum outlines recommended by the CDC.

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Expanding Higher Education Degree Opportunities in Correctional Facilities

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*To expand higher education for incarcerated individuals, New York State should implement bachelor's, associate's, and master's degree programs in **all** correctional facilities. This is a cost-effective initiative that highlights the benefits of investing in prison education through partnerships with colleges, non-profits, and state government committees.*

Background

Inequalities in educational institutions can contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. More than half of formerly incarcerated people hold only a high school diploma or GED.¹ The United States leads the world in its incarcerated population, with 1.9 million individuals in state and federal prisons. Alarming, this predicament worsens upon release, as 70% of incarcerated individuals are rearrested within five years.²

Access to higher education in New York state prisons is limited. While the state once had 70 higher education programs, restrictive policies in the mid-1990s drastically reduced this number.³ Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), and private foundations have now worked to establish more college programs in New York correctional facilities. While the numbers have increased, higher education initiatives still only reach a fraction of the incarcerated population, reflecting the urgent need for further reform.³

Ascendium, a non-profit organization, recently gave a \$3 million grant to the State University of New York (SUNY) Office of Higher Education in Prison (OHEP).⁴ SUNY OHEP operates across 14 college campuses within 23 correctional facilities, annually providing education for 1,000 incarcerated students.⁵ This initiative is a crucial step towards addressing the inequalities in prison education. With increased funding and support, New York schools can aim to

implement programs in all correctional facilities.

Research underscores the transformative potential of correctional education programs. Studies by the RAND Corporation and the Open Society Institute find that participation in such programs significantly reduces the likelihood of recidivism.⁶ Moreover, prison education proves to be a highly cost-effective investment. For every \$1 invested in prison education, taxpayers save \$4–5 in re-incarceration costs during the first three years post-release.⁷

Policy Idea

New York State should implement bachelor, associate, and master's degree programs in all 44 prison facilities, aiming to provide educational programming to a larger cohort of incarcerated individuals. Expanding opportunities for incarcerated individuals to obtain college degrees must be a collaborative approach involving institutions of higher education, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), and private foundations. By leveraging resources, partnerships, and funding, access to higher education will be expanded in correctional facilities, giving incarcerated individuals the necessary tools for successful reintegration into society upon release.

Policy Analysis

The effectiveness of correctional education programs in reducing recidivism rates is empirically supported by several studies. Prison

education proves to be a highly cost-effective investment. Research by the University of California at Los Angeles indicates that investing in prison education can prevent more crimes than investing in incarceration, as “a \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in [prison] education will prevent more than 600 crimes. [Prison] education is almost twice as cost-effective as incarceration.”⁸

A study by DOCCS on 2023 Post-Secondary Education in Prison shows that post-secondary education participants were much less likely to return to prison than non-participants at 10% vs 24%, respectively, after three years post release.⁹ Investing in prison higher education programs not only enhances rehabilitation but also yields significant societal benefits. Furthermore, investing in higher education in prisons is a cost-saving investment, lowering odds of recidivism by 43% and increasing employment post-release by 13%.¹⁰ By reducing recidivism rates, these initiatives contribute to public safety and alleviate the economic burden of incarceration.

Beyond SUNY OHEP prison education programs, schools like Cornell and New York University demonstrate the ability for universities to contribute to running programs, showing successful educational results. Expanding funding for prison higher education programs in New York is an important investment in promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and fostering a more equitable, and just society.

Highlights

- The United States leads in incarceration rates, with almost two million incarcerated individuals, exacerbating a 70% recidivism rate post-release.¹¹
- New York's state prisons face limited access to higher education, due to previous initiatives that reduced the number of programs.¹²
- Collaborative efforts, like Ascendium's \$3 million grant to SUNY's Office of Higher Education in Prison, aim to address educational inequalities within the incarcerated population.¹³
- Research underscores the efficacy of correctional education programs, indicating reduced recidivism rates and cost-effectiveness compared to investments in incarceration.¹⁴
- Investing in prison higher education programs not only enhances rehabilitation but also yields significant societal benefits. Furthermore, access to higher education in prison lowers odds of recidivism by 43% and increases employment post-release by 13%, while being a cost-saving investment.¹⁵

Implementation

In order to address the need for expanded access to higher education in the state prison system, it is essential to focus on leveraging partnerships along with increasing funding and advocacy. As of April 2024, Sing Sing Correctional Facility is the only correctional facility in the state to offer associate, bachelor's, and master's degree programs through the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program, a partnership with NY Colleges.¹⁶ The implementation of associate, bachelor, and master's degree programs should be spread to more facilities, especially maximum-

security prisons where incarcerated individuals often serve longer sentences. To expand these degree opportunities statewide, the New York State legislature should increase funding and collaborations between educational institutions, non-profit groups, and the government.

Collaborations with universities that have existing prison education programs such as Cornell University, New York University, and SUNYs, would be essential to begin an expansion of educational programs. Implementing more prison education programs similar to those at Cornell and NYU, would increase accessibility for incarcerated individuals to obtain degrees. Partnering with organizations like Hudson Link, which specialize in prison education and reentry services, would be crucial to expanding the network of prison education work.¹⁷ These partnerships would provide resources and expertise to support a state-wide implementation of education programs in correctional facilities. A state committee in the legislature should be established to oversee and implement these partnerships, and provide support to universities, prison education groups, and correctional facilities.

Increasing funding for prison education programs should be a priority. While there may be political backlash towards increasing funding, providing analysis on the cost-effectiveness, feasibility, equity, and efficiency of this initiative will prove a need to invest. Education is significantly cheaper than incarceration, as educating a full-time undergraduate student costs around \$5,000 annually, compared to the \$60,000 it costs to incarcerate a person in New York State.¹⁸ Data showing reduced recidivism rates highlights the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.¹⁹ Making degree programs accessible for all incarcerated individuals is an extremely equitable initiative, assisting people in effective rehabilitation.

Addressing potential challenges and backlash from the political community is imperative for ensuring the feasibility of this program. Politicians may feel that the state should not be spending money to educate incarcerated individuals, and often support cutting funding.²⁰ However, by emphasizing the economic and public safety benefits of this proposal, conservative lawmakers may feel more inclined to support it. Overall, if shown that a prison education initiative is cost-effective, and has broader societal impacts, it can be presented as a beneficial proposal for all parties involved.

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Head Starting Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Head Start

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Enrollment in the federal Head Start Program has declined significantly over the past few years due to teacher shortages and looming funding cuts. While there have been efforts to improve the program's quality, additional progress should be made to revitalize the program.

Background

The Head Start and Early Head Start federal programs provide early childhood educational services to low-income children from birth to age five. Alongside the educational services, they offer support programs such as mental health services and parenting services. Head Start has successfully served nearly 800,000 children through 1,600 local centers, raised high school graduation rates by 2.7% and college graduation rates by 39%, and improved national educational attainment.^{1,2} Higher rates of student retention have also assisted children in their emotional and behavioral development. However, Head Start programs have faced workforce shortages that have caused declining enrollment as schools close. In 2022, about 29% of Early Head Start teachers turned to other industries, such as food service and retail, due to increased compensation.^{3,4} Rates are higher in other states, like Kentucky and Alabama, where over 49% of Early Head Start staff have left the teaching industry.⁵ Head Start teachers made on average \$39,096 in 2022, a wage which is significantly lower than preschool teachers' and higher-ranking food service employees' average 2022 wages of \$53,200 and \$63,820, respectively.^{6,7,8} Due to potential funding cuts and shortages in the teacher workforce, Head Start programs are struggling to revitalize enrollment, as there are not enough teachers to meet the needs of low-income students.

Policy Idea

In order to best address the declining Head Start staff workforce and the subsequent decrease in the number of students able to be enrolled, legislators should introduce new financial and recruitment initiatives that focus on both retaining teaching staff while replenishing the depleted workforce. Legislation should address the main drawback of teaching that causes teachers to turn to other industries—insufficient pay. Additionally, legislation should allow the Head Start programs to hire more teachers by removing the stringent requirements for Head Start teachers, specifically a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.⁹ As classes of 17 students are structured with a teacher and teacher assistant, with decreased requirements, student teachers will be allowed to fill in the workforce shortage.¹⁰

Policy Analysis

The proposed policy advocates for investment into critical areas of the Head Start programs to discourage staff from leaving the Head Start workforce. Current Head Start staff lack the proper salary to sustain themselves financially which causes high rates of turnover, and prospective staff have barriers preventing them from joining the workforce. While Head Start programs receive funding for around 755,000 teacher slots, only around 650,000 slots are being filled.⁴ Empirically, an increase in a teacher's base pay reduces teacher turnover.¹¹ This pay boost is especially significant for teachers new to the workforce. By implementing

more incentives for teachers to join the workforce with higher salaries and the ability to work towards their teaching certifications, the workforce can be replenished.

Head Start's benefits to educational attainment allows for "large increases in adult human capital and economic self-sufficiency."¹² During the program, adult human capital rose by 18%, and economic self-sufficiency in adulthood rose by 9% for participants. Children who participated in Head Start were four percentage points more likely to work as adults, and adult poverty rates among women who participated in the program were reduced by 4.4 percentage points. Overall, the return on investment through the Head Start Program can be as high as 13% yearly, and there is a \$7–9 return for every \$1.^{13,14} Through increased funding to boost teacher salaries, Head Start can be revitalized and continue helping young Americans pursue higher education and eventually become more successful in the workforce.

Highlights

- Congress should invest into teacher salaries and reduce teaching requirements to retain Head Start teachers and recruit student teachers.
- Historically, Head Start has increased high school graduation rates by 2.7% and college graduation rates by 39%.^{1,2} In addition to improving academically, students also grow mentally

and emotionally during the program.²

- Nearly 49% of Head Start employees have left the program in states like Kentucky and Alabama, and about 29% of national Head Start teachers have turned to other industries.^{3,4,5}
- Head Start programs receive enough funding for around 755,000 teacher slots, but only approximately 650,000 slots are being filled due to workforce shortages.⁴
- Teacher base salary is directly correlated to retention within role, and pay boosts are most impactful for less experienced teachers.⁵
- Adult poverty rates among women program participants decreased by 4.4 percentage points.¹¹ Additionally, returns on investment in Head Start can be as high as 13% per year, and each dollar invested into the program can lead to up to \$9 in returns.¹²

Implementation

Since the creation of Head Start, the program has received strong bipartisan support.^{15,16} Specifically, voters are interested in increasing early learning program funding. In July of 2023, 74% of surveyed Democratic, Republican, and independent voters believed that “increasing funding for child care and early learning programs is an important priority and a good use of tax dollars.”¹⁷ Additionally, 80% were in support of providing greater funding to the Head Start Program, including 71% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats.¹⁷ Therefore, enacting this policy to improve funding towards Head Start would be feasible with its historical bipartisan support and current-day support from voters.

Potential congresspeople who would propose the policy would likely be Representative Mikie Sherrill (NJ-

11) and Representative Juan Ciscomani (AZ-06), as they have proposed related Head Start policies together in the past.⁹ Representative Sherrill is a part of the Democratic party and Representative Ciscomani is a part of the Republican party, which could enable them to garner bipartisan support for the policy. The National Head Start Association or past partners of Head Start like the New York State Education Department would be likely supporters of the policy. While there are no specific interest groups that have lobbied against increased Head Start funding in the past, state governments have faced challenges regarding their budget constraints which would likely pose challenges for this policy.

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Reimagining High School Hours: Pushing Start Times to Prioritize the Needs of High Schoolers

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The New York State Legislature should pass a law requiring public high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m., reshaping school hours to fit the health demands of teenage students.

Background

Studies show that teenagers undergo a sleep phase shift, otherwise known as a circadian rhythm, which keeps them awake until at least 11 p.m. and puts them in “sleep mode” until 8 a.m.¹ However, two-thirds of New York State high schools start before 8 p.m. and 97 percent of high schools start before 8:30 a.m.² Unsurprisingly, 40 percent of healthy teens experience regular sleepiness, and 30 percent exhibit fatigue.³ Furthermore, sleep deprivation is directly linked to a myriad of mental health issues, including depression.⁴ According to the Surgeon General’s Advisory, American youth are currently in a mental health pandemic.⁵ Per the CDC, there has been a persistent decline in the mental health of students since 2011.⁶ In 2021, 42 percent of high school students reported experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, with over 22 percent seriously contemplating suicide. Additionally, a concerning 10 percent of high schoolers attempted suicide in 2021.⁶ Given this information, it is important to consider that students had improved mental health when starting school later, as stated in a 2015 study.⁷ Additionally, when teenagers started school later, there was a significant improvement in their attention in class coupled with a decline in students sleeping or struggling to stay awake in class.⁷ Additional benefits to later school start times include a decline in tardiness, caffeine use, and car crashes among adolescents.^{1,7} Early school start times are a national public health concern, depriving children of sleep

their growing bodies and brains crucially need.

Policy Idea

The New York State Legislature should create a requirement that all public high schools start classes no earlier than 8:30 a.m. All public high schools that do not presently meet these parameters would have to push back the beginning of their first period or homeroom to, at minimum, 8:30 a.m.

Policy Analysis

Later school start times have a direct correlation with better grades. A University of Washington study found that students who started classes at 8:45 a.m. had final grades 4.5 percent higher than their peers with classes at 7:50 a.m.⁸ Another study conducted in public high schools across seven different states found that school start times at 8:30 a.m. or later were directly linked to improved attendance and graduation rates.⁹ These results point to possible equitable advantages of this policy as more students graduating could bridge the achievement gap.

This policy would not just have classroom benefits; it would also aid in students’ health. From pre-dawn car crashes to mental health issues, the policy would protect students from the many health risks associated with early school start times. A study by the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine found that when high school start times were delayed from 7:20 a.m. to 8:10 a.m., car crash rates fell.¹⁰ The crash rate per 1000 in 16- to 18-year-old licensed drivers was 29.59 with the later school start time versus 31.63 in

the trial given the earlier time. However, student safety expands beyond cars. According to a study conducted by the National Sleep Foundation, later school start times were associated with longer sleep and fewer mental health and substance abuse issues.¹¹ They also found that for every additional hour of sleep, there was a 28 percent decline in the odds of a teenager reporting feeling “sad” or “depressed.”

Highlights

- Teenagers’ natural sleep patterns conflict with New York State’s early high school start times, leading to widespread teen sleep deprivation. This sleep deprivation is also associated with teen mental health and substance abuse struggles, contributing to the US’s youth mental health crisis.
- The New York State legislature should create a law requiring all public high schools to start classes no earlier than 8:30 a.m.
- Studies indicate that later school times correlate with higher grades, better attendance, and improved graduation rates.^{8,9} Improved graduation rates could help shrink the achievement gap, creating a more equitable school system.
- Delaying start times also enhances students’ health by allowing them to get more sleep, reducing risks like car

accidents and mental health issues.¹⁰

Implementation

The New York State legislature should draft and pass a bill requiring later high school start times. Shelley B. Mayer, the chair of the committee on education of the New York State Senate, should sponsor this bill and workshop it with the education committee.¹² In addition to her credentials, Senator Mayer has expressed a dedication to adapting to emerging educational priorities, including “combat[ing] learning loss, [and] support[ing] social and emotional learning,” insinuating she would be an advocate for a later high school start.¹³ Once the bill is introduced, it would ideally pass due to the New York State legislature’s Democratic majority and their historical support for education reforms.¹⁴

To gain support for the bill, health experts and education experts could come to speak to the New York State legislature about its potential benefits. Dr. Jared Saletin, the associate director of Bradley Hospital’s Sleep Research Lab, has already appeared in an interview with WPRI News defending a California policy to push high school start times to 8:30 a.m.¹⁵ New York health experts could utilize similar tactics by providing compelling testimonials demonstrating the positive impact of later school start times on student well-being and academic performance. Additionally, The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that 8:30 a.m. start times be implemented for teenagers, providing credibility to this suggestion.¹⁶

Once the policy passes the Senate and Assembly, schools will need a grace period to enforce the policy and conduct all necessary logistical changes. Stakeholders for this policy include school administrators, teachers and staff, students, and parents.

In the first few years following the implementation of this policy, its success should be monitored and evaluated to discover whether any further changes are necessary.

Qualitative data, including feedback from teachers and in-depth interviews with students, is one resource that could provide lawmakers with potential revisions or expansions to this policy five years down the road. Quantitative data, including data collection on attendance rates, academic performance, and student well-being, also brings valuable, irrefutable statistics to analyze the effects of the policy.

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Protecting Parents and Students by Expanding the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents

By Samara Schiffman, srs397@cornell.edu

The Bill of Rights for Students and Parents should be expanded into a bill and passed into law in order to protect the rights of parents to direct their children's education, while also ensuring the safety and privacy of students.

Background

Issues of parental rights over their children's education are rife throughout US history, with lawsuits against public schools dating as far back as the 1920s.^{1,2,3} Over the past century, a majority of parental challenges against schools were resolved through the courts, which have affirmed the rights of parents to educate their children as they deem fit. Despite a precedent that protects parental rights, the court has also tried to ensure a balance between parents' rights and "the state's obligation to protect children's welfare."^{1,3} Over the past four years, the parental rights movement has shifted from judicial change towards legislative change, with multiple states' legislatures proposing and passing legislation to safeguard parental involvement in public schools.³ This policy-driven change reached its peak with the Parents Bill of Rights Act, which passed the House on March 27, 2023 and is currently under review by the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in the Senate.^{4,5} While the Parents Bill of Rights Act (H.R. 5) has good intentions, it is too extreme in its measures relating to LGBT+ students, making the alternative resolution proposed by Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents a superior option.⁶

Policy Idea

Congress should transform the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents into its own independent bill in order to properly protect the rights of both students and parents. The Bill of Rights for Students and Parents seeks to

increase levels of social trust for both titular parties, rather than just for parents at the expense of students. Unlike the Parents Bill of Rights, which poses a threat to the safety of students from marginalized communities, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+, this bill would empower and safeguard students. By passing a bill based on the framework of this resolution into law, the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents will have an actual effect on the letter of the law, empowering change on the national level and not just within the sentiments of the House.

Policy Analysis

As of the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, approximately 49.4 million students are enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools and around 48 million would be affected by this bill; the 1.4 million enrolled in pre-kindergarten would not be covered by the scope of the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents Act.⁷ Students learn and gain more from their education in schools with high levels of social trust, meaning "all parties understand one another's expectations and their own obligations, and the actions of principals, teachers, and parents validate those expectations."^{8,9} By increasing both transparency and communication between parents and schools, this bill aims to improve levels of social trust and therefore students' education. Additionally, ensuring parents are informed about their rights in regards to their child's schooling will help lessen the perceived barriers that prevent many parents from engaging

with schools. Of schools surveyed by the National Center for Education Statistics, 56% "perceived that lack of time on the part of school staff created a barrier to parent involvement to a great or moderate extent," which will be reduced by this bill's delegation of responsibility not just to teachers but also principals, superintendents, and other administrators within the school district.¹⁰

Highlights

- Republican confidence in public schools is at an all time low, with more than 50% having little or no faith in schools, creating an increased need for better relationships between parents, schools, and students.¹¹
- Over 400 bills protecting parents' rights have been proposed by state lawmakers in the past four years, with 39 becoming law in 19 states; a federal law would help establish a universal standard for public schools across the nation.¹²
- As of 2021, approximately 24.1% of or 11.5 million students identify as something other than heterosexual, necessitating further protections for LGBT students.¹³

Implementation

The current Bill of Rights for Students and Parents, in its resolution form, has garnered support from parental organizations such as the National Parents Union and National

PTA, and teacher groups like the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, as well as the Human Rights Campaign and NAACP.⁶ Currently, the resolution has support from 27 members of Congress, but this number can easily grow by further publicization and discussion of the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents. While many Americans are concerned about the state of public education and how to improve trust between parents and schools, they are likely unaware that legislation such as this exists and therefore are unable to advocate to their representatives in its support. Increased awareness of this bill will best be achieved through social media campaigns and TV ads, where they will have the most success in reaching voters, and more importantly, parents. However, in order for support of the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents to result in actual government action and law, it is necessary for Congress to adopt it from a resolution into a bill. All initial outreach campaigns should focus on urging Congress to draft the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents bill, as well as garnering support from members of Congress. This bill will easily gain the support of Democrats across the House and Senate, however, its success will be contingent upon the support of Republican representatives. Republicans with a solid conservative constituency will likely oppose this bill, thus necessitating the votes of Republicans from more moderate, purple districts. While this resolution already has a strong base of supporters, the number of those in favor must

continue to grow to make this bill and its passage a reality. Public schools and parental rights are such a hot button issue, meaning there has never been a more opportune time to garner national support for the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents.

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Revamping Outdated Teaching Methods in Middle and High Schools

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Students are still being taught by an antiquated public education system that was created over 150 years ago, leading children to be ill-prepared when entering the workforce and the real world.

Background

Increasing technological advances have led to a rapidly changing society. As a result, education methods have become outdated and no longer provide students with the resources needed to excel outside of the classroom. Schools therefore need to implement life skills teachings into their curricula. Life skills are “a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and responsible manner.”¹ With skills, students would be better prepared at all stages of life, as they would have the formative capability to approach real world issues. The COVID-19 pandemic proved the need for younger generations to adapt to changing learning environments out of necessity. Since “standardized tests don’t accurately measure student learning and growth,” schools’ usage of tests to gauge academic performance is impractical and fails to prove students’ life skills.² This gap in teaching students life skills has led to the reporting that “3 in 4 youth lack skills needed for employment,” which proves not only the outdated nature of curriculum but also the need for more life skills teaching.³ While technology has been proven as a useful resource in growing our society, it poses many issues such as the aforementioned skills gap. To help students cope with the arising issues, schools need to teach students the life skills needed to deal with new technologies. In the United

States alone, “24.3% of the youth are without secondary education level skills.”³ Setting the youth up for success allows them to become empowered and set on the right path.

Policy Idea

The federal government should mandate the implementation of life skills, such as financial literacy, collaboration, decision-making, in public middle and high schools. Currently, students are taught how to take standardized tests rather than learning critical life skills. To fix this problem and shift schools to skill-based learning rather than memorization learning, the curricula should focus on more hands-on and experiential learning and integrate the use of technology into each subject. This way students can become accustomed to modern day technology and gain comprehensive skills such as problem solving and critical thinking instead of repetition and retention. Through hands-on teaching, students would be required to rely on finding the answer rather than memorizing and restating information. Due to society changing rapidly, students need to deeply understand learned material to problem-solve rather than just recall information. The hands-on method should involve group activities so that different types of learners can play to their strengths while developing the social skills needed within the workforce.

Policy Analysis

“Students retain 75% of what they learn when they practice what they learned, and 90% of what they learn when they teach someone else”

and use the material immediately.⁴ The data highlights the importance of utilizing hands-on learning to teach students life skills rather than using outdated techniques such as lecturing from a non-updated textbook. Through learning life skills early on, youths are able to more accurately understand what life trajectory they want through discovering what style thinkers they are rather than being forced to conform to standardized learning techniques. Reports show that “teens’ average stress level was 5.8 on a 10-point scale; much higher than the maximum health stress level for adults of 3.9.”⁵ This statistic highlights the need for students to be equipped to handle real life pressures and responsibilities. Students will also feel more prepared to approach challenges due to holistic teaching creating a connection between social, mental, and academic learning rather than continuing to separate these concepts. Since all students learn differently, current teaching methods do not adequately prepare students for life outside of school. The outdated nature of the current system is evident, as “literacy rates have stagnated since 1971.”⁶ Through improving teaching methods, student stress will decrease while preparedness rates to enter the workforce will increase.⁶ This policy is feasible for a variety of schools to adopt as revamping curriculum does not require additional funding which makes shifting to life skill learning possible.

Highlights

The world is constantly changing due to new technology, but school curriculum does not reflect these changes, which leads to youth being

unprepared to enter the workforce and students being disengaged within the classroom.

- Shifting away from memorization and repetition learning to hands-on and experiential learning is crucial to creating a curriculum that reflects the skills the real world requires and can provide the United States with a higher-developed education system.
- By making curricula include more group projects to increase collaboration, society will move away from being so divided by teaching the maintenance of professional relationships through a curriculum catered to all types of learners.
- Pew Research Center reported that “more young adult children are living with their parents than in years past,” demonstrating the lack of students' preparedness to be independent in the real world and proving why schools need to teach life skills.⁷

Implementation

When comparing education quality state to state, it is important to recognize how the lack of a set curriculum leads to significant variation in quality offered to students. To counter this problem, states need to serve as advocates. In addition to the federal education department mandating curriculum by revamping and banning outdated teaching

methods. Schools need to be required to adopt these new techniques and evaluate the impact life skill-based education has on students every one to two years. Through constant reassessment and improvement, the United State's education system will be in better shape than ever before. Education is a state responsibility which leads to “state and local expenditures cover[ing] approximately 92 percent of school costs on average, while the federal budget cover[s] only 8 percent.”⁸ Due to this policy not requiring more state funding, schools have the breadth to implement hands-on and experiential learning into classrooms while still being able to constantly adapt the curriculum to make it most effective. The key to creating a curriculum that reflects changing times is constant reassessment and updating. By utilizing technology through methods like eLearning rather than outdated textbooks, prominent steps can be taken to reach the goal of workplace preparedness. School administrations need to take step-by-step action to internally reallocate funding and create an updated curriculum. Crucial steps should include purchasing eLearning platforms versus textbooks and other logistical changes as such. Utilizing constant reevaluation will allow the United States to move away from outdated teaching measures to skills-based learning.

