

THE REAL AFFORDABILITY AGENDA:

A Policy Manual To Put a Good Life For Everyone Back Within Reach

2026

The Crisis of Our Time • An Agenda for a Dignified Life • How We Pay For It



MayDayStrong.org

Introduction:

POLICIES TO MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR WORKING FAMILIES INSTEAD OF FOR BILLIONAIRES



Across the country, an affordability crisis is accelerating at kitchen tables and in checkout lines. Families are making daily tradeoffs, skipping care, buying less food, falling behind on bills, just to get through the month. The basics of a good life—an affordable home, quality healthcare, nutritious food, a dignified job, and beyond—are increasingly out of reach for millions of Americans. At the same time, big corporations and the super-rich are posting record profits, protected by rules that work for them while shifting higher costs onto everyone else. What working people pay more for, those at the top profit from. This crisis has hit Black and brown communities and working families most of all. None of this is an accident: it is the result of a system that has prioritized private profit over public well-being.

In response, May Day Strong is proud to announce **The Real Affordability Agenda**, a comprehensive plan to build a movement for multiracial democracy, change the economic rules of our country, and put the makings of a good life back within everyone's reach. This agenda outlines a clear, achievable vision for a society where our fundamental needs are met, our work is valued, and our communities can thrive.

Affordable Housing:

Corporate rent gouging, real estate wealth concentration, and private equity landlords are the primary drivers of the housing crisis, and we demand targeted regulatory and financing reforms. That means strict limits on rent increases so people can stay in their homes, dedicated taxes on luxury property sales and high-value assets to fund affordable housing production and preservation, and large-scale development of social housing models that ensure permanent affordability and resident governance. We seek to establish housing as a public good secured through democratic control and progressive revenue.

Good Jobs:

Wage stagnation and declining worker power are on the rise despite surging corporate profits; we demand structural reforms to secure dignified employment. We demand mandated living wages aligned with productivity growth and a jobs guarantee program to put displaced and unemployed workers in good jobs. We call for universal paid leave, the repeal of anti-union laws, strong worker organizing protections, curbing employer misclassification tactics, and raising the minimum wage closer to the actual cost of living (at least \$25 per hour) and end all subminimum wages - including for tipped workers, workers with disabilities, youth, and incarcerated workers.

Affordable Universal Needs:

We demand universal access to essential services by eliminating cost barriers and corporate profiteering. That means fully funded universal child care with fair provider wages, free school meals and expanded food assistance alongside anti-gouging measures, debt-free public higher education, free comprehensive health care for all, fare-free reliable transit, fully funded equitable public schools, and publicly controlled utilities with progressive pricing and assistance programs.

May Day Strong, unions, and community groups across the country will fight for a people-first agenda and demand the wealthiest individuals and largest corporations to finally contribute their fair share to the society that makes their success possible. We can afford a good life for everyone, of all races, genders and backgrounds. It is simply a matter of making different choices, and together, we will win the future we all deserve.

For more resources including sample legislation and where states are leading:

bit.ly/thepeoplesagenda

**A CLEAR, ACHIEVABLE
VISION FOR A SOCIETY**

The Crisis of Our Time:

RISING INEQUALITY AND THE SQUEEZE ON WORKING FAMILIES

Rising inequality is not an abstract economic theory; it is the root cause of the affordability crisis crushing millions of American families. Corporations and the ultra-wealthy have worked to rig this system to avoid paying their share of taxes, targeting Black communities and communities of color for the worst impacts, and dismantling the social safety net for everyone. For decades, the rules of our economy have been rewritten to channel wealth and income to a [tiny fraction of people at the very top](#). In fact, last year's One Big Beautiful Bill extended over 70 percent of its 2026 tax cuts to the richest fifth of Americans, with the top 1 percent receiving an average cut of \$66,000. This extreme concentration of resources and economic power in the hands of the few has left our public services starved of resources and it has left tens of millions of households living paycheck to paycheck, unable to save for emergencies, and falling further behind. Understanding the staggering scale of this disparity is the first step toward fixing it.

3 out of **5** people
people lack enough
savings to cover a
\$2,000
emergency expense.

**The data reveals a nation
starkly divided between the
ultra-wealthy and everyone
else:**

Life expectancy for
Black Americans is
on average

5 years
shorter than that of
white Americans.

1

The Stagnation of Wages:

Since 1978, compensation for top CEOs has skyrocketed by an astonishing 1,094%. Over that same period, the pay for a typical worker has increased by a mere 26%. This proves that American workers are more productive than ever, but the rewards of their labor are being captured by executives instead of being shared through higher wages.