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Enhancing Sex Education: The Real Education and Access for Healthy Education and Youth Act

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Inconsistent sexual education programs across the US leads to significant disparities in health amongst many communities. Without a comprehensive sexual education standard, students engage in risky behaviors, leading to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, and other negative health outcomes.

Background

Sexual education across the United States varies greatly, with some states implementing comprehensive, evidence-based programs and others lacking any form of structured sex education curriculum altogether. Communities fiercely debate what should be taught and at what age. Some states embrace comprehensive sex education programs that cover topics such as contraception, consent, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Others, however, adhere to abstinence-only education, which emphasizes refraining from sexual activity until marriage and often provides students limited information. States like Arizona, Colorado, and Oklahoma leave sex education policies to the discretion of local school districts, leading to inconsistencies in content and quality.¹ In contrast, others like New Jersey, California, and Oregon, have enacted legislation mandating consistent and medically accurate information to provide students with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health.²

Thirty-eight states plus the District of Columbia require sex education to be taught in schools, and even fewer of this population require the curriculum set in place include “key” sex education topics or medically accurate information.³ These topics include human development, relationships, and sexual behavior and health.⁴ The federal government spends \$110 million per year funding programs in schools that teach misleading and incomplete abstinence-only information, which ultimately

misguides students and does not meet federal sexual education goals.³ These abstinence-only programs are sometimes classified as “sexual risk avoidance” programs wherein students are encouraged to stay abstinent until marriage; however, research has proven that the risks, such as unsafe sex, exposure to STIs and STDs, and sexual abuse/assault, do not decrease through this method of education. The greater the emphasis on abstinence-only programs, the higher the incidence of young pregnancies and births.³ Research has also found that by the end of high school, more than 57% of teenagers have experienced sex; however, many methods in place do not equip students with the necessary knowledge to practice safe sex.³

Policy Idea

Congress should pass the Real Education and Access for Healthy Education Youth Act (REAHYA) introduced by Barbara Lee (D-CA) in the House of Representatives and Cory Booker (D-NJ) in the Senate.⁵ The REAHYA proposes allocating funds for the training of educators in sex education and offering grants to public and private entities, like high schools, colleges, and other organizations specializing in adolescent health and education, or with prior experience in training sex educators. Moreover, REAHYA mandates the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in funded sex education programs and prohibits federal funding for programs that fail to address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth in a sensitive and responsive manner.⁵

The objectives of the legislation encompass the prevention of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, dating violence, bullying, and harassment.⁵ The federal government should restrict funding to programs that withhold HIV information, lack medical accuracy, demonstrate ineffectiveness, perpetuate gender stereotypes, or contravene ethical principles of public health.

Policy Analysis

The REAHYA is a necessary policy that will limit the disparity in sex education timing and curriculum between all states. This legislative move will actively work to foster healthy relationships and safeguard youths’ rights to receive accurate information about sexual health. Additionally, the REAHYA essentially permits the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish grants that support sex education and sexual health services for young people.⁶ The HHS has a mission to “enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective services...and fostering advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services.”⁷ Many policymakers may view abstinence-only programming as theoretically effective; however, these intentions do not actually abstain people from engaging in sexual intercourse, especially now that the rising age of marriage leads to an increasing number of people having sex prior to marriage.⁸ According to a review on policies relating to abstinence until marriage, it has

concluded that, as defined by the US federal funding requirements, the programming inherently withholds information about human sexuality. Additionally, it may provide medically inaccurate and stigmatizing information.⁸ By reallocating resources to bolster the newly established comprehensive grant programs, the REAHYA will be effective in working towards a valuable standard education in which people will learn to use safe practices.

Highlights

- Disparities among different communities, such as high teen pregnancy rates and high rates of STIs, prompt a structured and factual sexual education curriculum that will standardize these statistics across the entire nation.³
- The federal government contributes substantial funds to the Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) grant program and the discretionary SRAE grant program to implement abstinence-only programs, which end up misleading students and fail to achieve federal sexual education objectives.⁸
- Congress should pass the Real Education and Access for Healthy Education and Youth Act in order to establish federal grants for comprehensive sex education programs while ceasing funding for detrimental abstinence-only programs, directing these grants towards schools and organizations to bolster the sexual health of young individuals, with a stipulation of mandating program grantees to advocate for gender equity and provide inclusive instruction accommodating varying gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations.⁶

- This act will support the HHS in creating support initiatives for sexual education and health services for young people across the country, and with support from the federal level, policymakers in the state and local levels will recognize the effectiveness of the mandated, factually accurate education.⁶

Implementation

The specifics of sexual education curricula are a polarizing issue in the US with many different opinions across the aisle in congress. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) need to gain momentum not only from the Democratic party but the Republican party as well. Furthermore, gaining support from different interest groups will also contribute to an increase in mobilization for the REAHYA. There is an extensive list of organizations that have endorsed this piece of legislation, including Advocates for Youth, American Sexual Health Association, The American Society for Reproductive Health, and many more.⁹

Since May of 2023 when this act was last on the floor of the House, there has been a large increase in research and data found from the differences in types of sexual education programs. Statistics are a compelling method to persuade both political parties to back the concept of transitioning away from abstinence-only programming in order to persuade both political parties. Mobilization of this act should also stem from explicitly stating the differences between abstinence-only programming and the new comprehensive curriculum that would be produced from the REAHYA. For example, a study conducted by the Texas Department of State Health Services found that the number of adolescents engaging in sexual intercourse increased after experiencing abstinence-only sexual education.¹⁰ Showing the statistical differences from state to state will

encourage both political parties to push for the policy that will produce the best standards for their constituents.

Additionally, there have been similar acts or bills put forward by individual states that cover very similar concepts to those covered in the REAHYA. For example, Massachusetts legislators have been trying to enact the Healthy Youth Act.¹¹ However, one of the factors that makes the REAHYA different and more desirable is the aspect of distribution of resources to the entire country as it comes from the federal level. Once enacted, federal grants should be distributed across numerous channels including high schools, colleges, and other organizations that all maintain the goal of supporting students and young individuals to make the best and most educated sexual health decisions.

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Integrating Artificial Intelligence into Cornell University Education

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Cornell University should implement an AI training program for teachers to provide them with the fundamental information and abilities they need to incorporate AI tools into their lessons, encouraging creativity and moral AI application for improved pedagogical results.

Background

Artificial intelligence (AI) integration in education has enormous potential for altering teaching and learning practices. It provides opportunities to reduce administrative procedures, customize instruction to specific student requirements, and provide rapid feedback, potentially improving educational outcomes. A 2023 Forbes Advisor survey that polled 500 practicing educators found that 60% of educators were using AI in their classrooms.¹ Key findings from the study reveal that 62% of all respondents have utilized AI technologies. Additionally, in a separate study conducted by Quizlet that polled students and teachers, students expressed agreement that AI technologies aid in better comprehension of material (73%) and facilitate faster or more efficient studying (67%).² Nearly half of both students (47%) and teachers (48%) acknowledged the positive impact of AI technologies on the student learning experience.

Cornell University has an existing tool called “Microsoft Copilot Enterprise,” which is a “university-wide ‘private’ version of ChatGPT and Dall-E that enables faculty and staff (eventually students) to experiment with generative AI text, image, and coding tools.”³ Copilot does not store login information or chat data and is not used to train language models. Along with the tool, the Cornell Administration released a series of administrative reports investigating the use of AI in educational settings and giving recommendations about the

integration of AI into classes.^{4,5} One recommendation from a committee report in July 2023 was that educators “rethink learning outcomes” and “actively integrate GAI into the learning process.”⁶ The report detailed the different contexts in which generative AI could be used in the classroom, including having students manually edit a written paragraph and compare it to the same AI-edited paragraph, using AI to create reverse outlines of written drafts, and even using generative AI as a debugging tool while coding. In-depth discussions on artificial intelligence principles should cover computer vision, machine learning, neural networks, and natural language processing.

Policy Idea

Cornell University should implement an AI training program that gives instructors and other relevant staff members the thorough information and abilities they need to successfully incorporate AI tools into their lesson plans. In-depth discussions on artificial intelligence principles should cover topics such as computer vision, machine learning, neural networks, and natural language processing. Faculty will also look at a variety of AI-related educational uses, such as automated feedback systems, adaptive assessment, and personalized learning. Participants will acquire hands-on experience with AI platforms and tools that are relevant to education through these sessions, which will encourage experimentation and creativity. The program would integrate already existing Cornell

University AI resources and guides into a comprehensive training that should be mandated for all instructors and other relevant staff members.

Policy Analysis

The Cornell University AI training program should be designed to give participants a thorough theoretical as well as hands-on understanding of AI concepts in addition to useful abilities for incorporating AI into instruction. The program should be constituted of workshops, talks, and practical sessions led by seasoned educators and specialists in AI and education. A wide range of subjects should be covered in the curriculum, beginning with a basic overview of modern AI fundamentals. Viewers of this file can see comments and suggestions. Participants would gain a thorough grasp of AI's concepts and applications by delving into the field's theoretical foundations. Building on this basis, the program should examine certain AI applications in education, such as automated feedback systems, adaptive assessment, and personalized learning. Educators would acquire insights into how AI can be successfully incorporated into teaching methods to improve student engagement and learning results through case studies and real-world examples. Participants would receive hands-on experience with AI tools and platforms that are relevant to education through these courses. They should be able to create AI-based learning modules, test AI-driven educational software, and use data analysis to guide decision-making on training. The

program should also include talks about the societal ramifications and ethical issues surrounding the use of AI in educational settings. To guarantee ethical AI implementation and equitable access to AI-driven educational materials, participants would examine issues like fairness, transparency, privacy, and bias.

In order to promote a collaborative learning environment, participants would receive continuing assistance and guidance from peers and instructors throughout the training program. Participants would have the information and abilities necessary to successfully incorporate AI technology into their teaching methods at the end of the program, which would eventually improve pedagogical efficacy and student engagement across subject areas.

Highlights

- To enhance the utilization of AI tools in educational settings, Cornell University should implement an all-inclusive AI training program. This initiative targets the improvement of relevant staff workers, teaching assistants, and faculty members' abilities.
- Cornell University has an existing tool called "Microsoft Copilot Enterprise" which is a "university-wide 'private' version of ChatGPT and Dall-E that enables faculty and staff (eventually students) to experiment with generative AI text, image, and coding tools."³
- Participants in the AI training program should receive a strong theoretical foundation by studying core AI concepts like machine learning, neural networks, and natural language processing.
- By working with case studies and real-world examples, participants would be able to effectively convert theory into reality and gain meaningful

insights into successful AI integration techniques.

- The proposed policy aims to equip educators with the know-how and abilities needed to successfully traverse the changing environment of education, encouraging creativity and equipping students for success in a world that is becoming more and more reliant on technology.

Implementation

Several essential actions should be performed in order to successfully implement Cornell University's AI training program. There are several resources that are already available for educators to use, yet they have not been combined into one comprehensive training. To ensure successful educator AI training, the program can incorporate existing training in Copilot that cover the basic functions of the generative AI program.³

To guarantee accessibility and effectiveness, the training program should be conducted by the existing AI Advisory Council at Cornell University, employing a variety of instructional methods. In order to suit a variety of learning styles and schedules, this training would be a mix of workshops, lectures, and hands-on sessions using both online and in-person resources. Training sessions should be facilitated by seasoned educators with a focus on AI and education, and funds will be set aside to acquire platforms and tools related to AI in education. To maintain the caliber and applicability of the training program, instructors should also be given access to opportunities for professional growth and continuing assistance.

Cornell University should use its resources to improve the implementation of the required AI training program by incorporating websites and resources on AI usage and learning. These materials should be included in the curriculum as an

adjunct to the training sessions, giving participants more help and direction in understanding and applying AI technologies. The curriculum should incorporate ethical issues and the societal ramifications of implementing AI in education, with a particular emphasis on justice, transparency, privacy, and bias. Participants would be urged to consider and think critically about the moral use of AI in educational contexts.

In order to tailor training to different disciplines, presentations can include specific examples listed in Appendixes B through G of the July 2023 "CU Committee Report: Generative Artificial Intelligence for Education and Pedagogy."⁴ These appendixes highlight different specific uses of generative AI in the classroom in a variety of different disciplines, from writing engineering.

Ultimately, methods for continuous assessment and feedback would be put in place to determine the training program's efficacy and pinpoint areas in need of development. In order to address the changing needs of instructors and students, the training program should be regularly improved and iterated upon using the input provided. Cornell University may improve pedagogical efficacy and student engagement across disciplines by implementing this approach and providing teachers with the information and skills they need to successfully use AI tools into their teaching methods.

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ENVIRONMENTAL & TECHNOLOGY POLICY

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Incorporating Environmental Considerations into the Foreign Aid Strategy

By Maoz Bizan, mb2389@cornell.edu

By reallocating portions of its foreign aid budget to climate aid, the United States can promote stability in vulnerable countries into the future of the climate crisis. In doing so, the US can best prevent environmental, economic, and national security threats.

Background

The political discourse surrounding climate change in the United States has largely revolved around blaming national entities — either the US itself or other major contributors such as China. Rising sea levels resulting from an increase in global temperatures directly threaten many US cities and population centers; the magnitude of this threat may be even higher than previously understood.¹ However, environmental crises transcend political boundaries, and the effects of greenhouse gas emissions are not constrained to their source regions. Many of the most climate-vulnerable countries are some of the poorest in the world but contribute a much smaller share to the climate crisis than less vulnerable, wealthier nations.² These nations often need to invest in expensive adaptations, which can pose an unsustainable economic burden without foreign assistance.³ As more countries are increasingly developing and industrializing, a rise in their greenhouse gas emissions is likely to follow.⁴

Furthermore, the challenges of climate change are not necessarily limited to direct threats posed by natural hazards. Environmental changes, such as drought or flooding, can lead to societal instability; geopolitical challenges abroad exacerbated by the effects of climate change can draw otherwise avoidable US involvement and expenditure, especially as the climate crisis grows in magnitude.⁵ Emphasizing global interconnectedness in the US climate

strategy will not only protect the US mainland from direct climatic crisis but also integrate geopolitical and economic stability into the approach towards climate change.

Policy Idea

Despite the United States agreeing to expand its foreign climate aid, it has fallen short of its stated contribution. The future of US climate aid largely depends on policies set following presidential elections and congressional decisions, making consistency in a long-term strategy difficult to attain.⁶ The US Department of State should closely scrutinize its approach to climate aid, both in amount and in allocation. Specifically, the Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs, responsible for collaborating with Congress and having influence on budget amounts, should emphasize climate aid in its core goals for interaction with Congress.⁷

Policy Analysis

Impacts of sea level rise and storms can cost the United States \$1 trillion by the end of the century.⁸ The costs and lost revenue caused by secondary economic and security impacts of climate change will also reach trillions of dollars.⁹ Emphasizing climate aid in both the US's foreign policy and its environmental policy will not only reduce the long-term economic burden of climate change, but also decrease the future need for US foreign assistance following effects of the climate crisis, including humanitarian or economic aid.

Impoverished countries need to spend a significant amount of their national GDPs to build infrastructure needed for sustainable and green development, a figure that can rise as high as 20 percent in small and disproportionately threatened Pacific island nations.¹⁰ Financing climate adaptation measures for these countries will allow them develop sustainably and also help limit the ramifications of climate change.¹¹ Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund already contribute to these causes in developing countries. Reallocating portions of the foreign aid budget to climate issues will have powerful effects for protecting the US and developing countries from environmental hazards, national security threats, and economic risks.¹⁰

Highlights

Climate change impacts extend across borders, and developing countries face disproportionate risks and economic burdens despite contributing less to the crisis than developed countries.² Low-income countries may be unable to afford climate adaptations, leading to avoidably large consequences globally, including in the US.

- Secondary effects of environmental challenges can cause instability and crises abroad, leading the US into avoidable and costly involvement. Foreign climate aid can reduce the likelihood of geopolitical crises by which the US may be impacted.

- Factoring climate concerns into foreign aid allocation can help countries implement climate management strategies that are otherwise unaffordable or impractical. Reducing the impact of climate change to foreign countries can prevent future environmental or economic burdens to the US.
- The Department of State and Congress should consider environmental vulnerabilities when deciding foreign aid budgets and allocation. Doing so will ensure a comprehensive foreign aid strategy that includes protection against risks posed by climate change impacts into the future, domestically and abroad.

Implementation

Because foreign aid distribution is determined by the Department of State and the budget itself decided by Congress, advocacy for foreign climate aid should be multifaceted.^{12,13} Though most funding for foreign aid is decided in Congress with the State-Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, supplementary bills could also dedicate funding towards specific areas, including foreign climate aid, before being integrated into the primary budget.¹³ Climate organizations can incorporate foreign aid into their existing advocacy work with Congress and other sectors of the government. Even without the support of Congress, the Department of State can incorporate environmental considerations into its current distribution of foreign aid without immediately changing the overall amounts.

Foreign aid and climate change are both contentious issues, and opposition to foreign climate aid is prevalent among both voters and legislators.^{14,15} Critics of climate aid may argue that the funding is not necessary and could be better directed towards other issues. By emphasizing

the economic or national security consequences that climate change in foreign countries can cause, foreign climate aid can appeal even to those who may be primarily concerned with other issues. By highlighting the benefits of foreign climate aid across different sectors of domestic and foreign affairs, policymakers can appreciate the importance of effective and decisive legislation.

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Transition Plans: The Decisive Strategy to Combatting Greenwashing

By William Dignam, wed45@cornell.edu

Greenwashing deceives audiences in hopes of persuading them that a product or service is sustainable. Companies shouldn't be allowed to advertise green policies without first proposing net-zero/transition goals, ensuring they cannot get away with greenwashing without acting upon their goals.

Background

With consumers becoming more aware of the consequences of climate change, many corporations want to institute themselves as “eco-friendly” to incentivize green audiences to purchase their products or services. As a result, many companies with known harmful practices strive to persuade consumers that they are less detrimental to the planet than their competitors. Nearly 60% of executives say their own organization is overstating its sustainability methods.¹

The oil industry is particularly notorious for using greenwashing as a form of climate denial. For example, Shell PLC has been covering its fossil fuel tracks by providing hydrogen refueling stations nationwide.² Hydrogen fuel is perceived as a renewable energy source in popular media, but the process of obtaining this hydrogen fuel currently requires an immense amount of fossil fuels, either from natural gas, ammonium (which requires fossil fuels to produce), or synthesis gas from coal. As of 2020, around 99% of hydrogen is made from fossil fuels.² Thankfully, Shell is ending its hydrogen refueling initiatives in large states like California but has no green alternative plans in place.³ It's evident that Shell didn't prioritize achieving any form of green energy, and there were no apparent green goals on their agenda. Greenwashing trends have been implemented in the fossil fuel industry for decades, but now, other companies are beginning to catch on and exaggerate their green claims. Overall, greenwashing poses a significant

roadblock in the fight against climate change.

Policy Idea

To effectively address the issue of greenwashing, companies wishing to advertise green policies and claims to consumers should implement a mandatory requirement and statement of accountability, similar to the European Union's Green Claim Directive. In addition, the Federal Trade Commission should revise its "Green Guide" to reflect more rigid principles and standards for labeling companies' sustainable initiatives. Alongside their green marketing efforts, companies should also propose tangible goals for achieving net-zero emissions or transitioning to green energy sources with greenhouse gas emission guidelines outlined by the US Security and Exchange Commission (SEC). Companies can also advertise their evidence related to these goals instead of relying on greenwashing. This policy would ensure accountability and transparency in corporate environmental initiatives and force efforts toward mitigating climate change rather than promoting false branding.

Policy Analysis

Net-zero plans have been a controversial topic over the last decade. Without proper regulations, a company can make false promises of net-zero goals and not act upon them. Therefore, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) should adopt and enforce stricter measures that specifically resemble policies in the

EU's Green Claims Directive. The directive offers several approaches to enforcement, one of which requires companies to provide evidence for their voluntary green claims in business-to-consumer transactions. This process would involve adhering to various requirements for assessment, such as considering the entire life cycle of their products or services.⁴ In March of 2023, lawmakers proposed new directive measures, mandating specific types of evidence and third-party verification from companies, obligating them to provide information to consumers regarding grain claims.⁵ The FTC has jurisdiction to request all of this information from companies since consumers deal directly with the protection claims proposed by companies which often deal with the “greenness” of the product or service. If companies attempt to find loopholes in enforcement by the FTC, the SEC has past policies that require companies to disclose direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions from their entire supply chain.⁶ With more stringency and financial incentives offered to companies, companies should be prompted to disclose their green policies with their fiscal year reports rather than separately. By knowing all of the outcomes, companies will only be rewarded by following through on green claims and net-zero transitioning plans.

Highlights

- Greenwashing deceives audiences into believing products or services are

environmentally friendly. Companies should have net-zero or transition goals to ensure accountability and prevent further greenwashing.

- Greenwashing affects employees and consumers, with estimates suggesting high levels of implementation in advertising. Corporations, especially the oil industry, use greenwashing to obscure harmful practices. Nearly 60% of executives say their own organization is overstating its sustainability methods.¹
- Companies advertising green policies should propose tangible net-zero or transition goals. Doing so ensures meaningful action toward environmental sustainability, promoting accountability while discouraging deceptive branding.
- The FTC should adopt stringent measures similar to the EU's Green Claims Directive to cease false promises of net-zero goals by companies. Mandating evidence and third-party verification, alongside SEC support with disclosures and incentives, ensures accountability.^{5,6}

Implementation

Empowering existing agencies to oversee and enforce compliance with the policy is necessary, along with verification and certification processes. With support from the SEC, the FTC can act as an enforcement agency with enough funding and legislative oversight. A carbon tax following the guidelines of The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act should provide the majority of funding for the FTC to enforce its measurements.⁷ The tax act proposes a fee rate on the carbon content greenhouse gas potential of fuels, starting at \$15 per metric-ton of emission in 2019 and

increasing annually by \$10. The rate applies to producers and importers of fuels emitting greenhouse gasses, but the proposed policy should also affect exporters of fossil fuels. The act exempts certain uses like agriculture and non-emitting purposes and provides refunds for carbon capture. Revenue is deposited into a CD trust fund for administrative expenses, but it could also be applied directly to greenwashing and transition measurements enforced by the FTC.⁷ Enforcement of these policies would encourage companies to transition to net-zero practices, as the fee rate should progressively increase over the years, and greenwashing would consequently face more severe repercussions. Similar to Alaska's royalty fees on fossil fuels, the revenue collected from carbon taxes should be rebated to US citizens to increase public support of these policies.⁸

As lobbying by gas companies and other polluters to prevent greenwashing legal action increases, there needs to be more publicization of these cases to deter companies away from these practices. The legal case of *Dorris v. Danone Waters of America* (also known as *Evian bottled water*) in early 2024 gained some traction in the media, but not enough to warrant major headlines or consequences to *Evian Water*. In summary, a New York court allowed consumers to proceed with claims against *Evian Water* for misleading marketing as "carbon neutral." The court found that the term could mislead consumers, as it is technical and carries multiple meanings. It also accepted consumers' allegations of confusion and paying a higher price due to the misrepresentation. The case was a big victory against greenwashing, considering *Evian Water's* nationwide status. The reputational loss to *Evian Water* should already be a major consequence of the greenwashing, but the case is relatively unknown in the public sphere.⁹ Greenwashing companies should face consequences

under FTC and SEC policies, while publicization of greenwashing crimes in mass media serves as another repercussion for committing to greenwashing practices.

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From Los Angeles to Amsterlangez: Dutchifying the US's Most Car Dependent Major City

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With pleasant year-round weather and high population density, Los Angeles has the potential to become a major cycling city. Los Angeles should become a cycling metropolis by constructing bike-friendly infrastructure and limiting car usage.

Background

Los Angeles is a city with a balmy yearly climate, vacillating between 48°F and 93°F.¹ Los Angeles County has an area of 4,058 square miles with a population of nearly 10 million, which accounts for a density of 2,430 people per square mile (the city of Los Angeles has a population density of 8,304 people per square mile). These statistics tell a story of Los Angeles' hidden density, something that is antithetical to the established narrative of Los Angeles being a sprawling metropolis. In fact, Los Angeles has been America's most densely populated metropolitan area for about four decades, beating the likes of New York City and Boston.² Los Angeles has all the makings of a biking paradise: high density and a climate that is more favorable than other bike-friendly cities in the world, such as Amsterdam or Copenhagen.

Unfortunately, in spite of Los Angeles' deceptively high density and favorable weather, the region is infamous for its car dependency. In 2022, cars made up 77.27 percent of commutes while bikes only made up 0.6 percent of commutes in Los Angeles.³ The great majority of commutes in Los Angeles are made by car because the city does not have a robust network of bike infrastructure. Los Angeles only has 19.4 miles of protected bike lanes and 700 miles of unprotected bike lanes, which pales in comparison to the 7,400 miles of paved roads within the city.^{4,5}

Such car dependency seems profligate considering that the average distance driven within a day in Los

Angeles is a short 9.3 miles.⁶ With such short average distance, there is significant impetus to make biking safer and more accessible within the city.

Policy Idea

To effectively transition Los Angeles into a bike-friendly city, Los Angeles should decrease streetside parking by five percent every year until street-side parking is only a quarter of Los Angeles' 2020 total. Decreasing availability of streetside parking should be combined with a pedestrianization of Los Angeles' major shopping streets. Pedestrianization entails making these important shopping streets only accessible by foot or bike. Targeting shopping streets with high pedestrian traffic would provide people with a larger incentive to switch to alternative modes of transportation.

The free space created by streetside parking should be made into protected two-way bike lanes separated from the road by vegetation islands. The remaining space on Los Angeles' roads should be reserved for express bus lanes, emergency vehicle transit, and reduced personal vehicle traffic.

To further incentivize bike usage, the city of Los Angeles should start a car-buying program wherein citizens can sell their cars and receive tax credits to buy bikes.

Policy Analysis

Making the transition to alternative forms of transportation is a difficult task, especially for a city the size of Los Angeles. However, various cities have successfully made this

transition; the most notable being Amsterdam, Netherlands.

After World War II, the Dutch post-war economic boom gave people the income necessary to afford personal vehicles. However, cars did not fit well into the narrow streets of Amsterdam. As the number of cars grew, the amount of traffic casualties rose exponentially to 3,300 deaths in 1971.⁷ In response to high traffic deaths, citizens protested for safer streets, and by the early 1980s, city planners adopted plans to accommodate bikers and pedestrians. Over a span of 40 years, Amsterdam has completely renovated itself to become one of the most bike-friendly cities in the world. Los Angeles, which currently finds itself in the same position as post-war Amsterdam, can learn a lot from the city's cycling policies.

The first hallmark of Amsterdam's biking policy is the creation of partitioned bike lanes. These lanes decrease the chance of traffic accidents and provide for a smooth, uninterrupted riding experience. For Los Angeles to create protected bike lanes, streetside parking must be iteratively reduced. Despite its elevated biking status, Amsterdam is still removing parking spaces; the city currently has a plan to remove 11,200 parking spaces from the center of the city by 2025.⁸ The parking-bike lane relationship is a crucial first step in Los Angeles' cycling policy.

Highlights

- With a favorable year-round climate and remarkably high population density, car-

dependent Los Angeles has the potential to become a cycling paradise.

- In order to become more bike-friendly, Los Angeles should learn from the steps Amsterdam, a formerly car-dependent city, took to build bike-friendly infrastructure.
- Los Angeles should take a gradual approach to biking in order to have the most impact on changing the deeply ingrained social norm of driving.
- First, Los Angeles should focus on incrementally reducing parking by five percent yearly by replacing the parking spaces with separated bike lanes. Major shopping streets should be completely pedestrianized in conjunction with the creation of a citywide car buyback program.

Implementation

The key to achieving long-lasting change in the transportation landscape of Los Angeles is rolling out different parts of the proposal over a longer time frame to avoid any mistakes in implementation and to give the public time to acclimate to change. Ideally, policies should be implemented in neighborhoods with the highest density because these neighborhoods would benefit the most from the traffic decongestion and reduction in air pollution that biking infrastructure would provide. In addition, denser neighborhoods have more people willing to make the preliminary switch from car usage to bike usage because within these neighborhoods, the incentive of traffic decongestion is significant.

Intentionality is an integral part of creating effective bike infrastructure

that will see high utilization. Placing additional focus on neighborhoods with high concentrations of businesses and connecting these neighborhoods with other high-density neighborhoods will create strategic arteries for bicycle transit. Creating these connections is an essential collateral task within this policy.

This policy should be proposed to the various Area Planning Committees within the Los Angeles government. The policy could see some pushback due to potential funding constraints. Changing the layout of a staunchly car-dependent city like Los Angeles can quickly become expensive, considering it costs anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to construct a mile of bike lanes.⁹ Choosing to add a road buffer to protect bike lanes could cause the per mile price to skyrocket even further. In order to fund an infrastructure project of this scale, the city of Los Angeles should institute a small increase in sales taxes and apply for federal infrastructure grants to add to municipal budgets.

The potential backlash from this policy could be significant. Special interest groups include car dealerships that stand to lose significant amounts of money due to reduced demand. Unfortunately, there is no concise way to lessen the financial blow such a policy will place on car dealerships. The car market within Los Angeles County would simply have to make a market-based adjustment to accommodate the eventual decrease in demand.

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Safer Consumption for a Safer Future

By Henry Han, hyh8@cornell.edu

The United States' failure to keep up with worldwide pesticide regulations threatens the health and safety of the food supply and farmworkers. It is time to promulgate safe consumption for a better future.

Background

American farms continue to use dangerous pesticides that are illegal in numerous countries.¹ The US comprises more than 17 percent of the world's pesticide use, with 30 percent of American pesticides outlawed in the European Union (EU).¹ Paraquat, the most widely used herbicide in the US, induces Parkinson's disease, creates devastating ecological impacts, and is acutely toxic to humans.² Additionally, scientific research has shown that organophosphate and neonicotinoid insecticides, commonly used to deter insects from crops, can cause developmental issues among children, especially those of farmworkers who are often exposed to pesticides.³ Researchers at Cornell University have found that neonicotinoid insecticides can also harm the already-endangered pollinator populations and run off into communities' shared water supplies.⁴ Although the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has categorized the aforementioned pesticides as dangerous, loopholes in the review process have let these ill-inducing drugs permeate throughout the agricultural and domestic spheres.⁵

While the EPA finds these pesticides threatening to people, vulnerable pollinators, and the environment, current EPA practices permit their use on farms nationwide. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act

(FIFRA) does not require the EPA to examine studies outside the ones the pesticide manufacturers have published when approving the product.⁵ Manufacturers have abused the EPA's leniency with conditional and emergency approvals despite having no reliable scientific backing to justify these special cases.⁶ When these harmful products are carelessly approved, they can remain in the market for years.⁵ Industries have taken advantage of this lax policy, with paraquat remaining in the market for decades and increasing in usage nationwide.⁷

Policy Idea

Congress should enact federal legislation that directly addresses (1) the dangerous pesticides, (2) the EPA's careless registration policy, and (3) protections for farmworker families who are more exposed to these products.

To the first point, Congress should ban paraquat, organophosphate insecticides, and neonicotinoid insecticides. Additionally, Congress should grant research to investigate the efficacy of pesticides that have been approved or are awaiting approval.

To the second point, legislation should compel the EPA to create a petitioning process for private citizens and organizations to submit their research on pesticides going through the process while exercising more stringent

conditional, emergency, and conventional approvals.

Finally, for the third point, the legislation should permit the EPA to serve monetary punishments to manufacturers for failing to adequately report their products or for misleading the public. These punishments should also be issued if employers of farmworkers fail to report pesticide-related injuries wherein the EPA should review the reports to further develop best practices and safer products.

Policy Analysis

Pesticide bans in other countries and legislation introduced to Congress have shown a solution is both possible and feasible. Concerning foreign bans, an ABC News analysis found that more than 50 countries have banned paraquat, including China, where the lead producer, Syngenta, is stationed.⁸ Research supports these many countries' positions. Early studies in South Korea, where paraquat is banned, found that the prohibition of the pesticide significantly reduced paraquat poisoning mortality rates by eight percent.⁹ The EU has banned neonicotinoid insecticides based on research of their detrimental effects on pollinators, which are essential to maintaining the food web.¹⁰ These bans will be effective but insufficient in addressing the US government's complacency.

Congressional enforcement of accountability within the EPA and for manufacturers who continuously abuse the EPA's complacency will prevent manufacturers from approving harmful products. External research will check the profit-driven research on the manufacturing side, making it more difficult for the EPA to approve pesticides on a conditional or emergency basis. Additionally, with farmworkers being the most exposed to these pesticides, some punitive measures will disincentivize exploitative practices at the farmworker families' expense. Pushing manufacturers and employers to report to the EPA can enable the government and other researchers to collect proper data to find safe solutions. The 118th Congress has introduced all of these measures through S.269 (Protect America's Children from Toxic Pesticides Act), which numerous organizations, including Earthjustice and the Center for Biological Diversity, have endorsed.¹¹

Highlights

- Pesticides, such as paraquat, organophosphate insecticides, and neonicotinoid insecticides, have been shown to pose enormous threats to everyday people, farmworkers, pollinators, and communities' water supplies, among many other health and ecological effects.^{2,3,4}
- Current EPA pesticide registration practices exclude impartial scientific research in their approval process and carelessly approve pesticides with no

concrete scientific backing.^{5,6}

- Outright bans partnered with diligent EPA pesticide registration processes, which include external research from the public, can directly remove harmful pesticides while assessing the potential dangers of pesticides in circulation or awaiting approval.
- Countries all over the world, including China and those in the EU, have banned paraquat, organophosphate insecticides, and neonicotinoid insecticides because of the overwhelming research that points to these herbicides' harmful effects on people and the environment.^{8,9,10}
- Holding manufacturers and farmworking employers accountable through monetary punishments will ensure that the private sector also complies with the EPA's new stringent registration process without compromising the health of consumers, farmworkers, and the environment.

Implementation

At the time of writing, Congress is debating provisions of the Farm Bill after its reauthorization was postponed from last year. With negotiations likely going into 2025, there is time for at least one of the three points of the idea to be incorporated into the bill.¹² The second point, which compels the EPA to diligently assess pesticide registration, may have a greater chance of becoming law compared to the other points.

While PACTPA has five co-sponsors in the Senate and 19 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives as of late March 2024, all of whom are Democrats or caucus with the Democrats, conservatives or Republicans may be inclined to haul in government accountability. Given their small government beliefs, Republicans may wish to regulate the EPA. However, if Republicans continue the EPA's lax policies in hopes a Republican administration capitalizes on a laissez-faire agency, advocates for PACTPA or its provisions should present research on the aforementioned sections of this proposal in tandem with pressure and assurances to swing the necessary elected officials to support PACTPA or its provisions.

Predominant research proves the proposal will be beneficial for people and the environment, but if elected officials are not convinced, environmental or farming organizations can form coalitions of researchers and farmers to schedule meetings with those on Capitol Hill to present the evidence directly. Speaking with elected officials and maintaining contact with staff in the official's office can both directly apply pressure on officials while ensuring long-term connections with members of the Senate and House of Representatives.¹³ Additionally, calling the offices of elected officials and expressing support for PACTPA can most certainly influence how elected officials vote, especially on issues close to their constituency.¹³ Directly lobbying elected officials may reduce the effects of harmful pesticides, but elected officials may share concerns about alternatives to these dangerous pesticides.

It is critical that researchers assure elected representatives that there is a plethora of affordable alternatives. Researchers and advocates should stress that non-neonicotinoid alternatives do not incur a significant financial burden for farmers.⁴ Furthermore, Cornell University’s New York State Integrated Pest Management (NYSIPM) has invested resources into offering guides for farmers to apply pesticides without harming the pollinator community.¹⁴ Ultimately, research shows that PACTPA effectively protects everyone environmentally and economically.

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A New Framework for Copyright: Empowering Intellectual Property in the Age of AI

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A current lack of definitive frameworks for copyright and generative AI presents an ever-growing risk to both current copyright holders and the future of the AI industry, presenting an urgent need for immediate policy action to balance the two.

Background

The copyright system has long worked to balance protections for creators of “new and original” works and the public’s ability to enjoy and use those works.¹ The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has made adaptation necessary to maintain this careful balancing act. Whether AI-generated works can be copyrighted, whether the use of copyrighted works in training datasets constitutes infringement, and whether the outputs of generative AI platforms can infringe pre-existing copyright claims have all become increasingly relevant questions with the steady development of AI technology.² Regulating this field is pressing, with analysis by McKinsey and Company finding that the total economic potential of generative AI amounts to \$17.1 trillion to \$25.6 trillion annually.³

The first concern—whether AI-generated works can be copyrighted—has recently come under scrutiny. The current rule maintains that works can only receive copyright if the work is “the product of human creativity,” a precedent established by *Burrow-Giles Lithographic Co. v. Sarony* (1884), which determined that copyright may only be extended to works with human creators.⁴ This framework has already been applied to generative AI by the federal government and provides a sufficient framework, although future expansions of copyright law to accommodate the outputs of generative AI platforms could be necessary.⁵

The last two concerns—whether the use of copyrighted works in training datasets constitutes infringement and whether the outputs of generative AI platforms can infringe pre-existing copyright claims—comprise the focus of this policy proposal with precedent on AI-generated works just starting to form through the framework of the fair use doctrine, which allows for the use of copyrighted work without permission for limited and transformative purposes.^{6,7} As these questions of fair use are adjudicated in court, policy action will help clarify permissible use and alleviate structural burdens on the judicial system.

Policy Idea

Congress should require an opt-out clause for the use of copyright holders’ works in generative AI datasets and pass a law expanding safe harbor protections to generative AI platforms.

Requiring permission would necessitate licensing agreements between creators of generative AI training datasets and copyright holders. This requirement would enable copyright holders to participate in the development of AI technology actively, protect individual claims to copyright, and avoid disincentivizing the further development of AI.

Expanding safe harbor protections would draw on preexisting policy from the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and would similarly maintain incentives for further development of AI technology while increasing protections for

copyright holders. Expanding these protections to generative AI platforms would also decrease the workload for the US Copyright Office, increasing the overall potential of the office.

Policy Analysis

The first section of this policy, creating an opt-out for the use of copyrighted works in generative AI datasets, would place power back in the hands of individual copyright holders by providing them the opportunity to opt in or out of any training datasets. While doing so would not address preexisting datasets, it would create positive future potential for further collaboration between copyright holders and generative AI platforms, thereby maintaining the balancing act of copyright. Drawing on the precedent of recent discussions on the European Union’s AI Act—specifically Article 4(3) CDSM—and providing copyright holders the chance to opt out of future AI training datasets would work to reduce the risk of copyright infringement claims.⁸

Similarly, expanding safe harbor protections would reduce copyright infringement claims by leveraging pre-existing protections for online platforms guaranteed under the DMCA. This protection shields “online service providers” from liability for copyright infringement by their users if the provider takes active steps to remove this infringing content.⁹ By extending these protections to generative AI platforms, it would be possible to maintain incentives for further development of AI, shift the burden of enforcement to generative AI

platforms, and protect copyright holders from the creation of potentially infringing work. One limitation of this proposed policy, however, is the difficulty of determining whether the outputs of generative AI are sufficiently infringing as well as creating a comprehensive method for detecting these cases of infringement.

Highlights

- The US Copyright System balances protections for original works of authorship (i.e., literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works) with the interests of the public good to engage with and use these works. This protection is granted automatically at the moment of creation, although copyright holders are encouraged to register their work with the US Copyright Office.¹⁰
- Generative AI technology creates a host of complications for the current US Copyright System, with the focus of this policy proposal centering on the following: whether the use of copyrighted works in generative AI training datasets constitutes infringement and whether the outputs of generative AI training datasets can constitute infringing content.
- To alleviate the current lacuna in copyright law regarding generative AI, Congress should pass a law that requires licensing agreements for the use of copyrighted works in AI training datasets and extends the safe harbor protections established under the DMCA to generative AI platforms.
- This proposed policy would reduce copyright infringement claims both in training datasets and in outputs by requiring increased care on the side of generative AI platforms, increasing the participation of

copyright holders, decreasing judicial load, and maintaining the potential for continued AI development.

Implementation

The first of prong of this proposal should be the promulgation of licensing requirements for the use of copyrighted works in generative AI datasets by the US Copyright Office under the Library of Congress, which Congress has delegated the authority to create and distribute regulations on copyright law.¹¹ To increase copyright holders' awareness of this new rule, the US Copyright Office should also produce educational materials documenting the opt-out privilege granted to copyright holders.

The second prong would require multi-faceted legislation to provide the technological basis required to detect potentially infringing content created by generative AI. The first element of this legislation would be the drafting and discussion of a bill through the Congressional House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Research and Technology to allocate funding for research on automatic detection software for potentially infringing outputs of generative AI. The second element of this legislation would be the amendment of the DMCA to include generative AI platforms within the safe harbor protections established under Section 512 of Title 17. This bill should be jointly sponsored by House Representatives Anna G. Eshoo (CA-16) and Michael McCaul (TX-10), given their positions as chairs of the Congressional Artificial Intelligence Caucus, as well as the political symbolism of bipartisan action on AI policy.¹²

To ensure enforcement, the US Copyright Office should simultaneously establish an internal task force through the Office of the Register focused on providing guidance and final decisions on flagged cases of potential infringement. This action would fall under the auspices of

the Office of the Register given their duty to administer the provisions of Title 17 and offer legal guidance on copyright.¹³

There does exist the potential for backlash from AI developers who would view these policy actions as resulting in stifling innovation, although the allocation of research funds for the development of detection systems, the continued allowed use of copyrighted works in training datasets with permission, and the creation of enforcement mechanisms through the US Copyright Office would all help assuage these concerns.

Addressing the current lack of federal guidance on the effect of generative AI on copyright is an immediate need, with the proposed policy working to maintain the careful balancing act of the copyright system and further promote the development of AI technology.

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Greening Kitchens: Transitioning Fort Worth's Mom-and-Pop Shops from Styrofoam to Compostable Packaging

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To address styrofoam containers' environmental detriment, the Fort Worth government should offer grants to price-sensitive mom-and-pop restaurants to aid the initial six months of the transition to compostable packaging. Restaurants that commit long-term to the initiative will receive green certifications.

Background

In 2017, independent businesses constituted over 68% of all restaurants in the United States.¹ Mom-and-pop restaurants thus form the culinary backbone of many communities. In Fort Worth, Texas, these small family-owned businesses, often serving ethnic cuisine from Mexican to Egyptian, tend to utilize styrofoam to pack orders, especially takeout. For these restaurants, delivery and takeout may constitute up to 60% of the overall business.² As a result, the materials used to package the food have a significant environmental impact.²

According to the Green Dining Alliance, the appeal of styrofoam, also known as polystyrene, primarily lies in its extremely low sticker price, which is derived from its lightweight configuration of plastic and air.³ On Restockit, a wholesale packaging website, a case of 200 large foam food containers costs \$32.29.⁴ Styrofoam is also an effective insulator, explaining its ubiquitous use as a vessel for foods and liquids.

Annually, styrofoam's environmental costs total approximately \$7 billion, including the price of cleanup, carbon emissions, and potential health effects. Styrofoam is one of the most persistent pollutants in waterways and other ecosystems: three million tons of styrofoam are produced annually, 80% of which goes to landfills, where it constitutes 30% of the volume.³ Since very few recycling facilities accept styrofoam, it remains

for an estimated 500 years in the landfill before fully decomposing.⁵

Considering the prevalence of styrofoam in the food and beverage industry, advocating for mom-and-pop shops to switch to eco-friendly packaging would significantly reduce its presence in our ecosystems. However, as these small businesses must often limit costs to stay financially healthy and are facing rising prices with inflation, financial assistance from local governments is vital to a successful switch.⁶ This policy proposal focuses on Fort Worth's scene of over 1,100 restaurants, but the presented ideas may be translated to any city.⁷

Policy Idea

To facilitate the phasing out of styrofoam to transition to compostable takeout containers, local governments should offer financial incentives in the form of grants averaging \$2,000 to small restaurants willing to make the switch to compostable packaging. To obtain grants, restaurants must demonstrate commitment or plans to integrate sustainability into operations, such as composting 50% of food waste or locally and organically sourcing 30% of produce. This illustration of reliability is vital to local governments, which must decide which restaurants would best utilize the grant money. Further, restaurants that consistently improve practices or maintain aforementioned green practices, including completing the transition to compostable containers for one year,

may receive a green certificate to post outside the restaurant to advertise themselves as eco-friendly. The certificate must be annually renewed with proof of continuance of commitment to sustainability.

Policy Analysis

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) already operates programs for reducing food-related trash, such as the Long Island Product Stewardship Institute Restaurant Guide, which helped one restaurant prevent the usage of 52,000 plastic items and save over \$3000 annually. These benefits stemmed from simple operational changes such as limiting disposable food ware.⁸ Similarly, by implementing the grant system and empowering restaurants to continue using compostable containers beyond the initial six-month purchase, Fort Worth's government could prevent the average local restaurant from using over 11,000 styrofoam containers yearly.

Not only would a switch from styrofoam benefit the environment, but the consequent green certificate could also attract more customers. In the National Restaurant Association's 2022 State of the Restaurant Industry report, many respondents indicated preferences for restaurants employing sustainable practices. The study revealed that 38% of customers would choose to eat at an establishment offering locally sourced foods over one that doesn't. Furthermore, sustainability and recyclability

appeared to matter more than the quality and insulation of packaging. In fact, 70% of millennials and 72% of Gen Z adults claimed willingness to pay more for takeout orders to make up for the cost of eco-friendly packaging.⁹ Thus, if mom-and-pop shops received assistance for the initial transition, the extra revenue from their new competitive edge over non-sustainable competitors and extra customer fees for takeout packaging would cover the recurring costs of purchasing compostable packaging.

In the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, Dallas restaurants average 52 transactions daily.¹⁰ Assuming 60% of the orders to be takeout, the average mom-and-pop shop would need about 5,600 takeout containers for six months of orders. To cover this initial order covering six months of operations, grants should average \$1,945-2,000, as compostable containers are \$102.27 for a 300-unit bulk case.¹¹ Thus, Fort Worth should grant small restaurants \$2000, which is flexible depending on the daily number of transactions, to replace styrofoam containers with compostable containers.

Highlights

- Many small restaurants in Fort Worth, referred to as mom-and-pop restaurants, depend heavily on takeout orders and use styrofoam containers due to low cost.^{2,3}
- Due to limited acceptance at recycling facilities, 80% of yearly styrofoam goes to landfills, where it takes 500 years to decompose.^{3,5}
- The Fort Worth city government should offer \$2,000 grants to restaurants that can demonstrate a commitment to sustainable practices, such as composting, which can replace styrofoam containers with enough compostable containers for six months' worth of orders.
- Restaurants that continue the container program and other

sustainable efforts will receive green certificates to be posted on storefronts, which could boost revenue, as many millennial and Gen Z customers value eco-friendly restaurants even if they are pricier.

Implementation

This grant system should only serve qualifying restaurants, which must be mom-and-pop shops, also referred to as independent or small-business restaurants. Restaurants must apply by demonstrating proof of intention or participation in sustainable food management. Various activities could qualify as participation, but for common options such as food waste diversion, there are specific guidelines. Efforts to divert food waste must see at least 50% of monthly food waste donated to composting piles at local farms. Alternatively, restaurants can demonstrate that at least 30% of the produce is locally and organically grown. Once such a qualification, along with status as a small business is demonstrated, the city government should assess the number of daily transactions the restaurant averages and use this figure to determine the necessary bulk order size for the packages to cover six months of operation.

Restaurateurs may be concerned that the pricier eco-friendly containers will hurt profitability. However, there is a \$1,000 difference in the cost of a six-month supply of styrofoam takeout containers and compostable containers. While implementing the new containers over the six-month period, businesses can gradually increase prices to account for this difference so that the following bulk purchases can be independently made with the extra revenue.

Restaurateurs may also worry that customers won't purchase food at these elevated prices, but even with the incremental rise required to increase revenue by \$1000 over a six-month period, these small ethnic restaurants

will be cheaper than their larger counterparts. Additionally, as cited earlier by the National Restaurant Association, customers are willing to pay more for takeout if helping to ensure eco-friendly packaging.⁹ If restaurant owners continue the compostable packaging initiative until the one-year mark while continuing their demonstrations in other commitments to sustainability, whether composting, local sourcing, or another activity, they will be awarded a green certification to post outside of their storefront. Simply following other initiatives without continuing the packaging efforts will not result in a certificate. This green advertisement is likely to increase customers as well, especially among millennials and Gen Z. Consequently, revenue would increase and help the restaurant cover packaging costs and improve profitability.

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Redlining to Reparations: The Risk of Environmental Racism

By Krislyn Michel, ksm239@cornell.edu

Environmental racism describes the issue of harmful, cancerous contaminants disproportionately affecting communities of color. Thus, enforcing air quality standards and implementing economic reparations for Black and Brown communities affected by pollution is imperative.