The Widening Wealth Gap:

The crisis of inequality is actively getting worse. The wealthiest 0.1% of Americans have seen their share of the nation's total financial wealth surge from 10% in 2003 to 16% today. This immense and growing concentration of resources and power in the hands of a few leaves less for public investment and shared prosperity, forcing families to compete for dwindling opportunities. While it's harder and harder for all working families to get ahead, communities of color begin with historical and structural disadvantages and discrimination. For example, Black and Latino families are twice as likely as white families to have no or negative wealth. [300,000 households control \\$40 trillion](#), more than five times what the federal government spent last year.

Widespread Financial Insecurity:

The reality for most families is one of profound financial fragility. Federal Reserve data shows that nearly three out of five people lack enough savings to cover a \$2,000 emergency expense. A single unexpected car repair or medical bill can be enough to push a family into financial ruin.

The Human Cost of Inequality:

This crisis has devastating, life-or-death consequences. On average, American men in the highest income group live 15 years longer than men in the lowest income group; for women, that difference is 10 years. Life expectancy for Black Americans is on average 5 years shorter than that of white Americans. This is not just an economic gap; it is a life-expectancy gap, driven by unequal access to healthcare, nutrition, and a life free from chronic stress. This extreme wealth concentration doesn't just shorten lives—it isolates them. As billionaires transform neighborhoods into investment portfolios, abandon public spaces for private alternatives, and profit from algorithms designed to divide us, communities fracture, trust erodes, and the resulting loneliness carries health risks comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes daily. The stress of living in highly unequal societies leads to a slew of health consequences, elevating cortisol levels, driving inflammation that contributes to cardiovascular disease, depression, and immune dysfunction.

This extreme inequality is the direct result of a tax system that has been rigged to favor the wealthy. To solve the affordability crisis, we must first address its source by demanding tax justice for the common good.

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Agenda for a Dignified Life:

WHAT WE CAN WIN TOGETHER



A just tax system is the means to a powerful end: building a society where every person can live a dignified life. By making the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share and chipping away at their wealth and economic dominance, we can fully fund the programs that guarantee the basics for everyone. The Real Affordability Agenda is organized around three core pillars that address the most pressing challenges facing working families today. It is a vision of what we can win when we work together.

Affordable Universal Needs

Universal Child Care And Fair Pay For Providers

The rent is too high, but in many places, the cost of child care is [even higher](#). High child care costs make life unaffordable for working families, squeezing young parents out of the workforce and preventing them from contributing to our economy. And caregivers rarely make living wages, despite performing essential work. It is possible to guarantee universal access to child care, pay educators fairly, and set all children up for success in elementary school and beyond. We can implement proven strategies like guaranteed operational funding for child care providers, which would allow them to serve more children at an affordable cost. School districts can also collaborate with child care programs to offer affordable, high-quality education and care experiences in settings that meet the needs and desires of families.

Affordable Groceries And Expanded Food Assistance

No one should struggle to afford groceries, and no child should go into debt to pay for their lunch at school. But in cities across the nation, [grocery prices have increased by more than 25%](#) in just the last five years. In 2023, [nearly 50 million people in the U.S. lived in food insecure households](#). This is not an accident: low wages, price gouging, and inadequate benefits lead to people being unable to afford food. Additionally, even basic access to food is unequal because many neighborhoods lack access to a convenient grocery store. It does not have to be this way: we can provide universal free school meals, expand food assistance, ensure every community has a convenient grocery store, and ban price gouging for food and groceries.

Debt-Free, High-Quality College For All

Our students are our future. When public colleges are unaffordable and underfunded, it harms our economy and democracy. The average cost of tuition at a private college is [nearly \\$45,000 per year](#), and degree programs are often inaccessible to working students. We must fully fund public colleges and universities, ensuring that students graduate without debt, that educators and staff are paid fairly, and that our public campuses have the quality facilities they deserve in which to teach and learn.

K-12 Education: Fully Funded And Equitable Schools

For too long, the quality of a child's education has been determined by their zip code, a system that reinforces racial and economic disparities and

leaves working families behind. While billionaires and corporations benefit from massive tax breaks, our public schools are left chronically underfunded, and predatory voucher programs further drain the lifeblood from local communities. We can build a public education system that serves as a true public good by requiring the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share toward our collective future. By securing stable, progressive revenue, we can ensure every classroom has small class sizes, every building is a safe and modern environment for learning, and every educator is paid a living wage which matches the importance of this profession. Investing in our schools is an investment in our democracy, moving us away from a system of scarcity and toward one where every student has the tools and support to succeed.

Health Care Is A Human Right

Health care is a basic need for survival, but for too long we have treated it as a product to be sold at a profit. No one should ever have to choose between purchasing food or medication, or go into bankruptcy because of medical debt. But the United States spends more on health care than most developed nations while achieving worse outcomes, making life unaffordable and robbing us of time with our loved ones. We can have a health care system in which patients come first and cost is not a barrier to adequate treatment. To address these problems comprehensively requires that we transform our healthcare system through improved and expanded Medicare for All. While we work towards free comprehensive health care for all, we need to stop big pharma from price gouging for prescription drugs, and ensure that when people need expensive care, they do not incur medical debt.