Background

Racial segregation from redlining has exposed communities of color to harmful chemicals dumped by nearby industrial facilities, resulting in fenceline communities.¹ Black Americans are 75 percent more likely than White Americans to live near toxic facilities.² The former are also subject to levels of air pollution at least 56 percent higher than their White counterparts.²

There are many instances of corporations harming communities of color, displaying the widespread problem of environmental racism in the US. In North Carolina, the Ward Transformer Company illegally dumped 31,000 gallons of hazardous polychlorinated biphenyl into a neighborhood of color.³ Two locations were proposed as dumping sites for the waste: Warren County, a predominantly Black community without much political power or the proper infrastructure for offloading and Chatham, a white-majority community with greater political input over the waste location.³ Warren County was 60 percent Black then, whereas Chatham County was only 27 percent.³ The waste ended up in Warren County, an apparent case of environmental racism. North Carolina, being a Southern state, is quite significant due to the South's history of environmental racism. Black residents comprised 75 percent of communities with hazardous-waste landfills in the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) analysis of the South or Region 5.4, but environmental racism is a nationwide issue, not just in the South.⁴

The EPA's Office of Environmental Justice has acknowledged the agency's failure to address "disproportionate burdens" and how the agency or industry is not required to monitor air toxins.⁵ Additionally, the EPA does not punish companies that knowingly poison nearby residents. Former president Trump's deregulation of natural gas has also further exacerbated the issue. Many innocent people live in sacrifice zones because of weak environmental governance. It is more imperative now than ever to address environmental racism because vulnerable neighborhoods will suffer disastrous health consequences without protection.

Policy Idea

Tackling environmental racism requires a two-fold approach: environmental protection and racial justice. According to experts, the EPA's limit for dangerous chemicals is a hundred times higher than the healthy amount.⁵ Thus, the EPA's lack of air pollution monitoring results in a lack of knowledge about fatal chemical exposure that people of color face, leading to a gap in policies that prevent the proliferation of environmental racism. The minimum level of pollutants in residential areas should be lowered to a healthier threshold, accompanied by harsher enforcement of these revised standards on non-compliant companies through fines. There should be financial reparations for communities impaired by environmental racism. If federal agencies recognize the danger of

people living near polluting companies, they should be required to grant financial reparations to these victims. Fines derived from the punitive aspects of this policy on non-compliant companies can fund the racial justice element of addressing environmental racism.

Policy Analysis

Strengthening the EPA's lax emission standards will reduce fatal chemical exposure, healthcare costs, and racial wealth gaps.² The EPA strives to protect people from an excess cancer risk worse than one in a million, yet its existing policies have a maximum excess cancer risk of 1 in 10,000.⁵ A policy with the former threshold will protect the health of about 74 million Americans currently exposed to high emissions, reducing cancer risk for more than 20% of the population.⁵

Inspired by the Justice40 program, which invests 40% of federal funds into disadvantaged communities within the EPA's Region 5 where environmental racism is prominent, the proposed policy mitigates environmental racism through reparations or investments into affected neighborhoods.⁶

Black families are more exposed to pollutants.⁵ After climate disasters, average property values substantially grow in majority-white communities due to reinvestment.² Yet, in the same circumstances, the wealth in neighborhoods of color decreases by an average of \$27,000.² Fixing America's racist system through reparations proves beneficial because

inaction increases the total cost of environmental racism – health care burdens and lost wealth – to be greater than the \$2.3 trillion the U.S. has spent on environmental disasters since 1980.²

Federal agencies have addressed environmental racism with Blacks in Green receiving \$10 million in reparations as part of Justice40.⁶ Funds collected by the EPA from fining non-compliant companies could also largely contribute back to redistributing economic and political power into communities that were taken advantage of.

Highlights

- The United States’ history with the enslavement of African people, segregation, and redlining has shaped the infrastructure of present-day communities of color and their proximity to highly polluted areas. The EPA is failing to protect environmental and public health.
- Environmental racism describes people of color being disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards at a rate higher than their White counterparts. As a result, exposure to harmful chemicals dumped by industrial facilities means that Black and Brown people suffer from its adverse side effects on their health.
- Environmental racism is also a public health problem. Addressing the issue means legislation should value fenceline communities who have been ignored in the past and the health implications of discrimination on people of color.
- Stricter regulation on air pollution should be enacted to lower the minimum level of pollutants to be a safer threshold alongside a harsher enforcement of these revised standards on noncompliant companies either through fines

or sentencing. The effects of legacy pollution should be reversed through financial reparations for communities impaired by environmental racism. These economic benefits will fund environmental remediation efforts, climate resilient infrastructure, and the costs of pollution’s negative externalities faced by fenceline communities – including healthcare and property values.

Implementation

This policy should be enforced on a Congressional level or agencies like the EPA. However, the proposed policy will likely face interference and backlash from various major stakeholders across different fields. The business models of industrial facilities heavily depend on the fast, cheap disposal of their excess waste without regard for how dumping pollutive substances into the environment can wreak havoc on the health of its surrounding communities. Increased regulation on air pollution would threaten their profits and functionality. Reform on air standards would mean large shifts within companies that are currently reliant on pollutive practices and have profit-driven interests.

The implementation of this policy would be difficult, since there is no incentive for industrial companies to change their practices. However, fuel corporate interests can be mitigated through the work of environmental lobbyists such as JC Sandberg at the National Waste & Recycling Association or Ibn Akbar Salaam who is the Director of Federal Legislative Affairs at Waste Management.⁷ Lobbyist efforts could be facilitated by media campaigns highlighting cases of environmental racism.

As a redistributive, racial project, the policy’s focus on mitigating the effects of racism on the health and economic disparities within the Black and Brown community

would most likely incite pushback from individuals critiquing its focus on one sector of the population. To refute these claims, the policy’s revised EPA emission standards should be reframed as beneficial to all residents regardless of color near a pollutive facility.

Spanning 10 years, the policy would start within any Congressional subcommittee relating to domestic, appropriation, infrastructure, environmental, technology, health, or racial/equality policy. Both informal and formal political actors: student groups, grassroots organizations, environmental justice groups, racial justice groups, politicians, interest groups, and more would conduct outreach through phonebanking, doorknocking, etc.

The financial reparations section of the dual-pronged policy proposal would be derived from federal funds through the Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers or the Infrastructure and Jobs Act.

It is essential to recognize how environmental racism undermines the health and economic prosperity of Black and Brown communities, who have already had to experience the effects of discrimination, segregation, and gaps in while the data industry is in its infancy. Setting forth reformed air pollution standards will save millions of Americans from suffering the adverse effects of exposure to harmful chemicals, thus improving the nation’s overall well-being.

Climate policy is health policy, which is equality policy.

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Expanding Shared Micromobility is the Way Forward for Cities of All Sizes

By Jack Turner, jt797@cornell.edu

High inner city car usage rates and a tendency to drive present opportunities for American cities to expand shared micromobility services. Services like bikeshare and e-scooters offer affordable and accessible mobility solutions and should be expanded to all American medium-sized cities.

Background

In recent years, major cities across the US have implemented wildly successful bikeshare systems that have seen a surge in ridership. In 2022 alone, individuals took over 130 million trips on bikeshare systems and e-scooters, representing a 40% increase over trips taken in 2018.¹ Moreover, 39% of riders used the micromobility services to commute to work.² However, these bikeshare systems continue to face financial and structural barriers to nationwide expansion, and many smaller-sized cities cannot reap the benefits these systems bring.⁹

Bikeshare systems are typically affordable for users, who can pay on a per-minute basis or through monthly or annual passes, which allow for unlimited trips for a duration. Some systems, like Capital Bikeshare in Washington, DC, are incredibly affordable, with rides costing only \$0.05 per minute after a small unlocking fee (usually around \$1 to \$2).¹ Capital Bikeshare and other systems often provide electric bikes and electric scooters ensuring that those who aren't as fit can still use the system.

These systems have gained traction in recent years with the advent of new bike lanes in cities but have yet to gain significant market share or awareness in smaller cities where their implementation could have major environmental and social benefits.

Policy Idea

The federal government should subsidize additional enhancements to shared micromobility solutions,

including bikeshare and e-scooters, to allow for their expansion in all cities with over 100,000 people and to ensure that existing bikeshare systems stay well-funded and maintained into the future. Large cities in the US already have existing bikeshare systems, but case studies in smaller towns suggest that shared micromobility is equally viable in dense, small- to medium-sized cities.⁵ Additional federal support will allow for enhanced maintenance, new docking stations, and—most importantly—a broader distribution of bikeshare availability in new markets to bridge individuals into more sustainable modes of transportation.

Policy Analysis

Bike share systems play an important role in CO₂ emissions reductions. One article in the *Resources, Conservation, and Recycling* journal found that across eight major cities in the US, annual emissions reduction spans a large range covering 41 tons of CO₂ abated in Seattle to 5417 tons abated in New York City.⁷

New bikeshare stations also reduce vehicle ownership by household by 2.2% and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 3.3% per person.⁴ Moreover, when bikeshare systems allow for one kilometer or fewer transfers to public transit, auto dependency reductions are as high as 10%.⁴

Bikeshare systems are relatively inexpensive to run but require extensive initial capital. CitiBike in New York City used a \$110 million naming rights deal to fund initial operations.¹⁰ A ride in a system

typically only costs the system about \$1.50, which in many cases is less than the cost the user is paying for the ride.³ Bikeshare systems do have serious equity implications, however. Qualitative interviews suggest that bikeshare system usage is highly racialized and class-divided, with most users being white and relatively wealthy.⁵ Access equity to bikeshare is a serious problem, and bikeshare expansion should focus on the breadth of dock locations rather than depth. That said, in cities where lower-income, disadvantaged neighborhoods have access to bikeshare, its usage is both viable and common.⁸

Highlights

- Congress should fund a federal expansion of bikeshare systems in small-to-medium sized cities through state allocations. Expansion of shared micromobility has been rapid in recent years, but many small-to-medium-sized cities still are extremely car-dependent and are ripe with potential for new systems.
- New bikeshare docks within a system reduce VMT by 3.3% per person.⁴ Docks themselves are not a necessity for a successful bikeshare system, but the conglomeration of bikes helps the system to run smoother.
- Larger systems successfully used naming rights programs as initial capital, but smaller systems require more support to gain traction. Larger

bikeshare systems tend to be cheaper for riders as a result of more extensive up-front financing, and increased federal funding for smaller systems can help to keep prices competitive for riders who may choose to use different modes of transportation.

- Smaller cities lack the political will and financial resources to successfully launch bike share systems, but the small cities that have launched systems have seen incredible success.

Implementation

This policy would necessitate local government cooperation but would require federal government intervention for implementation at a large scale. Appropriations bills should allocate additional funding for micromobility infrastructure and earmark it for all cities with populations above 100,000 people and any city below that threshold that requests the funding. Following the template of Citi Bike, the government should raise funds through naming rights deals that wish to associate with city-developed bikeshare programs.¹⁰

All micromobility operations should be handled by the city-facilitated organizations. Micromobility operations are quite varied in the US, with some being run by private companies, others by cities, and still others by smaller organizations. Bikeshare systems have proven to be effective no matter the operator, and the government-allocated funds also open up the potential for further private sector involvement if

local municipalities choose to run their bikeshare program as a concession where a private company could bid an even higher price for the project if they believe they can earn more profit.¹¹ The implementation holistically would have to rely on public-private partnerships to fully unleash government resources and take advantage of private sector equity in an industry where growth potential is still robust.

Rideshare companies could be a barrier to overcome in the implementation of the policy. In some large cities, Lyft owns and operates micromobility options including both e-scooters and bikeshare, but in smaller cities Lyft has no stake in the systems. Moving forward, bikeshare systems will need to remain price competitive and reliable such that people don't turn to rideshare if bikeshare is unavailable. Pricing shouldn't be a particular issue of concern in smaller cities where the market penetration rate of rideshare is low, but is a consideration, nonetheless.

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Towards Cleaner Air: Establish Tax Reforms on Private Jet Fuel for Environmental Progress

By Connor Weiss, cjw273@cornell.edu

Private non-commercial jets, which are jets with less than 20 seats purchased for business or leisure purposes, are one of the most carbon-intensive forms of transportation. The United States should pass laws that disincentivize travel via private jet.

Background

Air travel is one of the most popular forms of transportation worldwide due to its relatively low prices, convenience, and safety.^{1,2} Air travel is becoming ever more important in a globalized world, contributing to 5.1% of US GDP.³ However, aviation is one of the most carbon-intensive forms of transportation, estimated to account for around 3% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.⁴ It is also recognized to be a notoriously difficult sector to decarbonize, as the flights rely on energy-dense fossil fuels like kerosene.⁵

Commercial air travelers bear the burden of numerous taxes and fees imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and major airlines. Of all flights handled by the FAA in the US, 16% are private, yet those flights only contribute about 2% of the taxes that fund the FAA's daily functions.⁶ Instead, Americans who fly commercial contribute around 70% of the tax revenue received by the FAA.⁶ Furthermore, private flights emit at least ten times more carbon dioxide per passenger than commercial flights.⁶ This issue has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic, with private flights increasing by 20%, leading to a 23% increase in carbon dioxide emissions within the same period.⁷

These concerning developments require action to help slow the pouring of GHG emissions into our atmosphere, which is exacerbating climate change and raising the globe's temperature by 1.5°C.⁸ If these trends were to continue, everyday consumers and those who

can't afford air travel would have to bear the brunt of climate change and increasing inequality while the rich are able to travel freely with little repercussions.

Policy Idea

The United States Congress should pass a law that raises the federal jet fuel tax from \$0.219 per gallon to \$0.438 per gallon for non-commercial flights. This policy should also create a 10% transfer tax and a 5% sales tax that would apply to pre-owned and new purchases of jets, respectively. A new sustainable transportation fund would hold the funds raised from the new taxes, subsidizing local initiatives of lower carbon-intensive forms of transportation. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should have jurisdiction over the distribution of sustainable transportation funds.

Policy Analysis

The median wealth of those who fully own private jets is \$190,000,000 in comparison to all US adults, who have \$79,274.⁶ Those who fly privately have the capital available to pay the extra tax on their fuel. By doubling the current tax, as suggested by the Institute for Policy Studies's High Flyer Report, the federal government could raise significantly more capital to fund cleaner energy initiatives.⁶ In addition, introducing a 10% transfer tax would ensure that owners cannot donate their jets without contributing to greener forms of transportation.

To determine the efficacy of using tax policy to change consumer

activity, the government should look to legislation in Norway, which has attempted to reduce GHG emissions from transportation by incentivizing clean energy vehicles. Norway's policy modifies their vehicle registration tax based on expected CO₂ emissions per kilometer.⁹ In fact, this policy caused the share of high CO₂-emitting vehicles to drop by 12%.⁹

Another common form of policy for disincentivizing undesirable behaviors is known as a sin tax. As sin taxes has increased on goods such as cigarettes, it has been found that people are less likely to purchase them due to the price increase, leading to a historic low in cigarette usage in the US.^{10,11} The sustainable transportation fund will be important for creating a federal source of funding for non-emission burning infrastructure, so towns that would conventionally be unable to implement cleaner forms of transportation would have more capital to do so.

Highlights

- Due to its status as the second cheapest and statistically safest mode of transportation per mile, the US civil aviation industry contributes 5.1% to the GDP with its vital role in global tourism, supply chains, and business.^{2,1,3}
- Civil aviation, being highly carbon-intensive and reliant on jet fuel, is difficult to decarbonize.⁵ Furthermore, private jets contribute ten times more GHGs per passenger than commercial airlines, while

only contributing to about 2% of the FAA's function.⁶

- Congress should raise the federal private jet fuel tax from \$0.219 to \$0.438 per gallon, akin to implementing a sin tax. The collected tax revenue would fund less carbon-intensive transportation projects. This policy would level the playing field, ensuring that the richest among us are fairly contributing to environmental initiatives if they wish to pollute.
- Countries like Norway have successfully implemented sin taxes on vehicles' expected CO₂ emissions per kilometer, where the use of CO₂-intensive vehicles has dropped by 12%.⁹

Implementation

In the US, environmental policies face opposition due to their broad impacts across various sectors. To create a viable environmental policy, it is essential to tailor the policy to a specific issue that can be broadcast simply and succinctly. The first step in implementing this policy would be building a coalition consisting of NGOs and trade associations that would support the policy and conduct grassroots efforts to gain support, and pressure lawmakers who would be on the edge of supporting this bill. Some possible organizations include the Nature Conservancy, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Natural Resource Defense Council.

Due to increased polarization around environmental initiatives, there is likely limited bipartisan support available for this bill, though specific Senators to target would be Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. Admittedly, it is unlikely that this bill would pass in the Republican House of Representatives or reach a supermajority in the Senate to pass the filibuster. The best path for this policy to become law is through the reconciliation process if Joe Biden wins reelection in 2024 and Democrats

take back the House of Representatives. President Biden has already stated his support for this type of environmental policy in his State of the Union. He has also released budgets which would include this type of provision.¹² President Biden could additionally utilize the bully pulpit to bring more attention to the bill and talk about the benefits.

Additionally, US Senators Markey, Whitehouse, and Welch have introduced legislation that levies a \$190 per ton CO₂ tax emitted by private jets.¹³ While this bill hasn't been moved on, it shows that there is support for this type of policy among Senate Democrats. My proposed policy should be passed through the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, so it can be placed into a larger reconciliation bill.

Furthermore, my policy would be eligible to be placed in a reconciliation bill because it follows the Byrd Rules and concerns the government changing the tax code.¹⁴ There already has been pushback from trade associations like the National Business Aviation Association, which question the necessity of targeting private jets for increased taxation.¹² Similar to the USDA's Climate Smart Commodities Partnerships, the sustainable transportation fund will function on a grant application basis, with possible projects applying to the EPA to receive aid and be chosen by a committee.¹⁴

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FOREIGN POLICY

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The UN Peacekeeping Force Needs More Women

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Recruiting more female United Nations (UN) peacekeepers can help address the systemic issue of sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and violence in UN peacekeeping operations. This will ultimately make them more effective at peacebuilding in post-conflict states.

Background

The UN operates 11 peacekeeping operations on three continents, consisting of over 75,000 military, police, and civilian personnel sent by over 110 countries.^{1,2} Despite the force's large size, it does not reflect the gender ratio of the civilian communities they are meant to protect. Females comprise only 9% of the total UN Peacekeeping Force (PKF), and this imbalance is more pronounced in some troop-contributing nations such as India.³ Despite being the second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions with over 5,500 troops, only 0.9% of India's deployed force is female.³

The UN has also struggled to prevent its peacekeepers from committing sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and violence (SEAHV). Such acts have resulted in growing distrust in UN missions by locals and the international community. In 2021, the UN repatriated Gabonese peacekeepers who were deployed as part of its Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic after preliminary investigations revealed "credible evidence of widespread and systemic sexual exploitation and abuse".⁴ According to UN-published data, reports of allegations continue to be a persistent issue across many UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs).⁵

Despite the push for transparency and the pursuit of justice against the perpetrators of SEAHV, the UN struggles to address the root of the problem. In 2015, former UN Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon described sexual abuse as a "cancer in

our system."⁶ His predecessor, Secretary-General António Guterres, vowed to improve the handling of abuse allegations seven years later in 2022. His efforts have resulted in a 300% increase in reports of SEAHV, which would have likely gone unreported otherwise.⁷ Transparency is an important step toward addressing systemic issues; however, the UN should also put greater effort towards recruiting more women into the PKF to create an operational environment less susceptible to SEAHV.

Policy Idea

The UN should expand its reformation efforts to include preventative measures in addition to SEAHV mitigation and response initiatives:

- Increase the number of female peacekeepers, deploy all-female police and security units, and assign them to missions with greatest exposure to local communities.
- Encourage Troop-contributing nations to meet structural and recruitment benchmarks set by the Uniformed Gender-Parity Strategy 2018–2028 through financial and peacekeeper training incentives.⁸
- Create a public blacklist of military units, leadership, and peacekeepers who were associated with allegations of abuse.
- Enforce criminal penalties against charged peacekeepers.

Policy Analysis

Gender inequality remains the primary driver of sexual abuse. Female peacekeepers would act as a barrier to counteract the lack of power by providing female authority and protection for women. These female peacekeepers should be placed in roles that place them in constant contact with the communities they protect. Civilians, particularly women, are more likely to respond to PKFs containing women.⁹ Greater interaction between local women and UN forces is especially important to ensure these missions properly navigate the region's gender norms and make civilians more likely to report instances of SEAHV. Even a small presence of female peacekeepers can reduce the incidence of rape and the use of prostitution by male peacekeepers.⁹ The UN should also work toward increased female leadership in PKOs and create all-female units that would operate in mixed-gender operational environments.¹⁰ Evidence gathered from current and past female deployments demonstrates that greater involvement of women in nation-building can reduce violence and set the foundation for a stable nation in the long term while also fighting restrictive gender norms that prevent greater gender equity.¹¹

Female participation in mixed or all-female units will have to contend with evidence pointing towards lower effectiveness in combat-related performance and higher risks of injury among females. A US Marine Corps study found that all-male units performed better in physical and weapons tests than mixed units. The

study recorded musculoskeletal injury rates of 40.5% for females compared to 18.8% for males.¹³ This finding is corroborated by a 2011 study that reported that women are about 67% more likely than men to be discharged for a musculoskeletal disorder.¹⁴

Highlights

- Sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and violence (SEAHV) has been a long-standing issue within UN peacekeeping forces despite negative media exposure and efforts to improve transparency.
- UN leadership and the UN Security Council have made efforts to address the issue and increase the proportion of female peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations (PKOs). These initiatives have shown some progress but have failed to reach their stated goals.
- By involving more women in PKOs, rates of SEAHV can be lowered significantly and the effectiveness of UN forces can be enhanced.^{9,10,11,12}
- Female peacekeepers should be given the opportunities to participate in traditionally male-dominated security and policing tasks in all-female units.
- Additional mitigation measures such as enforcement of criminal charges against perpetrators of sexual violence in UN Peacekeeping Forces and comprehensive tracking and blacklisting of peacekeepers, leadership, and units responsible for SEAHV can further reduce its likelihood.

Implementation

Currently, the UN reimburses countries for every peacekeeper they volunteer at a standard rate.¹⁵ This rate should be increased considerably for

female peacekeepers. The UN should also address the military policies of troop-contributing countries (TCCs) that may dissuade or outright discriminate against female participation in the military.¹⁶ TCCs, while contributing to the UN's humanitarian mission, receive an additional benefit of enhancing their military capabilities.

To incentivize TCCs to pursue gender equity in their military structures, member nations such as the US, EU, or China, can offer unique training opportunities to peacekeeping units, particularly female units, such as officer and NCO training and joint training exercises. Doing so could help bolster the capabilities of PKFs and help women bypass cultural or institutional barriers within the militaries of TCCs. Though there may be some hesitation regarding the cost of increasing this figure by more developed member nations, it would serve as a viable alternative to volunteering their own service members.

In an operational environment, all-female security units should not be mission-restricted. Interaction with local populations should be encouraged and efforts made to integrate these units in patrols. Female units should also be deployed alongside male units to provide additional capability while also providing the safeguard of female units against SEAHV. To mitigate the higher risks of injury for female peacekeepers, there should be an adherence to height-weight standards best suited for females. Fitness regimens for female units should be focused on training that limits risk of injury while still meeting fitness standards for PKOs.

In addition to these measures, the UN should create pathways for criminal penalties against peacekeepers guilty of crimes. Currently, peacekeepers are only repatriated to their home country, where they often do not face repercussions.¹⁷ Allowing oversight bodies to operate in PKOs to investigate allegations would create a

deterrent and allow for justice. These bodies should share their evidence with the International Criminal Court, which would have the final say regarding punishment. Peacekeepers should also be required to provide DNA samples pre-deployment for use in investigations.

The UN should also work to identify units and TCCs with higher instances of SHEAV and partner them with units, particularly female units, with little to no history of engaging in criminal acts. Creating a culture of self-policing would help break the culture of tolerance and silence regarding SHEAV. TCCs may oppose the lack of judicial control in these instances; however, the reputation and effectiveness of UN missions must take precedence over desires of impunity for peacekeepers.

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International Child Labor Laws in the Congo: A Need for Reform

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By following regulations set forth for youth labor by international labor organizations and ensuring that exploitative labor is legally banned, the rates at which children are subjected to extreme and strenuous working conditions in the DRC would fittingly decrease.

Background

Child labor laws and their frequent violation have been a prevalent issue within sub-Saharan Africa, especially within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The first occurrence of exploitative child labor in the DRC occurred during the 19th century when the Belgian Empire occupied the nation. Under King Leopold II's rule, the Belgians forced cruel working conditions upon the Congolese, killing over 20 million during the extraction of raw minerals such as cobalt and rubber.¹ Many of those who suffered exploitative working conditions were children. Such exploitative child labor has persisted within the nation and is present within the modern-day DRC. According to the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the DRC has approximately 40,000 child laborers who work in the mining or mineral cobalt industry.² These children are believed to work about 12 hours daily under strenuous and often dangerous conditions.² The employment of children for these positions is not only deemed dangerous by humanitarian organizations, but also violates international child labor laws. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the minimum age of working for children is globally set to 12–13 years for light work and 14–15 years for general employment. The ILO restricts hazardous work, such as the work conducted by children within the DRC, to individuals 18 years and older.³

The exploitation of child laborers in the DRC leads to detrimental consequences for the nation's youth, which often manifest in conflict, poverty, and a lack of access to basic amenities.⁴ The interplay between these factors has left children vulnerable to early marriage and additional forms of child abuse.⁴ The DRC has made moderate advancements in its efforts to eliminate exploitative child labor. In 2021, the country invested 40% of the nation's budget in primary education and implemented the National Action Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor program. Nonetheless, violations of international child labor laws continue to run rampant in the country.⁵

Policy Ideal

The Congolese government should pass strict federal legislation that mandates the completion of primary education through 8th grade among children who intend to be employed and should strictly follow ILO regulations that restrict hazardous and strenuous work to individuals 18 years of age and older. Legislation should also prohibit employment sectors from utilizing labor from children who have not yet completed their primary education or are below the age of 18 years if they engage in hazardous and strenuous work. Penalties for breaching this law should include heavy tax fines and prison sentences imposed upon employers who exploit child laborers.

Policy Analysis

Countries that encountered similar child labor law enforcement issues like Eswatini and Georgia have successfully implemented strict national regulations that work to limit exploitative child labor practices and adhere to legal precedents established by international labor coalitions. For instance, the government of Eswatini has made several independent efforts to reduce child labor, including the Employment Act of 1980.⁶ This act restricts children under the age of 15 from engaging in industrial work unless the child is directly related to the employer or the work is primarily educational. Eswatini's Employment Act also restricts non-industrial employers from employing children during school hours and sets working hour regulations. Likewise, the nation's chapter of the Reducing Exploitative Child Labour in South Africa Project (RECLISA Project) works to raise awareness of exploitative child labor practices in the region by supporting over 2,000 children who are at risk of labor exploitation by enrolling them in primary and secondary schools.⁷ Such efforts have enabled Eswatini to reduce its percentage of child laborers to 11.7% and increase its school attendance by 92.5%—a substantial improvement compared to the DRC's child school enrollment rate of 68.8%. Similarly, Georgia has utilized expert labor inspectors to monitor and identify coerced or exploitative labor practices to effectively mitigate the violation of child labor laws in the nation.⁸ Inspection programs, combined with the nation's newly adopted prosecution

strategy that works to legally reprimand employers engaged in child labor exploitation and trafficking, has lowered the country's percentage of child laborers to 2.9%—a minuscule margin when compared to the DRC's rate of 17.4%.

Highlights

- The violation of child labor laws has been a persistent issue evident within sub-Saharan Africa, predominantly in the Democratic Republic of Congo and its cobalt mining and mineral extraction sectors.¹
- Despite moderate efforts in the DRC to reduce exploitative child labor practices, approximately 40,000 children continue to be employed in hazardous and often dangerous working conditions. Additional legislation should be enacted and enforced to monitor and prevent the violation of international child labor laws.^{2,5}
- By imposing strict regulations and punitive measures on employers that subject children to extraneous and hazardous working environments and mandating the employment of workers who have finished their primary education, DRC's legislators should follow international models to help reduce instances of exploitative child labor.³
- This policy is feasible, as funding may be allocated from existing initiatives to prevent child labor within the DRC in addition to aid received from international humanitarian and labor organizations.¹⁴

Implementation

This policy should be introduced at the federal level, with community groups like the Democratic Republic of Congo Pact Children Out of Mining (COM) program as well as the COTECCO project leading in the

policy's efforts to effectively mitigate the violation of child labor laws within the DRC.^{9,10} Likewise, by collaborating with organizations that reach a vast amount of youth; like UNICEF, Save the Children, and the ILO; the government of the DRC can receive international aid in creating federal legislation aimed at preventing exploitative practices upon child laborers.¹¹

The DRC has a bicameral parliament made up of the lower and upper houses known as National Assembly and Senate.¹² Due to the country's variance in time taken to pass legislation, a firm timeline regarding the law's enactment cannot be made. However, when assessing the country's attempts to enact legislation to prevent exploitative child labor in 2021, it can be inferred that the policy's timeline would not surpass its preceding legislation.¹³

The funding needed to implement this policy should be obtained by reallocating the funding given to the nation's pre-established programs that inefficiently mitigate exploitative child labor practices. Likewise, financial aid could be acquired from outside organizations.¹⁴ For example, the Fund for the Prevention of Child Labour in Mining Communities is a UN program that reduces child labor within the mining sectors—especially within highly susceptible copper belt communities in the nation's Lualaba and Haut-Katanga provinces.¹⁴

The success of this policy should be monitored by annually investigating and assessing the number of laborers who have either completed their primary education by verifying their educational certifications or are 18 years of age. Through such assessments, government officials can determine whether employers are adhering to international child labor laws and potentially prosecute violators through heavy fines or imprisonment.

The resistance this policy may receive would primarily stem from employers in the mining and mineral

extraction sector, who often rely on child labor to extract raw materials such as cobalt. In the regions of Katakana and Copperbelt, child laborers under the age of 18 years typically makeup 40% of miners in the area.¹⁵ However, by reducing child labor in the DRC, the nation can experience increased economic prosperity due to wage increases, health improvement, and educational retention.¹⁶

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Restoring Department of State Oversight for US Civilian Gun Exports

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Reclassifying US weapon exports to the State Department would strengthen foreign policy objectives oriented at addressing gun violence, promoting democracy and human rights in Latin America.

Background

Former President Trump's administration signed an executive order supported by gun rights lobbying groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF).¹ Since its enactment, the executive order has shifted the regulation of a wide array of private weapons sales from the Department of State (DOS) to the Department of Commerce (DOC). US gun manufacturers' business interests have lobbied for the reversal of this policy, as they seek to increase their global market penetration. Additionally, the regulatory shift has allowed the expanded flow of weapons used in international criminal activity. There is evidence that US companies' exported weapons have been appearing in crimes, yet without thorough crime gun tracking systems in importing countries, there are still significant gaps in gun tracking statistics.² Many Latin American countries lack regulatory powers or resources to track end-user abuses by weapon sales of US companies. The issue is particularly important in Latin American countries, where at least 67 percent of homicides were perpetrated with firearms, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.³ The DOC put a 90-day pause on licensing permits for weapons in October 2023, citing the "risk of firearms being diverted to entities or activities that promote regional instability, violate human rights, or fuel criminal activities."⁴ Nonetheless, the reclassification of assault rifles, shotguns, and handguns into the purview of the DOC has led to lower accountability for US gun

exporters. The ban leaves an opening for future regulatory adjustment, but the DOC still lacks proper incentives and long-term mechanisms to advance US foreign policies, specifically those aimed at promoting democracy and human rights over economic growth.

Policy Idea

To reduce US weapon sales that harm US foreign policy, President Joe Biden should sign an executive order banning US weapon manufacturers from exporting assault weapons, handguns, and shotguns through the DOC and reinstating DOS oversight on civilian arms and ammunition sales. The executive order should reclassify gun sales outside the US as arms sales under the United States Munition List (USML), which would require DOS approval. This order would reduce legally sold US guns from entering unstable countries with high crime rates that lack proper gun regulations.

Policy Analysis

A Forum on the Arms Trade report found that past DOS license approval generated approximately \$9 billion annually, and DOC's Department Bureau of Industry and Security approved approximately \$10.5 billion per year in gun export licenses.⁵ This increase occurred due to the DOC's limited licensing standards and has resulted in export spikes in countries without proper gun tracking systems and rampant weapon black markets. One such case was Peru in which a spike in imported guns has fueled the cartel in Ecuador, according

to a Bloomberg investigation.⁶ President Biden Administration has acknowledged the need to enforce stricter export licensing criteria in DOC.⁷ Given the DOC's negligent track record and prior collaboration with weapons manufacturers, the logical solution emerges: reinstating DOS oversight to ensure regulatory efficacy. The risks of future presidential administrations quickly reversing additive restrictions and opening up licensing regimes remain a threat. Current efforts to increase cooperation with the DOC and DOS could also be easily reversed. The DOS is involved in reducing gun trafficking in Latin America through extensive investment in cooperative training and technology support.⁸ However, the DOC concurrently lacks policy controls to prevent firearm licenses in countries that lack proper gun-tracking efforts. Such facts are noteworthy, considering that the Government Accountability Office report found that about 40 percent of recovered and reported firearms in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were US-sourced.⁸ This report's insights are part of a much larger problem, since many confiscated guns are never reported and documented to DOS or ATF authorities. Without significant collaboration with import countries' police authorities and foreign gun regulators, the DOC risks increased gun accessibility and lower regulatory end-use checks that contravene US goals for security, democracy, and economic prosperity in Latin America.

Highlights

- The reversal of the USML's recategorization of assault weapons, handguns, and shotguns would reduce access to firearms in countries with weak gun regulations and high levels of gun violence by reorienting US policy decisions that benefit DOS goals.
- A Government Accountability Office report found that about 40 percent of recovered and reported firearms in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were US-sourced.⁷
- DOS license approval generated approximately \$9 billion per year, and a Forum on the Arms Trade report found that the DOC's Bureau of Industry and Security has approved approximately \$10.5 billion per year worth of gun export licenses.⁵
- President Joe Biden should sign an executive order to restore the status quo export to previous levels and reestablish DOS oversight.

Implementation

Gun rights lobbying groups, including the NRA and the NSSF, wield considerable influence in shaping US firearm policies. However, President Biden has demonstrated a willingness to challenge their agenda, particularly regarding gun control measures.⁹ His administration's commitment to prioritizing public safety and human rights over the economic interests of the gun industry suggests a readiness to take decisive action on weapon exports abroad and domestically. President Biden's stance on gun violence prevention and his administration's emphasis on diplomacy and multilateral engagement further align with the objectives of

reinstating State Department oversight.¹⁰ By leveraging these factors and employing strategic communication tactics to frame the issue as a national security and moral imperative, President Biden can enact meaningful policy change via executive order during his re-election campaign. The policy could raise awareness of President Biden's efforts to slow down increasing immigration on the southern border, partly caused by asylum seekers' escaping gun violence in Latin America. According to a Monmouth poll, 6 in 10 Americans see illegal immigration as a very serious problem.¹¹ Without bipartisan support for border reform, President Biden could use executive action such as weapon export controls as action-oriented at stopping the cause of illegal immigration at the source. By implementing this strategy, President Biden could address the rising concern of illegal immigration and demonstrate a commitment to human rights internationally.

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Ensuring Justice and Accountability: A Call to Action for Sudan's Darfur Crisis

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Given escalating ethnically motivated violence, timely action is imperative to protect civilians and prevent further atrocities in Sudan. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights should conduct investigative missions and publicly share findings to initiate accountability for perpetrators.

Background

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has precipitated a profound escalation of violence, notably within the Darfur region.¹ In Darfur, Arab-affiliated militias and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces have systematically targeted non-Arab civilians and communities, predicated solely on their ethnic background. This deliberate targeting has provoked a deluge of widespread atrocities typified by indiscriminate killings, pervasive looting, and the coercive displacement of countless civilians. These actions have not only inflicted immediate physical harm but have also catalyzed a myriad of psychological trauma and societal disintegration within affected communities.¹ Despite concerted international endeavors to secure a ceasefire and initiate peace negotiations, the situation on the ground persists in dire and volatile circumstances.¹

Civilians, particularly those residing in Darfur, find themselves ensnared in a perpetual state of vulnerability as they grapple with the looming specter of further violence and displacement. The struggle for a sustainable peace accord, compounded by the pervasive climate of impunity, has emboldened perpetrators to persist in their onslaught against vulnerable populations and exacerbate an already grim humanitarian crisis.³ Furthermore, the protracted duration of the conflict has severely strained the region's already fragile infrastructure. Such burdens have amplified the humanitarian ramifications and

impeded the dispensation of life-saving aid to affected populations.

In view of these harrowing circumstances, expeditious and concerted international action is imperative to address the root causes of the conflict, safeguard civilian populations from further harm, and facilitate the establishment of a sustainable peace process anchored in the tenets of justice, accountability, and human rights. By undertaking decisive action, The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) stands poised to play an indispensable role in fostering peace, justice, and stability within Sudan.²

Policy Idea

1. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) should take immediate action to address the crisis in Sudan and ensure accountability for perpetrators of atrocities. These actions should include conducting thorough investigations into human rights violations, monitoring the situation on the ground through country visits and rapporteurships, and collaborating with relevant international stakeholders to implement measures to protect civilians and prevent further violence.
2. Additionally, the ACHPR should work towards establishing mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable by submitting communications regarding

alleged violations to the UN and the International Criminal Court (ICC) and requesting provisional measures to prevent irreparable harm to victims.

Policy Analysis

The imperative to address escalating ethnically motivated atrocities in Sudan necessitates a pivotal role for the ACHPR. Comprehensive investigative measures are essential to protect civilians and redress underlying causes of the conflict by ensuring accountability for perpetrators. Central to this effort is the ACHPR's proposed engagement in fact-finding missions to Sudan, aimed at meticulously documenting human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law. By dispatching such missions, particularly to Darfur, the ACHPR can conduct exhaustive investigations and report on abuses occurring within the region and across Sudan. The ACHPR should harness its Special Mechanisms to investigate, including the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa and the Working Group on Death Penalty, Extra-Judicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Africa.⁴ These mechanisms are invaluable tools for monitoring and documenting pertinent human rights abuses, thus facilitating informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

The ACHPR should then ensure the meticulous organization of its findings and collaborate closely with pertinent stakeholders, such as the

UN Genocide Convention, to mobilize resources for effective action. The Rome Statute of the ICC will be an additional tool in this proposal of justice produced by collaboration.⁵ The Rome Statute furnishes a comprehensive framework for the adjudication of individuals implicated in grave circumstances, including genocide and crimes against humanity.

The ACHPR's proactive engagement is paramount in addressing the challenges facing Sudan. By undertaking these concerted efforts, the ACHPR can contribute significantly to pursuing justice and, ultimately, establishing sustainable peace in the Darfur region.

Highlights

- The ongoing conflict in Sudan has caused a notable uptick in violence, especially in the Darfur region. Rapid Support Forces and militias with Arab affiliations have committed several atrocities by targeting non-Arab citizens and villages based on their ethnic heritage.¹
- Despite international efforts to negotiate a ceasefire and initiate peace dialogues, the situation persists in dire and volatile circumstances. This violence has severely strained the region's fragile infrastructure and affected the dispensation of life-saving aid.¹
- The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) should conduct thorough investigations into human rights violations, monitor the situation on the ground, and collaborate with stakeholders to implement measures to protect civilians and prevent further violence.²
- The ACHPR should establish mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable by submitting communications to the United Nations and the International Criminal Court under the Rome Statute

regarding alleged violations and requesting provisional measures to prevent irreparable harm to victims.^{2,5}

Implementation

The participation of the ACHPR in addressing ground-level atrocities and contributing to international justice through data collection has limitations in immediately halting genocide or violence. This proposal aims not to cease violence immediately but rather to gather information to prompt resource-endowed governing bodies, including the United Nations, to take action. Nonetheless, this proposal offers a streamlined interventionist approach. Furthermore, caution is warranted in conducting proposed fact-finding missions due to the risk of data misuse by perpetrators. Despite these complexities, entrusting specialized professionals at the ACHPR with data collection underscores the importance of safeguarding victim privacy. Thorough investigation remains crucial in instances of mass killings, in addition to supporting intervention efforts and providing post-crisis assistance to affected communities.

Building upon the involvement of the ACHPR's aforementioned Specialized Mechanisms, it becomes apparent that their participation ensures the development of recommendations specifically addressing the organized killings and displacement of civilians. By leveraging their expertise, these mechanisms have the potential to provide nuanced insights into the intricate dynamics at play with the hope of facilitating targeted interventions to mitigate violence and foster accountability. Moreover, the ACHPR can conduct comprehensive investigations and present relevant evidence to the United Nations to halt violence and safeguard the vulnerable populace. Thus, entrusting the ACHPR with the task of conducting an extensive investigation is deemed optimal, given its established presence in the region and its capacity to offer

comprehensive support to victims while ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

While the active engagement of the ACHPR in facilitating the accountability process through meticulous data collection stands as a foundational imperative, it necessitates subsequent actions to ensure the culpability of perpetrators under the purview of international law. In this continuum of action, the next phase of implementation entails collaborative efforts with the ICC, as delineated within the parameters of the Rome Statute. By harnessing foundational principles enshrined within the Rome Statute, the ACHPR is poised to engage in a symbiotic partnership with the ICC, commencing with the initial stages of evidence acquisition and extending steadfast support for the prosecution of perpetrators responsible for the heinous acts perpetrated within Sudan's Darfur region.

Throughout the trajectory of this proposal, the ACHPR's involvement in compilation endeavors must meticulously align with the prerequisites articulated within the Rome Statute. This necessitates a steadfast commitment to upholding standards of impartiality, objectivity, and reliability, thereby ensuring the admissibility of evidence in the adjudicative proceedings of international criminal tribunals.

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Establishing an Effective Resettlement Program for Rohingya Refugees in Indonesia

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The Indonesian government should establish a Rohingya refugee resettlement program and combat domestic anti-immigrant efforts with international stakeholders such as the United Nations Agencies and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Background

The Rohingya, a Muslim minority ethnic group that has resided in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar for centuries, have faced systemic marginalization. Despite their historical presence in Myanmar, the Rohingya lack official government recognition as an ethnic group and have been deprived of citizenship since 1982.¹ This lack of recognition renders them the world's largest stateless community; Myanmar denies them fundamental rights and leaves them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

Over one million Rohingya have fled Myanmar due to ethnic violence and regional instability. Currently, over 960,000 Rohingya reside in Bangladesh, primarily in the country's densely populated Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps.¹ Recently, refugees have been met with hostility by Indonesian communities that are increasingly resistant to accommodating the arriving Rohingya. In December 2023, protesters on the Indonesian province Aceh's Sabang Island dismantled temporary shelters and threatened to push Rohingya boats back to sea.² Over 100 Indonesian students breached police barricades, physically attacked Rohingya refugees, coerced them onto trucks, and transported them to immigration authorities, demanding their deportation.²

Overcrowding and perilous conditions in Bangladeshi camps pushed more than 1,700 Rohingya refugees to embark on boats to

Indonesia in November 2023.³ Refugee rights activists are urging Indonesian authorities to cease the practice of pushing back Rohingya boats and to investigate and halt any assaults on refugees. Instead, they should allow refugees to disembark at the nearest safe port, providing them with the necessary protection and humanitarian aid and addressing any incitement of violence against them.

Policy Idea

Indonesia should develop a resettlement program for Rohingya refugees to regional provinces, including Aceh. The program should account for fundamental housing, childcare, and education services. Indonesia should provide fiscal support for community-driven initiatives to ensure the government's sustainability and allow Rohingya refugees to receive proper services.

Although President Regulation No. 125/2016 provides a framework for refugee protection in Indonesia, the country's decentralized governance structure has resulted in inconsistent responses at the local level.⁴ Indonesia should thus also implement laws and training that allow law enforcement to handle anti-immigrant crimes and motivated actions properly. With insufficient funding and support from the central government, local administrations are tasked with managing the crisis autonomously. Therefore, this situation requires more regional support from member countries in ASEAN and the United Nations, which could help with these

local operations, such as UN agencies like the UNHCR.

Policy Analysis

The Indonesian government should enhance its implementation strategies of resettlement programming to address immediate challenges related to local efforts and resource constraints and develop long-term plans for the refugees' integration into the country. The evolving anti-refugee attitudes in Aceh and the broader shifts in responses to Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia highlight the multifaceted challenges of managing a complex and prolonged crisis without sufficient global, national, and regional support.⁵ While community-driven efforts such as expanding housing accessibility and services are crucial, sustainable solutions require support from regional actors and the federal government. Without such support, local communities are likely to experience increasing fatigue and strain, leading to growing resentment toward the Rohingya.

Addressing the increase in Rohingya boat arrivals in Indonesia necessitates a collaborative approach that emphasizes shared responsibility and a commitment to a sustainable and comprehensive resolution. The international community should reassess its dedication to addressing the enduring displacement of Rohingya and acknowledge a collective obligation to provide a lasting solution. Regional cooperation made strides through efforts such as the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism at the Eighth Bali Process Ministerial Conference in

February 2023.⁴ However, these strategies have not resulted in a clear strategy for improving responses to the recent increase in maritime arrivals witnessed over the past few months. Regional counterparts should renew their cooperation by leveraging existing frameworks and enact policies to ensure coordinated and efficient policy responses to local crises.

Highlights

1. Since late December, there have been several demonstrators in Sabang Island, a province of Indonesia's Aceh, taking apart makeshift shelters and issuing threats to send Rohingya boats back out to sea. More than 100 Indonesian students broke through police barriers, assaulted Rohingya refugees, forced them onto trucks, and moved them to immigration authorities, urging for their removal from the area.²
2. The Indonesian government should improve its execution plans to tackle immediate issues arising from local initiatives and limited resources while formulating long-term strategies for integrating refugees into the nation. Doing so includes expanding housing services, childcare and enforcing stricter laws on anti-immigrant motivated crimes.³
3. Although President Regulation No. 125/2016 provides a framework for refugee protection in Indonesia, the country's decentralized governance structure has resulted in inconsistent responses at the local level. With insufficient funding and support from the central government, local administrations are tasked with managing the crisis autonomously.⁴

4. ASEAN and UN Agencies should collaborate with Indonesia and play a bigger role in addressing the Rohingya crisis through local operations.⁵

Implementation

The Indonesian government should establish a refugee resettlement program that will operate on a region-by-region basis to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. The program will outline a set of expectations for regional governments to follow. Establishing connections with local and international aid organizations will also better support these services and programming. While the exact amount of refugee resettlement funding is unclear, Indonesia Provinces Ministries should urgently adjust budgeting to address this nationwide crisis.⁶

Instead of investing in these resettlement camps, Indonesia's regional government should invest in permanent housing services, which would provide a better living environment. Working with humanitarian organizations such as Save The Children could assist regional governments with setting up more proper housing for refugees.⁷ In 2018, Indonesia enacted a policy ending the use of detention centers as shelters, including refugee youth.⁸ In 2019, Indonesia's Minister of Education enacted a policy ensuring the right to education for refugee youth.⁸ These policies should remain in practice, as previously seen implemented successfully in Jakarta, where the local government worked closely with NGOs to monitor proper housing and childcare services.⁸ In addition, these organizations have expanded childcare and educational opportunities for Rohingya Refugee youth. For example, in the camps in Aceh, Save the Children has established secure areas where children can engage in play and receive recovery assistance with the Geutanyoe Foundation's assistance.⁷

Indonesia should maintain its relationships with United Nations Agencies such as UNHCR and IOM to continue intensifying its efforts to deliver crucial local aid and protection to refugees arriving in Indonesia.⁹

With anti-refugee rhetoric increasing, the regional government has the responsibility to respond through enforcing strict policies on anti-refugee motivated crimes. These hate crimes should not be tolerated, and implementing strict laws would allow regional Indonesian courts to punish and prohibit these crimes from continuing. There should also be implemented training for Regional Search and Rescue Agencies, such as the one located in Banda Ache, so authorities can welcome Rohingya refugees and train them to combat local deportation efforts prompted by local community members.⁹

Lastly, ASEAN should cooperate with Indonesia and update its Refugee policy framework. This framework should include having ASEAN countries, mainly Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, undertake more significant efforts in monitoring boats of Rohingya Refugees, agreeing to enforce fair asylum procedures, and providing access to legal representation.¹⁰

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Reconstructing Argentina's Economy: How Import Substitution Industrialization Could Revitalize Argentina's Economy

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Argentina should adopt a modified Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) strategy to prioritize state-led investments in domestic initiatives while stimulating economic growth and social welfare.

Background

Since their inception as Spanish colonial possessions, Latin America has struggled with developing economic growth policies. Despite the region's abundant natural resources, the story appears to remain the same in regards to Latin American economic development: the region's states are capital-poor and rely on international capital to fuel their growth process.¹ Moreover, integrating Latin American states into global capital markets may sacrifice domestic sector development goals, as one would have to maintain a compatible exchange rate in line with international market conditions.¹ Reliance on international capital and volatile socioeconomic conditions makes Latin American economic development a daunting task.

Despite short-term economic growth, Argentina's fluctuating economic development policies in conjunction with political turmoil have consistently failed to sustain growth. The rise and fall of President Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962) and his management of Argentina's state-owned oil enterprise, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), exemplify the challenges of maintaining consistent Latin American economic policies. Because Frondizi favored utilizing foreign capital in economic development by setting contracts with oil companies, he faced intense public backlash and was overthrown in a coup d'état.² Even later initiatives, such as the 1991 Convertibility Plan, were fruitless. While the Convertibility Plan pegged the Argentine peso with the US

dollar and successfully diminished inflation rates from 3,000 percent to 0.1 percent in 1996, it still ended in failure during 2002 when Argentina defaulted on a historic \$155 billion public debt as capital fled the country amid eroding credibility.¹ Regardless of administration or time period, Argentina has constantly faced issues with economic development.

Policy Idea

Argentina should adopt a modified import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy that prioritizes state-sponsored policies that invest in domestic development initiatives to enhance social welfare. This approach should emphasize reigniting domestic production while also seeing positive social returns on investment. First, due to its volatile and unstable economic situation, Argentina should initially not abandon its current policies on generating revenues, enhancing investor confidence, and tackling inflation, as they are temporarily needed to refill long empty state revenues. Secondly, once Argentina has developed enough revenues under the current administration, it should eventually adopt expansionary state-led developmental policies that aim to stimulate domestic growth. Finally, the nation should invest generated funds into social welfare initiatives to better support its financially struggling populace.

Policy Analysis

The past decade of Argentina's economic history demonstrates that ISI can boost economic development in the modern day. After the 2002 financial crisis, the Argentine government imposed a levy on primary commodity exports such as soybean, corn, and wheat. The government later distributed the gains from this levy to the domestic manufacturing sector.³ Distributing the gains to the domestic manufacturing sector resulted a gross domestic product increase from 11.2 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2008.³ In other words, Argentina oversaw the successful implementation of ISI's two core aspects by heavily taxing imports, using those incomes to develop domestic manufacturing, distributing those gains to their manufacturing sector, and stimulating substantial GDP growth.

When evaluating past examples of ISI's implementation, the strategy demonstrates its potential to boost contemporary economic development in Argentina if the state invested in domestic production initiatives. ISI historically succeeded by having the state invest in its domestic industries, which saw a positive impact on domestic production and gross domestic product. However, the state has lost the reserves it needs to continue with ISI since 2010 due to declining wages and depleting foreign exchange reserves amidst capital flight from investors.³ Despite current President Javier Milei's short-term revenue-boosting policies, they are unsustainable in the long run. In light

of this, the proposed policy suggests temporarily allowing these policies to generate the needed revenues to transition to the long-term ISI policy in the coming years.

Highlights

- Argentina has grappled with economic growth challenges since its colonial inception, facing political instability, elitist policies, and reliance on international capital, which has hindered sustainable development despite short-term growth spurts and failed economic initiatives under several administrations.¹
- Past initiatives, such as the 1991 Convertibility Plan, diminished inflation rates but caused one of Argentina's historic defaults that resulted in capital and investors fleeing from the country amidst instability and economic credibility concerns.¹
- Following the 2002 financial crisis, the government implemented Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) by imposing levies on primary commodity exports and reinvesting the proceeds into domestic manufacturing.³ As a result, gross domestic product significantly increased from 11.2 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2008.³
- Argentina should initially maintain current economic policies to generate the necessary revenues to transition to a state-led developmental approach under ISI that emphasizes the state investing in domestic production projects around the country.

Implementation

Successfully implementing ISI requires allowing Milei's policies to temporarily continue until 2027 to build reserves for ISI. Simultaneously, Senator Oscar Isidro Parrilli and Deputy Pablo Todero of the Neuquén Province should form multiparty coalitions advocating for

ISI before the October 2025 midterm elections in light of Congress's recent victory over Milei, which granted federal spending to domestic production projects in Neuquén Province where they both represent.

First, the Argentine Congress should temporarily allow Milei's policies to continue until the end of his term in 2027 to build up the state reserves necessary for ISI. As of March 2024, Milei has built up the state's reserves by \$5 billion USD.⁴ Moreover, he has rolled over import debts by successfully issuing Bond for the Recovery of a Free Argentina (Bopreal) bonds.⁴ These are bonds that boost imports used in local manufacturing by providing importers with a way of paying off their debt.⁵ Despite these gains, Milei's focus on limiting state intervention with a plan that requires state intervention positions him and his party, La Libertad Avanza and their alliances in Congress, as formidable obstacles to ISI being considered.

To overcome La Libertad Avanza's domination over the Senate, Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate's National Economy and Investment Committee, Senator Oscar Isidro Parrilli and Deputy Pablo Todero should rally their colleagues who voted against Milei's omnibus bill back in February 2024 and form multiparty coalitions in both chambers in Congress to advocate for ISI and should do so before the upcoming October 2025 midterm elections. Although a modified omnibus bill passed in the Chamber of Deputies as of February 2024, Congress nevertheless forced the president to concede provincial federal spending to an oil pipeline in the Neuquén Province.^{6,7} Before October 2025, Deputy Todero should swiftly garner support from like-minded Chamber of Deputies members, such as Vice President Cecilia Moreau and First Minority Leader Germán Martínez, as they risk losing influence and promoting ISI if they are voted out of power.⁸ Senator Isidro Parrilli should also do the same with senators who belong with other center-left parties such as PJ or UP, given his vocal opposition to the the president's handling of

executive power.⁹ While the prospect of Milei and his party shutting down this opposition is probable, a unified opposition in Congress will most likely provide the grounds of implementing ISI in the near future.

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Improving the International Labor Law of the Tech Industry

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The United States and its EU allies should raise tariffs by 10% on tech products manufactured by exploited laborers while filing complaints with the ILO to compel companies to fix inhumane practices in the tech industry.

Background

Currently, many major tech companies rely on Taiwan's Foxconn and similar manufacturing companies to assemble their products. These companies include Apple, Nokia, Google, Cisco, Sony, Microsoft, etc.¹

However, China Labor Watch has accused Foxconn of violating labor laws in the past to keep prices low.² Some reports from 2019 showed that employees were working 100 hours of overtime without pay while being abused for not meeting production targets.² Foxconn and Apple did admit to wrongdoing but continued exploitative practices.³

In 2023, the founder of Foxconn, Terry Guo, announced that he would run for president of Taiwan. In response, China investigated Foxconn's factories, and those factories are now moving to Karnataka State in India, which has removed labor protections in exchange for new Foxconn jobs in the area.^{4,5} These changes in India's labor laws include allowing up to 145 hours of overtime over three months while allowing women to work through the night.⁵ With prior offenses of worker abuse in China and other parts of India, this terrifying deal with India only means labor law violations as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) will continue.⁶

Other manufacturers that tech companies rely on, like Suyin Electronics and TSMC, also have labor violations beyond China and India.⁷ Tech companies perpetuate these inhumane conditions in order to cut operational costs and be more competitive in US and EU markets.⁸

Policy Idea

To remove the incentive that tech companies have to look for cheap, exploitable labor, the US Congress and its EU allies should impose a 10% tariff increase on technological products that use exploited workers. Meanwhile, the US State Department, Department of Labor, and the EU should file a complaint with the ILO based on international labor law violations to further add pressure on these tech companies.⁸ Solely the US and EU should implement these tariffs and complaints because most tech companies generate their revenue from the US and EU.⁹ By implementing the 10% tariff, the US and EU would apply pressure on both tech companies and the consumers to switch to labor friendly options while the ILO complaint compels the supply chain and foreign governments to follow international labor law.

Policy Analysis

Both the tariffs and ILO complaints are implementable and feasible. Tariffs have been proven effective in pushing tech companies like Apple to move manufacturing bases. In 2019, during the Trump trade war, a mere 10% increase in tariffs led to sharp drops in stock price, an eight million unit drop in iPhone sales, and movements to new factories.¹⁰ Another 10% increase in tariffs within the next three months—based not on country of origin but labor abuse—would encourage these tech companies to move away from current notorious labor practices.

To prevent tech manufacturers from making labor practices worse in response to these new tariffs, the US should also file a complaint with the ILO to initiate a formal investigation.⁸

As for the ILO complaint, the ILO Constitution in Article 26 highlights that any member has the right to file complaints with the ILO if a member is not observing the conventions of the ILO they have ratified.¹¹ Many countries with these abusive working conditions, like China and India, have ratified conventions C105 and C100 for the abolition of forced labor and equal rights.^{12,13} Most or all of these conventions were broken by tech manufacturers, especially with the new, relaxed labor laws in India. ILO complaints will force companies to comply with reasonable labor laws.

Both tariffs and ILO complaints have been implemented in the past with success. They can both be used again to fight for reasonable labor policy in developing countries.

Highlights

- Current tech manufacturing companies are colluding with foreign governments and tech companies to illegally exploit labor based on international law to keep prices as low as possible.^{1,3}
- Despite numerous existing international laws in the International Labor Organization and national laws where these factories are located, nothing is being done to enforce those laws.^{4,6}
- The United States and the European Union should pass

new tariffs on tech products manufactured with illegal labor in order to increase the costs of using illegal labor and economically encourage foreign governments and their supply chains to stop using illegal labor.¹⁰

- The United States, by filing a complaint with the ILO, should bring global attention to the inhumane and illegal conditions in those tech factories, which also prevents these companies from worsening conditions to match new operating costs that come with tariffs.⁸
- The proposed policy will support workers globally with tariffs until their working conditions are improved while putting labor law violations of tech companies and other parts of the tech supply chain on international news.

Implementation

This policy should be introduced at both the federal level in the United States and the international level. The policy should be first suggested to Republican Senator Ted Budd of North Carolina. Senator Budd has been tough on trade with foreign countries in the past with a previous “China Trade Relations Act.” Additionally, he is on both the Senate Committee of Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security. He is one of the most likely Senators to pass this policy. However, this policy, unlike his previous acts, being more precise in its target and language, will be more effective and more likely to pass Congress—especially since this policy is targeting private entities that break international laws, not other governments.

For the European Union to cooperate with the United States on the tariff, the next step should be to reach out to Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell to direct the State Department to coordinate for the US and its allies to impose tariffs on illegally manufactured tech goods. With the State Department on board, the next step should be to

direct Ambassador Mark Gitenstein to inform the EU of the plan and convince them to follow suit.

The ILO complaint can be filed by the State Department, which would entail informing Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield’s office at the UN. The ILO complaint can be seconded by private organizations and unions. Reaching out to the International Trade Union Confederation, which represents 191 million workers in 169 countries, can support that ILO complaint, which would also build new labor solidarity globally. This policy is in line with global union goals, which would get labor movements internationally to pressure governments to adopt the policy and pressure corporations to comply.

Support can be drawn from both sides of the political spectrum. The tariffs would be a protectionist stance while being based on human rights and international cooperation. It would also draw support from the growing labor movement. The policy is likely to get through both Senate and the House, as it accomplishes the goals of both parties. Backlash could come from the companies that benefit from the low prices that the illegal labor comes from. However, that resistance will be the minority given that many groups have a reason to support this policy.

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Hosts After Hanawon: Creating A Host System for North Korean Defectors in South Korea

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The South Korean government's Ministry of Unification should implement a post-Hanawon host family/host individual system to help North Korean defectors achieve healthy social adjustment in the country and reduce the negative stigma surrounding escapees.

Background

North Korea's economic collapse and famine under the country's former leaders Kim Il-sung and his successor Kim Jong-il led to an unprecedented influx of defectors seeking refuge in their southern neighbor during the late 1990s and early 2000s.^{1,2,3,4} In 1999, South Korea's Ministry of Unification (MOU) opened the Settlement Support Center for North Korean Refugees—colloquially referred to as Hanawon—in Anseong to accommodate the high defector volume.^{3,5,6} Since Hanawon's establishment, the MOU has accepted over 30,000 refugees and opened a second location.^{1,7}

Upon arrival in South Korea, all North Korean defectors undergo a three-month interrogation process by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) as a precautionary security measure and to gather information about the reclusive North.⁸ Following their clearance, the NIA sends defectors to a Hanawon facility wherein the MOU coordinates a 12-week program designed to acclimate the defectors to the South's lifestyle, culture, and capitalist economy.⁶

Hanawon's initial acclimation program was criticized by some defectors, scholars, and advocacy organizations for its lack of practical job training, long-term assistance, and on-site physical and mental health professionals.^{4,9,10,11} News coverage has highlighted that physical examinations are now commonplace and defectors undergo hours of training to learn how to access physical and mental health

resources.^{5,12} Notably, Hanawon now offers defectors 22 courses on various vocational expertise to help them enter the workforce.^{5,6,13} Defectors also receive numerous subsidies and benefits depending on their characteristics upon graduation from Hanawon.¹

Debates regarding Hanawon's curriculum have continued, but two obstacles continue to impede defectors' smooth integration into South Korean society—societal discrimination and loneliness.^{6,14} According to the Korea Hana Foundation (KHF), an MOU non-profit, around one in six surveyed defectors reported experiencing discrimination in their 2023 Resettlement Survey.¹⁵ To combat this trend, the MOU should consider implementing social programs to help integrate defectors smoothly into South Korean society.

Policy Idea

To further acclimate North Korean defectors to South Korean society, reduce the negative stigma surrounding escapees, and provide defectors with a stable social connection to prevent isolation and loneliness, the MOU should establish a post-Hanawon host family system that includes the following:

1. A voluntary host system for defectors who lack family members or companions in South Korea and wish to establish a personal connection with a South Korean family or individual(s)
2. Designated South Korean host families or individuals, selected on a volunteer basis following necessary clearances
3. A voluntary system of shared residence or constant contact, giving the defector(s) and host(s) the option to live together
4. Stipends for host(s) designed to compensate them for their time and miscellaneous expenses they may incur while caring for the defector
5. A set length for the hosting period agreed upon by the host(s) and defector(s)

Policy Analysis

As defection becomes more difficult, North Koreans will be less likely to escape in larger groups, such as their family unit. From 2019 to 2022, the number of defectors Hanawon received yearly plummeted from 1,047 to just 67.¹ During this period, escaping North Korea became nearly impossible when its current leader Kim Jong-un used the COVID-19 pandemic to justify locking down the nation's borders with China and Russia—the former country being the most common escape route for defectors.^{16,17,18} The MOU saw a slight increase to 196 defectors in 2023 as North Korea slightly relaxed its border restrictions, but rates are still comparatively low.^{1,19} A smaller defector population can exacerbate feelings of loneliness among escapees—a problem that has already

left detrimental effects on defectors' psychological well-being.^{20,21} Other international charitable organizations have coordinated successful host family programs for refugees, such as the United Kingdom's Positive Action in Housing.^{22,23} Such facts demonstrate that host families or individuals are opportune mechanisms for defectors' healthy social adjustment to South Korea.

North Korea and South Korea's prolonged separation has resulted in cultural and linguistic differences which make it easier to identify a North Korean refugee. The KHF's 2023 Resettlement Survey found that 72.8 percent of discrimination instances occurred due to differences in North Koreans' "communication culture" which includes language, lifestyles, and attitudes.¹⁵ When analyzing language differences, South Koreans have incorporated many English loan words into their language while the North has somewhat "purified" their language of foreign influence.^{24,25,26} These linguistic differences pose learning challenges for defectors and have pushed some to conceal their accents to avoid being identified and discriminated against.²⁷ Providing a host family or individual can help defectors learn loan words while acclimating their hosts to North Korean communication styles.

Highlights

- The South Korean government's Ministry of Unification (MOU) coordinates an acclimation program for North Korean defectors at their two Settlement Support Centers for North Korean Refugees—both colloquially referred to as Hanawon.^{1,2,3,4,5}
- Hanawon offers a three-month program with 22 courses designed to adjust defectors to South Korea's capitalistic lifestyle and offer them practical job training.^{5,6,13}

- Many Hanawon graduates often feel socially isolated after the program ends and have experienced discrimination in South Korean society primarily due to differences in communication culture.^{15,20,21,27}
- To improve refugees' smooth acclimation to South Korean society, reduce their feelings of loneliness, and help reduce the stigma surrounding North Korean escapees, the MOU should implement a host program that would pair defectors with a family or individual on a voluntary basis.

Implementation

A host system will likely provide healthy social benefits to defectors, but opting into the system should not be mandatory. Considering that surveyed defectors' second most common motivation for leaving North Korea was hatred of the government's uncurbed monitoring and authority, creating a controlling environment could exacerbate defectors' stress levels.²⁸ Additionally, the MOU should not force those who opt into the system to be housed with their hosts in order to grant them an appropriate amount of personal autonomy.

Considering the negative stigma surrounding North Korean defectors, recruiting host volunteers may be difficult. If difficulties arise, the MOU can begin outreach campaigns to volunteers or employees of non-governmental organizations and other defector advocacy groups—many of which have previously collaborated with the Ministry. The MOU should coordinate comprehensive background checks of all individuals who wish to participate in the program to help ensure defector safety. Pre-program surveys can be distributed among hosts and defectors to allow them to indicate living preferences, special accommodations, etc. Additionally, the MOU should provide a system for hosts and defectors to report potential issues, such as interpersonal conflicts

or safety concerns, and request Ministry agents to address them on-site if necessary.

In light of ongoing tension on the Korean peninsula and mounting pressure from South Korea's current president Yoon Suk-yeol to cut spending, the MOU presented South Korea's National Assembly with a budget proposal that would reduce the Ministry's 2024 funding by 40 percent, restructure ministries focused on inter-Korean cooperation, and cut defector resettlement budgets by 7 percent.^{29,30} Despite the funding decrease, defectors' stipends are still set to increase due to lower escapee rates requiring fewer MOU expenditures.³⁰ Securing additional funding for the host program may be difficult under President Yoon's plans for the MOU. To account for this potential impediment, any remaining funds in the defector settlement budget can be allocated to paying volunteer hosts for their efforts. Stipends can be adjusted considering whether the defector lives with the host(s), how many defectors they accommodate, and other miscellaneous expenses. Hosts should be mandated to keep accurate logs of their expenses and send monthly summaries to MOU financial officials. By successfully implementing a host system, the MOU can effectively assist defectors with social adjustment while promoting an inclusive South Korean society amidst regional tension.

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“Sey No More”: Combatting Galamsey to Promote Environmental Sustainability and Economic Development in Ghana

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To combat illegal mining, the Ghanaian government should establish a formalized system of small-scale mining, educate on the societal and environmental impacts of illegal mining, and empower communities to instill the shared responsibility of upholding environmental sustainability without impeding economic development.

Background

In Ghana, "galamsey" refers to illegal, small-scale gold mining. Small, poorly-equipped, untrained, and unlicensed groups exploit gold deposits in rivers, forests, and other areas, bypassing regulations and safety measures.¹ The methods employed in galamsey—specifically the use of mercury and cyanide to extract the gold—lead to severe environmental degradation and harmful environments.^{1,2} Unregulated mining practices devastate forests, pollute water bodies with mercury and cyanide, and threaten biodiversity. The Ghana Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) estimates show that over 25% of Ghana's forest cover has been lost to galamsey.^{4,5} The health risks associated with the contamination of water with mercury and cyanide include neurological problems, birth defects, and kidney damage.^{2,3} Estimates by the EPA show that over 40% of waterbodies in mining areas exceed mercury safety limits.⁵

Galamsey operations also contribute to the exploitation of labor, child labor, and conflicts over mining territories in the country which affect overall economic and social stability.² According to a report by the Ghana Statistical Service in 2019, the prevalence of child labor in mining and quarrying activities, which includes galamsey, was estimated to be around 22.4% among children aged 5 to 17.^{2,4} This data is based on only reported incidences. Child workers may be forbidden from receiving an education

due to their obligations to support mining operations. The illicit nature of galamsey makes enforcing fair labor practices challenging. Individuals engaged in galamsey see it as a source of income, but the overall economic impact is negative. The World Bank estimates that Ghana loses \$5 billion annually due to galamsey.^{4,7} Galamsey leads to legitimate mining operations being undermined which eventually leads to revenue losses for the Ghanaian government and legal mining companies.

Policy Idea

“Sey No More” is a three-point plan to tackle galamsey in Ghana:

- **Formalize Small-Scale Mining:** Establish a legal framework for small-scale mining with safety training for miners on handling toxic chemicals. Doing so includes a code of conduct for responsible mining practices, enforced by regulatory bodies and communities (two-month review, six-month education rollout).
- **Increase Community Engagement & Empowerment:** Partner with local communities to raise awareness about the environmental harms of galamsey and promote sustainable alternatives for employment. Introduce and create alternative income sources for people through vocational training and agricultural initiatives, to

reduce reliance on galamsey as a source of income and wealth accumulation. Will involve a three-month needs assessment, 3-month campaign development, and ongoing education).

- **Strengthen Law Enforcement:** Increase penalties for galamsey and ensure transparency in law enforcement to deter participation. Utilize advanced technologies like satellites for frequent monitoring of mining activities to identify and swiftly respond to illegal operations in time before they pose severe hazards to the environment (four-month review and strengthen penalties, three-month implementation, and communication).

Sey No More's success hinges on collaboration between government, citizens, and credible institutions in Ghana, along with responsible use of national funding for social welfare programs and economic development.

Policy Analysis

Ghana has a long history of battling galamsey, with previous initiatives like Operation Vanguard in 2017 utilizing military force and the Land and Minerals Act of 2006 focusing on regulations and licensing.^{2,4} These efforts failed to work primarily because they addressed Galamsey's consequences, not its root causes.^{2,4,5} Unlike past initiatives, ‘Sey

No More’ recognizes that economic inequality motivates the uptick in illegal mining practices in Ghana as a source of income and a way of life. ‘Sey No More’ aims to directly target Galamsey by tackling societal inequities that contribute to participating in galamsey and corrupt employment practices aiding in Galamsey’s development. By providing alternative income sources through vocational training and agricultural programs for youth, ‘Sey No More’ tackles poverty, a significant driver of illegal mining participation.⁷

‘Sey No More’ fosters a sense of community ownership by actively engaging local residents. Education and awareness campaigns empower communities to become active participants in protecting their environment and promoting sustainable development strategies. While past initiatives focused on dismantling illegal mining operations, ‘Sey No More’ promotes long-term solutions. The emphasis on responsible mining practices minimizes environmental damage, while the development of alternative livelihoods ensures a lasting impact by reducing reliance on galamsey for income.

Although limited enforcement, inadequate resources, logistical difficulties, and institutional corruption can lead to the inefficacy of regulatory policies, ‘Sey No More’ hinges on citizen accountability and functions through instilling a sense of responsibility in Ghanaians. Failing to recognize the socially dictated reasons for participation in such activities renders the efficacy of these policies negligible. Sey No More’s emphasis on community and citizen empowerment to invest in more sustainable forms of employment makes the dream of eradicating the epidemic of galamsey a reality.

Highlights

- ‘Sey No More’ offers a comprehensive solution aimed at tackling galamsey through a multi-phased plan addressing

environmental, economic, and social aspects. Unlike past initiatives focused solely on enforcement, Sey No More offers a more holistic approach that tackles the root cause of the uptick in illegal mining practices: poverty.

- ‘Sey No More’ goes beyond enforcement by empowering miners with safety training and formalization. Additionally, community engagement fosters environmental awareness and discourages galamsey, with youth programs intended to provide alternative income sources that tackle the root cause of illegal mining involvement—poverty.
- ‘Sey No More’ aims to combat galamsey, a destructive practice that wreaks havoc on Ghana’s environment, pollutes water sources, harms local communities, and perpetuates cycles of inequality and poverty. By promoting responsible mining practices and providing sustainable alternatives for employment opportunities and wealth accumulation, ‘Sey No More’ paves the way for a brighter future for Ghana.

Implementation

The first aspect of Sey No More involves implementing a formal process for small-scale mining operations which involves educating miners partaking in mining activities on how to keep themselves and the environment safe from the toxic chemicals involved in mining processes. This will provide a legal code of conduct, which will enforce responsible mining practices and enhance oversight of mining operations. Key stakeholders include mining regulatory bodies, environmental agencies, and mining communities. Phase one of this step involves reviewing and updating regulations. Phase two involves

developing and implementing educational programs for miners.

The second aspect involves engaging local communities through educational campaigns for awareness of the effects of galamsey and empowering citizens through providing programs aimed at providing alternative sources of income such as vocational training and agricultural initiatives. This will help promote responsibility to maintain sustainability and sustainable employment alternatives to ‘galamsey’, discouraging involvement. Studies by the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health show that community engagement can lead to increased environmental consciousness. This aspect of ‘Sey No More’ will contribute to fostering a sense of responsibility among citizens, making them reject illegal mining, and invest in other forms of income. Key stakeholders include local communities, NGOs, and government agencies. Phase one, taking up to five months, will involve assessing community needs to develop awareness campaigns and vocational training opportunities. The next phase will be an ongoing process of implementing educational programs and pathways to employment. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has proven the success of alternative livelihood programs in reducing poverty and dependence on illegal activities for survival. This policy idea accentuates this need and recognizes the socioeconomic implications of employment opportunities, contributing to galamsey being seen as a reliable form of income.

The third aspect involves strengthening law enforcement through enforcing stricter legal penalties for galamsey, ensuring transparency in law enforcement operations, and enhancing current surveillance practices to deter participation. This will involve utilizing advanced technologies like satellites for frequent monitoring of mining activities to identify and swiftly

respond to illegal operations with frequent checkups by national agencies to ensure efficacy and efficiency. Key Stakeholders include national mining agencies, national technology providers, local and federal law enforcement, and environmental protection agencies. Phase one taking up to 4 months will involve reviewing and strengthening penalties and surveillance needs. Phase two, taking three months will involve the implementation of improved surveillance and consequences.

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Leveraging Grassroots-Level Action Against Myanmar Poppy Cultivation

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Myanmar is the world's leading producer of opium.¹ Grassroots-level intervention, financial incentive, and continuous monitoring are necessary for Myanmar to phase out poppy cultivation.

Background

Opium and its trade have ravaged economies, communities, and individuals since antiquity.² Now, global demand for this addictive narcotic depressant is valued at \$10 billion USD.³ Afghanistan has historically satiated most of this demand. However, the “Golden Triangle,” a fertile, mountainous region shared by Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, has become a globally significant producer since the proliferation of opium in Southeast Asia in the 1950s.² This regional upsurge in opium cultivation and export since the 2021 Myanmar coup d'état makes narcotics control an increasing concern.¹

Myanmar has emerged as the world's largest opium-producing country. Most of its opium is cultivated by small farmers whose incomes have been affected by the falling prices of edible crops and are trapped in a poverty cycle that bars them from upward social mobility.¹ Nevertheless, phasing out poppy cultivation is difficult due to ongoing factional conflict in Myanmar because major poppy-producing areas are controlled by paramilitary and dissenter groups.³ Furthermore, the Tatmadaw junta that is currently in power has been complicit in opium production and may be opposed to international intervention.³

While Myanmar has seen effective anti-opium legislation enacted between 1996 and 2006, it failed to address the underlying normative drivers of opium production.³ This includes the persistent demand for opium, the profitable nature of the drug

trade, and a lack of incentive for farmers to produce other less lucrative crops. The most effective approach is therefore to tackle poppy cultivation at the grassroots level using crop substitution, where an agency subsidizes and oversees the replacement of opium with alternative crops. Thailand has already set a successful and practical precedent; over the course of 40 years, the country was able to reduce opium production by 97% using substitute farming.⁴

Policy Idea

The United Nations should establish a nongovernment organization for the purpose of implementing two concurrent approaches. First, it should subsidize farmers for climate-appropriate cash crops such as coffee and tea to replace opium with. Second, it should incentivize the local private sector to ally with farmers and provide them a market in which to sell their products by financial means via foreign aid or investment. The agency should incentivize the Burmese government to control prices and ensure farmers earn enough to sustain a living.

The World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) should be a source of funds for this initiative, having previously worked with the Myanmar government.⁷ Meanwhile, Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation can provide farmers with techniques and management regarding the contract farming process, while the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development

could assist practically by building infrastructure and organizing farmers in productive unions.⁶

Policy Analysis

Instead of local government agencies, a non-governmental organization (NGO) should spearhead the effort because Myanmar, the largest opium producer in the Golden Triangle, is massively corrupt. The country ranked 162 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2023 Corruptions Perceptions Index.⁵ Corruption interrupts anti-narcotic efforts through bribery, coercion, and misuse of hard power by Myanmar's military regime.³ These crimes can lead to funding embezzlement and opium cultivators being pre-informed about scheduled drug raids. In addition, the 2021 coup has destabilized the bureaucracy and subsequently reduced government initiatives' efficacy, hence this initiative's emphasis on NGO rather than government action.³

Myanmar's government itself could also have a practical interest in remaining in the opium trade: its domestic opium market is worth \$2 billion, about 3% of its GDP.⁸ Moreover, the Tatmadaw has historically relied on opium farmers for tax revenues, so reimbursing it for losing its opium economy could motivate government cooperation.³ Therefore, the initiative should emphasize aid and financial incentives to help it bypass a corrupt bureaucracy and allow the policy's implementation to be overseen by the FAO and nonpartisan foreign agents.

Highlights

- Global demand for opium is valued at \$10 billion, and Myanmar has emerged as the world's leading opium producer.⁸ Opium in Myanmar is mostly produced by small independent farmers who are motivated by the low prices of alternative food crops.³
- Previous efforts to eliminate opium in Myanmar are ineffective in the long term because they fail to address normative problems.³ Factionalism, territorial disputes, and the current junta's history of complacency in opium production challenge a centralized, government-based approach to solving the issue.³
- An NGO-led effort to provide small Burmese farmers with lucrative alternative crops is a feasible solution. There is solid precedent, wherein Thailand has used this approach to eliminate opium production within 40 years.⁴ Funding should be obtained from intergovernmental organizations that have worked with the Burmese government in the past such as the UNFAO and foreign governments.⁷ Although they may be reluctant to participate, the project has significant practical and humanitarian appeal. The funding should be used as aid and financial incentives to bypass any unwilling bureaucracy.
- The program expects a statistically significant reduction in opium cultivation within 10 years, after which its funding may be renewed. The rural economy may also see growth as the initiative introduces improved infrastructure and more sustainable livelihoods.

Implementation

A grassroots bureaucracy is essential for this initiative to be successful. First, an NGO should be registered in Myanmar. Funding for all its operations should be obtained from the World Bank, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Thai government, which shares the Golden Triangle with Myanmar and for whom drug control is in its best interest.⁴ A board and staff experienced in negotiating with juntas and statistical analysis should be appointed alongside any available veterans from the past Thailand substitute farming program. The organization should then approach Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation and Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, offering to sponsor farming contracts and infrastructural work. The NGO should requisition further funds from the World Bank if needed. However, given the junta's corruption and human rights record, these funds should only be pledged on the condition that their use will be monitored by the NGO. Should they be allocated for any unethical use, including military purposes, the program will withdraw all further aid.

The majority of opium production in Myanmar takes place in Shan State and Kachin State.³ The NGO should survey their administrative subdivisions and triage them based on the quantity of opium produced. It should begin substitution farming in the region with the highest opium yield on a small trial basis of around five villages, which is equivalent to Myanmar's smallest administrative subdivision of a village tract. Doing so will reduce bureaucratic disputes, as village tracts are typically governed by a single elected administrator.⁹

Farmers can be given a certain amount of a cash crop on a weekly basis that would be decided by the board and government agencies. Given its similar climate, Myanmar may take inspiration from Thailand's 97%-reduction of opium production by

planting similar crops, namely coffee, tea, and cabbage.⁴ Farmer income, quality of life, and local and regional opium output should be monitored for one year, after which the board should evaluate the success of the trial by the quantity that opium production was reduced. If successful, the program should then expand into neighboring areas while the NGO continues monitoring past interventions.

The long-term timeline should be determined by results, but 10 years of funding should be allocated to start. Substitution farming took 40 years to prove effective in Thailand under a centralized government effort, but given the NGO's focus and resources, as well as how the Myanmar junta may be increasingly willing to cooperate in order to seek legitimacy on the international stage, outcomes in this initiative could take far less time.

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HEALTHCARE POLICY

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Equitable Minds: A Proposal for Strengthening Mental Health Parity Laws

By Ava Boris, amb688@cornell.edu

There exists a notable disparity in the perceived quality of treatment provided to patients seeking treatment for their physical ailments when compared to that of the treatment used to remedy their psychological conditions. Strengthening and expanding Mental Health Parity Laws in the United States is crucial for improving health outcomes and mitigating financial burdens.

Background

According to a recent study by Mental Health America, 54.7% of adults with a mental illness do not receive treatment, totaling just over 28 million individuals lacking proper access to adequate care.¹ Additionally, 25% of Americans reported feeling financially restricted in that they had to choose between affording mental health treatment and paying for daily necessities.² The high, frequently out-of-pocket costs for many necessary mental health treatments create a dangerous barrier to care access.

In order to address the numerous prevalent discrepancies surrounding mental health care, Congress passed the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) in 2008.³ This law prevents group health plans and health insurance issuers that cover mental health or substance use disorder treatment from raising premiums on such treatments. Effectively, the MHPAEA prevents benefit limitations, discriminating on the basis of the service provided. However, many health plan structures are exempt from adhering to the protections outlined under the MHPAEA. Self-insured non-Federal governmental plans with 50 or fewer employees, group health plans, and health insurance issuers are examples of such exempt bodies.³ The lack of widespread adoption of such parity regulation means that Congress must pass new policies to ensure mental health treatment is accessible to all those who need and desire it.

Policy Idea

Congress should pass a bill updating protections for individuals insured for mental health services. This bill should enhance mental health access by expanding insurance coverage for mental health and substance use care and penalizing coverage systems that fail to comply with regulations. Following the passage of MHPAEA, premium upcharges on mental health services were first regulated. However, because so many provider groups are removed from these regulations and those of which regulations applied to were able to circumvent these restrictions, greater action must be taken. Taxing health systems following failure to comply with updated regulations will force these systems to convert their policies to abide by the newly outlined regulation.

Policy Analysis

Throughout the 2022 fiscal year, the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) spearheaded the investigation of 145 health systems.⁵ It is the role of the EBSA to investigate actions taken by health systems surrounding annual dollar limits, aggregate lifetime dollar limits, treatment limitations, benefits in all classifications, financial requirements, and cumulative financial requirements. Of these 145 aforementioned investigations, the EBSA cited 18 MHPAEA violations in 11 of the investigations. The EBSA conducts these MHPAEA compliance reviews annually in all open cases in which

MHPAEA applies. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) are also responsible for the enforcement of MHPAEA. During the 2022 Fiscal year, CMS cited 7 health systems for MHPAEA violations. The same course of action was taken with these health systems as those issued EBSA MHPAEA violations. However, the review process of these systems is lengthy and inefficient. Additionally, health systems are not penalized for their lack of adherence to standards, rather just asked to compensate patients for back payments.⁵ Doing so incentivizes systems to evade coverage updates until after they have been investigated and ordered to do so by either the EBSA or CMS. Implementing syntaxes for companies that evade updates would be beneficial in reducing such incidence. By holding health systems accountable for their actions, greater adherence to the policy is anticipated due to the financial burden that would otherwise be placed on the health systems. By prohibiting insurers from up-charging for mental health and substance abuse treatments, not only will the frequency of these treatments increase to a desirable level, but the risk of overusing therapy is not expected to be correlated.⁴

Highlights

- It is the role of the EBSA to investigate actions taken by health systems surrounding annual dollar limits, aggregate lifetime dollar limits, treatment limitations, benefits in all classifications, financial

requirements, and cumulative financial requirements.

- During the 2022 Fiscal year, CMS and EBSA cited 7 and 18 health systems for MHPAEA violations, respectively.⁵
- Congress should pass a bill updating protections for individuals insured for mental health services, prohibiting insurers from up-charging for mental health and substance abuse treatments. Not only would the frequency of these treatments increase to a desirable level, but the risk of overusing therapy would also not be expected to be correlated.⁴

Implementation

By enlisting the support of various mental health interest groups, the policy proposal could more easily be passed. The National Alliance on Mental Illness, the largest grassroots mental health organization in the United States aimed at building better lives for those impacted by mental illness, would likely be interested in supporting initiatives that aim to improve access to mental healthcare.⁶ Other groups, such as the National Hispanic Medical Association could also serve as key lobbyists.^{7,8} Additionally, gathering support from specific Congressional members who have voiced an interest in this issue would improve the proposal's viability. Congresswoman Napolitano of the 31st district of California is the founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Mental Health Caucus. Napolitano is a strong advocate of equitable access to mental health resources and has been a supporter of bills with similar objectives.⁹ Likewise, Senator Blumenthal of Connecticut has been recognized for his passionate leadership in increasing access to behavioral healthcare and mental health parity and could be an important supporter of the proposed policy.¹⁰ The support of both a Senator and

Congresswoman would aid in the bills passage through both houses.

A few potential expanders to this policy that would benefit its successful implementation include the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Mental Health America.^{11,12} In April of 2022, the SAMHSA advocated for the distribution of an informational resources guide that highlight mental health coverage guarantees. This guide was created via a partnership with the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services.¹¹ Conversely, potential backlash could arise from employers, individuals, and insurance companies concerned about rising healthcare costs. The primary fear regarding such rising costs is that it could result in higher premiums or reduced coverage in other areas. However, a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that expansion of mental health parity laws had no direct impacts on healthcare costs.¹³ Another concern surrounding the proposed policy is that enforcing more extensive mental health parity laws could be challenging due to the complexity of insurance coverage and reimbursement systems.

Currently, two separate agencies, CMS and EBSA, work to monitor mental health parity coverage claims. While both bodies have had success in their roles, the lack of coordination causes many investigative inefficiencies in the form of repeat analysis and skipped cases.⁵ By creating a joint task force between both agencies, more effective results can arise from their collaboration.

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Food for Pharma: Banning the Use of Gifts in Pharmaceutical Marketing

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The New York State government should prohibit branded pharmaceutical firms from offering any gifts—including money, food, among others—to clinical prescribers to incentivize the use of their pharmaceuticals. Such a policy would not allow marketing tactics to influence physician decisions over financial incentives.

Background

In 2019, the pharmaceutical industry made \$3.6 billion in payments to physicians and teaching hospitals to promote pharmaceuticals, excluding cases where the payments were for scientific research purposes.¹ This practice, while legal, is controversial within the healthcare industry.² The American opioid crisis is a prime example of this controversy, as many experts believe that it was partly caused by physicians receiving large payments for prescribing more opioids.² Open Payments, overseen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), has been the most influential policy regulating physician and hospital payments from pharmaceutical firms. To enhance transparency, Open Payments receives annual information from reporting entities about payments from pharmaceutical firms published in a Congressional report and made publicly available on the CMS website.³ These payments can include cash payments (e.g., consulting services, lectures, travel, and accommodation) and non-cash payments (e.g., meals, gifts, stocks, and licenses).¹ Data show that physicians respond to gifts and payments from pharmaceutical firms with increased prescriptions and patient expenditures on the marketed drug.⁴ However, analysis of payments to physicians has shown that they do not lead to significant decreases in the quality of drugs prescribed, nor do they significantly increase the quality of a drug prescribed.⁴ This unclear correlation between gift-giving and

payment marketing to physicians and the quality of pharmaceuticals available to patients disproves the efficacy of this pharmaceutical firm's marketing tactic.

Policy Idea

New York State should ban pharmaceutical firms from providing physicians with gifts (both monetary and non-monetary) as a form of pharmaceutical marketing. This includes, but it is not limited to, cash payments, paying for attending conferences, food, beverages, trips, etc. This ban excludes pharmaceutical payments to physicians for the purpose of scientific medical research. This will aid in ensuring that physicians and other healthcare providers are prescribing drugs to their patients based on the drugs' efficacy, safety, and expected benefit to the patients rather than other, potentially biased, influences.

Policy Analysis

In 2021, Dr. Russel Kridel, the Chair of the American Medical Association's (AMA) Board of Trustees, published a report titled the "AMA's Code of Medical Ethics." In Opinion 9.6.2., Dr. Kridel establishes that "gifts from industry, including pharmaceutical organizations, can create conditions in which professional judgment is susceptible to bias."⁵ The Opinion also suggests that physicians decline gifts from pharmaceutical companies in the form of cash or when they don't *directly* benefit the patient.⁶

A few states, including Vermont, Massachusetts, and

Minnesota, have enacted policies that eliminate nearly all gifts to physicians from pharmaceutical firms, including all monetary gifts.⁷ One study has demonstrated reductions in prescriptions in states with gift-banning policies, particularly for psychotropic medications.⁷ It found that physicians in states with marketing bans related to gifts were 39% to 83% less likely to prescribe newly marketed medications compared to their peers in states without such bans.⁷ These statistics suggest that physician gifts play a large role in the medications prescribed, regardless of their clinical benefit. Another study analyzed self-regulation and government intervention strategies for physician gifts, elucidating that pharmaceutical firms are solely focused on increasing corporate profits.⁸ This study found that physician gifts likely have little to no benefit to the patient, increase the likelihood of prescription bias, and increase profits for pharmaceutical companies.⁸ A meta-analysis of studies performed across multiple countries supports the ill intention of pharmaceutical companies' gifts to physicians. Even in the case of free drug samples, patient care can be corrupted, as research shows that less than two-thirds of physicians who distributed free samples from pharmaceutical companies had a "good basis of knowledge" as to the efficacy of the sample product.⁹

Highlights

- The pharmaceutical industry uses monetary and non-monetary gifts to promote

pharmaceuticals to physicians and hospital systems. In 2019, \$3.6 billion in monetary gifts alone were distributed to physicians and hospitals.¹

- This practice is highly controversial within the medical, pharmaceutical, and health policy industries, for multiple studies have shown that physicians tend to overprescribe certain drugs after receiving pharmaceutical company gifts.^{2, 4, 7, 9}
- The official stance of the AMA is that gifts from the pharmaceutical industry to prescribers can breach professional judgment and create an environment in which prescribers are susceptible to bias.⁵ Meta-analyses of studies show that large proportions of physicians do not fully understand the efficacy of free samples given as gifts from pharmaceutical companies when they distribute them to patients.⁹
- Policies such as Open Payments have increased transparency between patients and prescribers by publicizing gift data, but further action should be taken to protect patients.³
- Banning the use of gifts to physicians from pharmaceutical companies has shown a decrease in prescribing rates in several states. It should be implemented in New York State to limit uniform and potentially biased prescribing.⁷

Implementation

Implementing this policy would require minimal financial investment from the New York State government. When Massachusetts implemented a pharmaceutical gift ban policy, one of the primary concerns among policymakers was the potential loss of economic benefits associated

with pharmaceutical companies sponsoring physician attendance at conferences.¹⁰ To promote new pharmaceuticals, many pharmaceutical companies fully cover the cost of attending conferences for physicians, where significant pharmaceutical marketing would occur. Such a method of marketing would violate this ban and may decrease the economic stimulus they bring to state and local economies. This concern could also arise in New York when implementing this ban.

The best way to push lawmakers to pass this ban at the cost of pharmaceutical companies' revenue would be for them to face large pressure from constituents. A possible solution to this limitation would be a comprehensive advertising campaign highlighting the negative effects of physician gifts from pharmaceutical companies. The stakeholder bearing the largest cost in implementing this policy is the pharmaceutical industry. To introduce this policy as a bill in the New York State Legislature, the primary focus would have to be placed on addressing pushback from lawmakers and pharmaceutical companies. Additionally, patients are a stakeholder group that has a large benefit to gain from this policy. Through an advertising campaign, patients can be informed of the advantages and strategize exerting public pressure on pharmaceutical companies, which can be an effective policy instrument when the public is well-informed.¹¹

Evaluating New Jersey's gift ban, which imposes loose limits on the dollar amounts of gifts, demonstrates that most public pushback stemmed from a misunderstanding of the policy. Comments on this policy expressed concerns that it would limit clinical research funds to physicians, which are sometimes given by pharmaceutical companies.¹² The New Jersey policy excluded gifts for the purpose of furthering research on new drugs from the start. If political pushback ensues in response to the proposal of this policy,

New York can take a similar approach as New Jersey and have a general \$10,000 limit on physician gifts rather than an outright ban.¹²

Overall, an implementation process focused on constituent education could put pressure on lawmakers and pharmaceutical companies to enact this policy in New York State. Implementing this policy would reduce bias in prescribing medications as per the recommendation of the American Medical Association.⁶

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National Contraceptive Access Initiative: Empowering Women's Health and Autonomy

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Limited and inequitable access to contraceptives contributes to unintended pregnancies and exacerbates racial and economic disparities in healthcare. The federal government should implement a national program modeled after Delaware's CAN initiative, tailoring adoption strategies to the needs of the hospital.

Background

*"To live and strive in modern America is to participate in a series of morally fraught systems."*¹

The Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 despite widespread opposition was a devastating loss for the bodily autonomy of women across the country.² This controversial decision has threatened reproductive rights and healthcare freedom, especially in marginalized communities already struggling to acquire adequate healthcare access.³ As of February 21, 2024, 14 states have banned abortion, and four other states have imposed restrictive gestational limits on abortion ranging from six to twelve weeks.⁴ In further deprivation to women's rights during pregnancy, the scarcity of abortion access is only made worse given limited access to proper contraception.⁵ Even if patients have access to long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), previous studies report that up to 50% of women will not return for necessary secondary LARC insertions.⁶ Research has demonstrated that women who have access to effective contraception can "go to school longer and participate in the job market at higher rates than women who don't."⁷ Unfortunately, reliable contraception is another aspect of the healthcare system wherein inequities are apparent and leaves low-income groups behind. More than 19 million American women of reproductive age are living in contraceptive deserts where "they lack reasonable access in their county to a health center that offers the full range

of contraceptive methods," oftentimes located within states that have banned abortion.⁵ Additionally, most pregnancies are unintended, which means that these women would have preferred a later pregnancy or none at all.¹ This experience is a less than ideal way to bring a child into the world, especially if the parents are already facing other negative social determinants of health.

Policy Idea

Policymakers should implement a nationwide program that models the Delaware Contraceptive Access Now program (DelCAN) to ensure that women can get the proper form of birth control that is best fit for them individually.⁷ DelCAN was initiated to increase access to contraceptives and decrease unintended pregnancies.⁷ A national program should comprise of three main parts: promoting Medicaid reimbursement policies for LARC, funding for LARC devices in Title X clinics, and upstream training for clinicians and support staff. There should be financial incentives for states to include compensation for LARCs in the federally qualified health centers that do not already have it included in their prospective payment system visit rates. Solidifying Medicaid reimbursement policies for LARC methods, such as intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants, can ensure that low-income individuals have access to highly effective forms of contraception without financial barriers.

Policy Analysis

The internal expansion of reproductive agencies would significantly reduce unwanted and unplanned pregnancies and lead to better outcomes for low-income women. The DelCAN program is supported by 10 years of data that holistically demonstrate this program's effectiveness. Research has shown that compared to women who were able to have abortions, those forced to give birth were more likely to live below the poverty line four years later.¹ Data from a comprehensive study spanning 2014 to 2017 revealed a remarkable 24 percent decline in unintended pregnancies among low-income and uninsured women enrolled in the DelCAN program.¹ Also, compared to other states, postpartum LARC use increased by 5.36 percentage points in Delaware during the implementation period (2015–2017) which decreases the chances of a second pregnancy that is unwanted.⁸ Moreover, the observed increase in demand for LARC contraception aligns with existing research highlighting the efficacy of these methods in preventing unintended pregnancies. Studies have consistently shown that LARC methods, such as IUDs and implants, are among the most effective forms of birth control, with failure rates significantly lower than traditional contraceptive methods.⁹ Based on the evidence, this approach should be replicated nationwide, giving women more autonomy over when and how they want to start a family and reducing the chance that the child will grow up in poverty.

Highlights

- The Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* significantly impacted women's autonomy, especially in marginalized communities with limited healthcare access.^{2,3} As of early 2024, stringent abortion restrictions and bans are in place in several states, exacerbating challenges in accessing effective contraception.⁴ Over 19 million American women live in contraceptive deserts, facing higher unintended pregnancy rates, which adversely affects their education and job participation, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.^{1,5}
- There should be a nationwide adaptation of Delaware's Contraceptive Access Now program to increase accessibility of contraceptive options for women. Key components include Medicaid reimbursement for Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARCs), Title X clinic funding for LARC devices, and Upstream training for healthcare staff. Financial incentives for LARC inclusion in federally qualified health centers would further enhance accessibility.⁷
- The proposed policy would expand reproductive agencies' promises to curtail unwanted pregnancies, particularly benefiting low-income women. Data from the DeICAN program, established in 2014, underscore its success: a notable 24% drop in unintended pregnancies among low-income women enrolled.¹ Postpartum LARC use surged by 5.36 percentage points, aligning with research highlighting LARC's effectiveness.⁸ Nationwide replication could empower

women in family planning decisions, potentially mitigating poverty's intergenerational cycle.

Implementation

The proposed policy would ideally travel through federal avenues. An Interagency Task Force should be created with representatives from relevant federal agencies, specifically the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and Health Resources and Services Administration.^{11,12,13} The original DeICAN initiative had a public-private partnership between Delaware and Upstream USA to provide educational training for clinicians and support staff.⁷ This partnership should be extended to more states but it would require funding and workers. Philanthropists helped the DeICAN initiative and will hopefully continue to donate, especially given potential long-term healthcare savings from reduced unintended pregnancies. This money will aid in purchasing LARC for Title X clinics.⁷ Following DeICAN's model, financial incentive should be created for states that create Medicaid reimbursement policies for LARC which increases awareness of contraceptive use for postpartum women.⁷ This policy is likely to receive bipartisan support as contraceptive access is an issue that crosses party lines: Americans support over-the-counter birth control by a 62-point margin and support increased overall accessibility for birth control pills by a 67-point margin.¹³

Despite national support, it is possible there will be backlash to this proposal, as healthcare changes in government can be a drawn-out process. However, access to contraception has become a time sensitive issue so as to prevent unsafe abortions. A qualitative analysis was conducted by Skračić et al. to gauge healthcare site leader's recommendations post-Delaware CAN initiation.⁹ One finding was that

implementation of this program is not a one-size-fits-all method, and clear communication needs to happen prior to Upstream training to identify practice needs.⁹ Additionally, providers should be consulted by Upstream to create internal agreements before training. In order to enhance buy-in during training sessions, a committee in Upstream should create an informational guide to highlight the specific impact of CAN on each role within a healthcare practice. This guide should include procedures for processing payments, accurately billing patients and including Medicaid reimbursement to their practice. It is crucial that cultural sensitivity training is also included and implemented, such as having information and consent forms available in different languages, accounting for varying medical literacy, reducing biases, and ensuring equitable access to reproductive healthcare. The most vulnerable women who would benefit the most from this program are also those most distrusting of healthcare systems from a fear of financial burden and breaches in confidentiality.¹

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Enhancing Accessibility of Telehealth for Mental Health Care in New York State

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Current state licensing regulations prohibit telehealth visits between patients and mental health care providers when both are not located in New York. To address this issue, New York should join multi-state compacts that permit telehealth visits across member states' boundaries.

Background

New York State education law dictates that mental health providers must be licensed in New York to treat patients in the state and that New York-licensed providers may not engage in regular telehealth visits with out-of-state patients.¹ However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth utilization and policy evolved rapidly. Telehealth visits increased by 766% nationally within the first three months of the pandemic.² Between March and August of 2021, 39 percent of those telehealth visits were for mental health and substance use disorder diagnoses.³ In response to provider shortages and increased demand for telehealth, New York enacted an emergency executive order allowing providers from any US state to practice in NYS without a New York license.⁴ New York mental health care providers relied heavily on telehealth during this time because residents frequently cross state lines for work or school.⁵ However, once the governor rescinded the executive order, the state returned to its pre-pandemic licensing regulations.⁶

Under the post-pandemic policy, providers must obtain multiple state licenses to treat patients in other states, which is both costly and difficult.⁵ The license requirement creates a barrier to consistent care with patients who have moved out of the provider's jurisdiction. On the patient side, relocating results in having to switch providers, which can be emotionally taxing for those who have built a rapport with their counselor or psychologist.⁷

To address accessibility concerns, other states have joined compacts that allow certain professionals to practice telemedicine with patients across member-state boundaries. The Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT) is one compact that facilitates telepsychology across its 42 member states without requiring multiple state licenses.⁸ Similarly, the Interstate Counseling Compact allows licensed counselors to practice in all member states. Currently, New York is not a member of any such licensing compact, but state senators have recently introduced a bill, S6883, that proposes amendments to New York education statutes to enact PSYPACT and the Interstate Counseling Compact.⁹

Policy Idea

The New York state legislature should pass Senate Bill S6883 or introduce new legislation to join PSYPACT and the Interstate Counseling Compact. Since its introduction, S6883 has been sitting in the Senate Higher Education Committee. An identical bill is also sitting in the Assembly Higher Education Committee. Legislators should hold a public hearing with input from patients and providers to provide insight into the bill's necessity and create a sense of urgency for its passage. If the bill does not become law during this legislative session, it can be reintroduced during the next.

Policy Analysis

Joining interstate licensing compacts is an effective way to improve access to and continuity in telemental health care. Under the compacts, providers will no longer have to obtain multiple licenses to see out-of-state patients, and patients can avoid abrupt terminations of care when they move away from their provider. The freedom to continue seeing relocated patients is especially beneficial for providers who specialize in working with mobile populations like students. At a time when mental health is an increasingly pressing issue among college students, students should be able to receive consistent behavioral health care.¹⁰

Passing S6883 also addresses mental health care deserts. Providers in compact member states can practice in remote areas of other states with severe mental health provider shortages. Parts of rural New York, such as the Finger Lakes region, have long suffered from extended wait times to see a mental health professional.¹¹ The ability to seek care from out-of-state expands the provider pool for all. Moreover, expanding telehealth could increase mental health care utilization by making therapy convenient for those who travel often. Under current policy, NYS providers must hold the proper license to provide care to a patient located outside of NYS.¹ Passing this bill streamlines mental health care for patients and providers by reducing restrictive residential requirements. Because these compacts are relatively new, little research has been done on their impact in member states.

However, 96 percent of psychologists have affirmed that telehealth is effective, convincing over 30 states to join the aforementioned compacts.¹² Without enacting PSYPACT and the Counseling Compact, New York State fails to provide its residents with the full range of mental health services.

Highlights

- Between March and August 2021, 39 percent of all US telehealth visits were for mental health and substance use disorder diagnoses.³ Since rescinding an executive order spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, New York state has prohibited mental health professionals from working across state lines without obtaining multiple licenses.⁶ This policy makes it difficult for patients to maintain a rapport with their counselor or psychologist and limits the accessibility of mental health services.
- The Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT) and the Interstate Counseling Compact allow providers to offer telehealth services across dozens of member states without obtaining multiple licenses. New York is not a member of either compact.
- New York must pass a bill amending the education law to enact PSYPACT and the Interstate Counseling Compact. S6883, a bill proposing this measure, is sitting in the Higher Education Committee with no hearing scheduled for the current legislative session.⁹
- Expanding telehealth prevents unnecessary provider changes, addresses mental health deserts, and increases mental health care utilization among mobile populations.

Implementation

Enacting this legislation is a logical next step in meeting Governor Kathy Hochul's goal to reduce unmet mental health care needs in NYS.¹³ Although the governor's recent \$1 billion investment in mental health does not specifically address licensing compacts, it does mention support for legislation that increases geographic accessibility to behavioral health care.¹³ The current administration's support for mental health care will make passing compact-related legislation more politically feasible. Additionally, the budget suggests that oversight for the health professions be moved from the State Education Department to the Department of Health.¹⁴ If approved, this change has the potential to open a policy window for advancing compact legislation in the next few years. To date, proposals to join PSYPACT and the Interstate Counseling Compact have fallen under the jurisdiction of the Education Department's Office of the Professions.¹ As a result, state legislators in the Higher Education Committee address issues related to schools alongside issues in the health professions. Competing priorities could be one reason that S6883 has been stuck in committee without a hearing. A nearly identical state senate bill, S9234, died in the Higher Education Committee and failed to receive a hearing during the 2021-2022 legislative session.¹⁵ To avoid a similar fate for the current bill, bill sponsors and outside stakeholders must raise public awareness of the issue.

If S6883 fails to pass, another key consideration for the passage of future compact legislation is narrowing the scope of the bill to focus solely on mental health. Beyond amending education statutes to enact PSYPACT and the Interstate Counseling Compact, S6883 proposes amending the public health statutes to add New York to the emergency medical services personnel licensure interstate compact. Combining two separate issues under

the same bill may be limiting opportunities for consensus in the Senate. At a time when mental health is taking priority in the state, legislators will have more success with a new bill that solely addresses licensing compacts for mental health professionals. State Senate minority leader Robert G. Ort (R) of New York's 62nd District sponsored both S6883 and S9234 and may be willing to sponsor the new bill. One key ally that could help bring attention to the compact issue is the New York State Psychological Association, which considers joining PSYPACT to be one of its legislative priorities.¹⁶ With support from outside stakeholders and legislators from both major political parties, the conversation around licensing compacts will be louder and more legislatively successful.

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Requiring Community Outreach Programs to Encourage Female Inclusion in HIV Clinical Research

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Female HIV patients currently do not receive treatments that have been sufficiently tested on female participants. To rectify this, the FDA should require those conducting HIV clinical research to institute community outreach programs to better encourage and facilitate female participation.

Background

In 2019, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the Ending the HIV Epidemic in the US (EHE) plan, which “aims to end the HIV epidemic in the United States by 2030” by “reduc[ing] the number of new HIV infections...by at least 90 percent.”¹ As the HHS seeks to rapidly increase the availability of diagnostic and preventative tools and HIV treatments, it is important that they be effective for all HIV patients. Persistent male bias in biomedical research has created treatment issues for female patients, from different medical test results to adverse drug effects.² HIV research is no exception, since female participant enrollment is especially low relative to disease burden in clinical trials for HIV treatments. In 2016, “women represented a median of 19.2% participants” in trials testing antiretroviral drugs (ARV), and only “11.1%” in trials of “curative strategies.”³ Despite this low enrollment data, women are “acquiring HIV at a higher rate than men globally” and constitute “over half of the 35 million people living with HIV worldwide.”⁴ Sex differences could impact HIV treatment effectiveness for female patients, so researchers must sufficiently test treatments on them.^{4,5} Due to the EHE plan, and as HIV cure trials in which females are especially underrepresented become more common, there is an urgent need to resolve the male bias in HIV research.^{4,5}

Male bias in clinical research primarily stems from researchers’ prejudice against female inclusion, as they often incorrectly assume that female hormones cause “messy” data, and a lack of necessary accommodations made by researchers to help women participate.⁶ In HIV trials specifically, a mistrust of clinical researchers amongst potential participants and the lack of support networks among female patients also contribute to low female enrollment.⁵

Policy Idea

To increase female enrollment in HIV clinical research, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should implement a policy requiring institutions conducting such research, whether funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the industry, to make substantial efforts to enroll female patients through at least one community outreach program. Such outreach programs should be implemented at all phases of clinical trials, particularly in phases II and III, which can include HIV-positive patients. Such programs should include advertising trials at local women’s clinics, establishing partnerships with local physicians to enroll more of their female patients, addressing mistrust among female patients, and accommodating possible female-specific barriers to participation. Researchers could also encourage female HIV patients, who “tend to be isolated,” to form support networks similar to those of gay men which help

“alert potential participants to clinical trials.”⁵

Policy Analysis

A policy requiring institutions running HIV treatment or cure clinical trials to employ outreach programs would primarily require commitments and efforts from policymakers, researchers, and participants. Such commitments should prove feasible. Researchers should effectively “tailor” their studies for women’s participation.⁷ Such commitment should prove to be possible, as the resistance of researchers is becoming less of a barrier.⁸

An inclusive policy would also encourage potential participants by requiring researchers to try to construct trials that facilitate female participation. Women with HIV are actively calling for their inclusion in clinical research, and have demonstrated their willingness to enroll when researchers make it possible.⁹ Recently, clinical researchers who conducted an all-female HIV cure trial completed enrollment “within 3 months of study initiation.”⁹ A contributing factor to this success was presumably the “reimbursements” which researchers offered “one-third of participants,” which several said helped them pay for transportation.¹⁰ In addition, more women than average enrolled in two ARV trials that offered less frequent treatments, most likely because such time flexibility made it possible for women with commitments such as caring for their families.^{5,7}

Women of color represent a majority of new HIV diagnoses.⁴ As these women typically experience particular mistrust of researchers, due to a “history of exploitation” by them, researchers must make particular efforts to build back this trust by providing information more openly.⁵

Highlights

- Due to the EHE plan, and as HIV cure trials in which females are especially underrepresented become more common, there is an urgent need to resolve the male bias in HIV research.^{4,5}
- Male bias in clinical research primarily stems from prejudice against female inclusion and a lack of necessary accommodations to help women participate.⁶ In HIV trials specifically, a mistrust of clinical researchers amongst potential participants and the lack of support networks among female patients also contribute to low female participation.⁵
- To increase female enrollment in HIV clinical research, the FDA should require research institutions to coordinate community outreach programs.
- Such programs would require commitment from policymakers, researchers, and participants. Such commitment should prove feasible, as researchers are becoming less resistant to female inclusion.⁸ Additionally, patients would be more likely to enroll, as the policy would require efforts to facilitate female participation in clinical trials.^{5,7} Encouraging connections between researchers, local physicians, and female HIV patients would further promote participation.

Implementation

The proposed policy should be presented to the FDA's Office of Women's Health (OWH) for implementation. This policy would align with the Office's goals to “promote the inclusion of women in clinical trials and the implementation of guidelines,” and it could advocate for the policy to Agency officials.¹¹ Gaining additional endorsement from the NIH Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) would help mobilize support for the policy. The ORWH could advocate for the policy in the research community and even implement the policy to apply to NIH-funded research to prove its effectiveness in this subset of research before the FDA passes it.¹² Dr. Janine Clayton, the director of the ORWH, has written about the need “to do more for women” with HIV and could be a potential champion for the policy.⁴

In addition, support must be garnered from physicians, researchers, and the community of women with HIV to endorse the policy. In addition to being advocates, female researchers may have specific insight into how best to facilitate female participation, as female authorship has been shown through research to be “correlated with higher female enrollment in clinical trials.”¹³ The involvement of female HIV patients in advocating for the policy would be equally crucial, as they could share their experiences of clinical trials and their hopes for future trials and treatments.

Due to the EHE's goal for 2030, the policy's implementation would have to be closely monitored by the FDA to ensure that the inclusion of female HIV patients increases quickly.¹ The FDA should convene a panel of experts on research policies and HIV research to monitor this progress and determine the exact amount of female representation that trials must reach based on either disease burden or a different, appropriate benchmark.

Some community outreach programs, such as accommodations for transportation, may require financial

resources. For NIH-funded trials, the ORWH could advocate for the NIH to provide additional funds, from those it receives each year through the EHE initiative, to researchers conducting HIV research.¹ For HIV clinical trials that are industry-funded, finances could potentially be obtained through the OWH or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Creating Ethical Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence Innovation in Healthcare

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Ethical guidelines for artificial intelligence in healthcare innovation are vital to advancing healthcare quality, safely, and responsibly. The balance between embracing such technological advancements and protecting patient security and privacy is key to holistic health improvement.

Background

As society faces modern healthcare dilemmas, it must explore modern solutions. Companies like IBM, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, and other tech tycoons are heavily investing in language processing information (i.e., natural language processing, rule-based expert systems, machine learning, healthcare analytics, diagnostics and treatment applications, and administrative applications) and other artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to interpret human communication for healthcare sector applications.¹ With the rapid emergence of AI in various economic sectors, healthcare should also harness its power.² However, such immense potential brings an ethical responsibility of equal magnitude. To achieve the Quadruple Aim effectively, policy frameworks that address a range of critical requirements are necessary: patient privacy, data security, transparency, explainability, regulatory oversight, ethical consideration, clinical validation and efficacy, healthcare professional collaboration, continued monitoring and evaluation, education and training, interoperability, and public awareness and engagement.³ The responsible and ethical use of innovation is vital to balancing its potential with the need to improve patient outcomes and healthcare quality at a reduced cost and staff difficulty, thereby achieving unified health equity for all.⁴

Policy Idea

The Biden-Harris Administration's Executive Order

manages the benefits and risks of artificial intelligence, particularly in the healthcare system.⁵ Congress should implement legislation to fortify this commitment. Specifically, Executive Order 14110 ensures that the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) solidifies the "safe, secure, and trustworthy development and use of artificial intelligence."⁶ With 15 AI companies and 28 healthcare provider and payer organizations, the industry committed to develop optimizing healthcare delivery and payment AI solutions for health equity, access expansion, affordable care, outcome improvement, coordinated care, improved patient experience, and reduced clinician burnout. They will follow the Fair, Appropriate, Valid, Effective, and Safe (FAVES) AI principles under the DHHS's Health Data, Technology, and Interoperability: Certification Program Updates Algorithm Transparency, and Information Sharing rule, fortified trust mechanisms for transparent use for patients, strict risk management for tracking harms and avoiding them, and the swift yet responsible AI research, investigation and development.⁶

Policy Analysis

Artificial intelligence in healthcare has the life-saving potential to efficiently detect, diagnose, and monitor life-threatening diseases.⁷ A subset of AI, machine learning specializes in using trained data to predict cancer, some implementations of which have a higher accuracy rate than clinicians, and to improve diagnoses, prognoses, and life quality.⁸

Surgery centers have used machine learning to detect and diagnose brain tumors in real-time, analyze medical images, differentiate between malignant and normal tissue, analyze gene tissue and activity levels, and identify colorectal mismatch repair deficit.⁸ According to the American Cancer Society, AI makes reviewing and translating mammograms 30 times faster while maintaining 99 percent accuracy.⁹ AI also improves clinical workflow, reads medical forms and histories, integrates electronic health records, reduces human-resource costs, increases data efficiency, enhances diagnostic accuracy, and elevates treatment.⁸ Cayuga Medical Center adopted a Meditech-Integrated CDI Software Solution, resulting in \$130,000 in savings. However, great insights on privacy, transparency, and other concerns remain unclear.¹⁰

AI will contribute over \$15 trillion to the global economy by 2030 with limitless potential, so regulating such growth is necessary for the healthcare industry due to concerns of bias and unknown factors.² Undeniably, embracing such innovation is vital. Nevertheless, regulating such innovation for ethical standards and safety is also vital. While only 23 percent of US adults believe the healthcare system has adopted AI too slowly, 75 percent think it is too fast without considering all patient risks.¹¹ While so new there are no established efficacy points, many experts from institutions, such as the Harvard Business Review and Brookings Institution, call for healthcare AI regulation.^{12,13}

Highlights

- With the vast potential to enhance the health equity-centered Quadruple Aim and save lives, artificial intelligence is rapidly emerging in the healthcare industry.^{1,8,9}
- Only 23 percent of US adults believe the healthcare system has adopted AI too slowly, whereas 75 percent think it is too fast without considering all patient risks.¹¹ Agreeing with the survey, experts from institutions such as the Harvard Business Review and Brookings call for healthcare AI regulation.^{12,13}
- With such rapid advancement, ethically protecting patient privacy, data security, transparency, explainability, regulatory oversight, ethical consideration, clinical validation and efficacy, healthcare professional collaboration, continued monitoring and evaluation, education and training, interoperability, and public awareness and engagement are vital.³
- Answering these calls, the Biden-Harris Administration's Executive Order 14110 ensures that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) solidifies a "safe, secure, and trustworthy development and use of artificial intelligence," alongside 15 AI companies and 28 payers and providers.^{5,6}
- While AI holds the vast potential to improve health outcomes and savings, there are also great concerns of future bias, privacy, and more due to the novel nature of this technology.^{8,9,12,13}

Implementation

The proposed policy upholds the Biden-Harris AI executive order, which advocates for the continued commitment of the 15 leading AI companies, 28 healthcare providers/payers involved in developing safe, secure, and trustworthy use/purchase.¹⁴ As this voluntary commitment is already underway, taking full swing at the end of 2023, ensuring this commitment persists in the upcoming election cycle is pertinent. This declaration shows American healthcare innovation values such as safety and ethics for the health equity-centered Quadruple Aim.

Following its Executive Order, the Biden-Harris Administration should follow suit by calling for Congressional fortification. Federal motivation and guidance are vital to preventing interstate differences and utilizing a united front. In this manner, fortifying Biden's Executive Order is critical for fast action, which is necessary to match AI's pace. However, ensuring this commitment to fortify legislation is essential for preserving the policy throughout future presidencies.

However, they may face some congressional pushback. Some may argue that the regulation of AI stifles innovation.¹⁵ Others worry the adoption of AI in healthcare will make the US more susceptible to cyber attacks; thankfully, the Biden-Harris HHS Office of Information Security has considered the potential phishing, malware development, supply chain compromise, and more to develop advanced precautionary tools, preventative/mitigation steps, and defense.¹⁶

Lastly, one important issue to monitor is eliminating algorithmic bias. Ensuring data is from a diverse background will ensure such algorithms work for all demographics, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other factor.¹⁴ While many software companies, like Google and their DeepMind Health, prioritize utilizing neural networks to mimic the human brain, it is crucial to ensure any

biases from developers do not poison their creations.^{9,17} Unfortunately, in the past, when developers assumed specific symptoms were less likely in Black Women versus non-Hispanic White women, this missing of key diagnosis indicators diminishes care.¹⁷ For example, in 2007, an algorithm falsely suggested Cesarean Deliveries at a higher rate for Black patients due to an incorrect assumption that they had less success with vaginal birth after Cesarean Delivery; this old software was discovered and corrected in 2017. It is therefore vital to learn from these mistakes and exercise developmental caution.¹⁷ According to the Pew Research Center, 51 percent of Americans believe that artificial intelligence in diagnosis and treatment recommendations will reduce bias and unfair treatment.¹¹ With most Americans in support of responsible embracement, American healthcare should integrate AI.

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Securing Drug Availability: A Call for Domestic Pharmaceutical Manufacturing

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The escalating drug shortages in the United States, particularly affecting cancer patients reliant on chemotherapy drugs, highlight the urgent need for domestic manufacturing of essential pharmaceuticals. The US government should impose policy initiatives to prioritize reshoring production to mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities and ensure FDA-regulated, consistent drug availability.

Background

From 2021 to 2022, drug shortages in the US have increased by nearly 30%, impacting 295 products.¹ However, this trend is continuously worsening; as of June 2023, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) reported more than 300 active drug shortages, the highest number in almost a decade.¹ Among those most significantly affected by these drug shortages are cancer patients who need chemotherapy drugs such as carboplatin and cisplatin.² Therefore, widespread chemotherapy drug shortages now require physicians to ration these safer, less toxic, and lifesaving drugs.³

Pharmaceutical imports from international countries primarily contribute to drug shortages. Historically, the US produced pharmaceuticals domestically; however, the trend of manufacturing drugs outside of the US has principally increased within the last decade.⁴ This fact is especially true for manufacturers of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), the active ingredients of drugs formulated into injections and tablets.⁷ A 2019 study indicates that only 28% of manufacturing facilities producing APIs for the US market were domestic, with the remaining 72% located abroad, 13% of which were located in China.⁷

Policy Idea

The US government should offer subsidies or tax breaks to local manufacturers, incentivizing domestic

manufacturing and ensuring that drugs are screened and regulated by the FDA and amply supplied to prevent future shortages. Subsidies could take the form of direct financial support to offset the costs of establishing or relocating manufacturing operations within the country; tax breaks may reduce corporate tax rates for companies who produce pharmaceuticals domestically. These vital changes would reduce supply chain disruptions, especially with the uncertainty of foreign export policies and work interruptions that could occur overseas.⁷ The US should return manufacturing facilities to domestic properties to alleviate pharmaceutical shortages.

Policy Analysis

The US has failed to invest in building capacity and manufacturing plants to promote a surplus of cancer drugs and prevent shortages.⁷ Many researchers blame pharmaceutical shortages on manufacturing APIs in foreign countries, namely China and India.⁸ Despite lower prices, foreign manufacturers do not account for stockpiling of APIs; instead, they rely on just-in-time production and are often shut down due to contamination issues.⁸ For instance, a factory near Delhi, India, was closed by the World Health Organization following the deaths of 70 West African children caused by ingestion of cough syrup containing toxic chemicals intended for industrial use.⁸ Such product contamination is likely to be frequent, and the US should not continually deal

with shortages caused by the inadequate regulation of foreign manufacturing facilities when local production is an option.

Bringing domestic drug manufacturing to US shores would invest in both the economic and security interests of the US. In 2022, the US government invested billions of dollars into producing computer chips for this purpose, and many believe that the government should take similar action for pharmaceuticals.⁸ Despite the need for an uncontaminated and consistent supply of drugs, the biggest hurdle the US would need to overcome to reshore production would be the ideological differences in the US political landscape. With such a divided government, lawmakers may not be able to set their differences aside; Democrats may be concerned about giving financial support to pharmaceutical companies who have been viewed as “people who are already robbing you,” while Republicans would not want to approve liberal measures during a liberal Presidency.⁸ The ability to reframe this political issue into a national security issue would garner political support from both sides of the spectrum.⁸

Highlights

- Escalating US drug shortages, notably impacting cancer patients reliant on chemotherapy drugs, underscore the need for domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing.^{3,4}

- Urgent policy action should prioritize reshoring production to mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities and ensure consistent drug availability.^{4,6}
- Policy initiatives must incentivize domestic manufacturing, offering subsidies or tax breaks to local manufacturers, and ensure FDA-regulated drug supply to prevent future shortages.^{4,5}
- Dependence on foreign manufacturing poses risks of supply chain disruptions, necessitating investment in domestic capacity for economic and national security interests.^{1,8}

Implementation

A comprehensive strategy to effectively address the escalating pharmaceutical shortages in the United States necessitates a multifaceted approach that integrates legislative action, government support, regulatory oversight, investment in research and development, and workforce development. Firstly, legislative measures should be crafted and enacted to create a conducive environment for domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing. This strategy involves offering a range of incentives such as subsidies, tax breaks, and regulatory assistance to pharmaceutical companies willing to reshore production facilities. Such legislation initiatives should also streamline bureaucratic processes and facilitate access to funding companies investing in domestic manufacturing capabilities. Simultaneously, it is crucial for government agencies to display proactive engagement with pharmaceutical companies to facilitate the relocation of manufacturing operations. The US government should

establish a dedicated task force or agency to coordinate efforts in addressing company needs and offer support in transitioning domestic manufacturing.

Furthermore, robust regulatory oversight by the FDA is essential to ensure the safety, efficacy, and quality of domestically manufactured pharmaceuticals. While expediting regulatory approvals to support timely production is important, maintaining quality standards and monitoring compliance with regulatory requirements are paramount. In parallel, investing in research and development for pharmaceutical manufacturing technologies and processes is critical to enhancing domestic production capabilities and fostering innovation in the industry. Government funding for initiatives, research grants, and public-private partnerships can incentivize companies to invest in advanced manufacturing technologies that improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance the reliability of drug production. Moreover, addressing workforce development is essential to ensure the availability of a skilled workforce capable of supporting domestic pharmaceutical and manufacturing operations. Toward this end, the Department of Labor should oversee implementing training programs, vocational education initiatives, and partnerships with educational institutions to equip workers with the necessary skills and knowledge required for roles in pharmaceutical manufacturing.

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