Fast And Free Transit

The ability to travel is a basic right: it impacts our ability to work, access education, and see our loved ones. But public transit is often underfunded, unreliable, and unaffordable. When more people ride public buses, ferries, and rail, it reduces traffic congestion and pollution for everyone. Making these public goods free also makes them better because public transportation providers can focus on getting us conveniently and reliably where we need to go – instead of focusing on payments and enforcing fare policies.

Utilities We Can Afford

Communities across the nation are being price gouged for basic utilities that they need in order to survive and communicate. Energy costs are rising far faster than inflation, to the benefit of some of the world's largest corporations and richest individuals. Rising costs and low wages also make it difficult for people to pay for critical utilities like electricity and heat. We can shift ownership from private utility companies to public ownership, fully fund and expand the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, ban price gouging on utilities, put price caps on utilities, and implement a progressive energy rate structure that would charge more for high energy users (like data centers).

Affordable Housing

Tax High-End Real Estate Sales To Build Affordable Housing

Disparities in real estate wealth are among the primary drivers of economic inequality and the racial wealth gap. The ultra-wealthy and corporations have been able to accumulate significant wealth

through property ownership and rental profits, while others have been left behind. Transfer taxes, or transfer fees, assess a fee at the point of sale on high-end transactions (e.g., real estate sales over \$1 million) and redirect this revenue into affordable housing production and preservation.

Ban Rent Gouging

Families across the country are facing displacement because our system allows corporate landlords to price gouge tenants in seek of limitless profits. There is no good reason to double someone's rent in a single year. We must place common-sense restrictions on extreme rent increases.

Expand And Improve Housing Assistance

Housing assistance has long been inadequate, and is under renewed attack by the Trump administration. While we must expand and improve federal housing assistance, states and localities must also take action now to ensure that everyone has access to a safe, stable, affordable home.

Expand Tenants' Rights And Protections

Just like workers deserve rights and protections at work, tenants deserve rights and protections at home. In addition to stabilizing rents, states and localities can take many other steps to make the housing market more fair for tenants and protect their rights.

Social Housing: A Permanently Affordable Home For All

Corporate ownership of our homes is not working. All of us deserve housing that is permanently affordable, where we have a say in our living conditions, and where our children can grow

and thrive. By investing in social housing, which creates permanently affordable homes for people with a wide range of incomes, we can build a more dignified housing system.

Good Jobs

A Thriving Wage For All

The federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour has not been increased since 2009, [and would have been nearly \\$26 per hour in 2024 if wage growth had kept up with productivity since 1968](#). Despite some states creating their own minimum wages, 20 states continue to use the outdated federal minimum, keeping many workers in poverty. The federal government must raise the minimum wage closer to the actual cost of living (at least \$25 per hour) and end all subminimum wages - including for tipped workers, workers with disabilities, youth, and incarcerated workers.

Jobs Guarantee

While corporations lay off workers to boost profits and replace people with AI, no one should be left without a way to earn a living. Rather than letting unemployment soar with the coming tsunami of layoffs, a public jobs program will put people to work rebuilding our communities, strengthening local economies, and restoring dignity to work instead of letting corporate greed decide who gets left behind.

Paid Family And Medical Leave

States can create programs that ensure access to paid leave, creating state-funded paid leave programs that replace lost income and protect workers from retaliation for needing time off.

Building Worker Power

All workers must have the right to organize. Cities and states can take steps to make it easier for workers to form unions and negotiate better working conditions. In states where these anti-union “right to work” laws exist, they must be defeated.

Strong Unemployment Protections

State leaders can strengthen unemployment protections, providing adequate access, income and duration of unemployment benefits so that workers can take the time to find jobs that fully utilize their skills and contribute to productivity and prosperity for all.

Strengthen Overtime And Prevent Wage Theft

Workers should be paid what they are owed. States must strengthen overtime laws and fully staff enforcement bodies that help workers defend their rights.

Worker Health And Safety

Going to work shouldn't put your safety or health at risk. A great many jobs could be safe if employers followed clear rules to make them safe and not erode workers health. Those measures often cost money, so public policies need to level the playing field so *all* employers follow best practices for safe workplaces.

This agenda is a blueprint for a country that works for all of us, where a dignified life is a right, not a privilege.

How We Pay For It:

TAX EXTREME WEALTH & LARGE CORPORATIONS FOR THE COMMON GOOD



The most common question we hear is, “So how do we pay for all this?” The answer is simple and has been true for generations: we pay for it by asking the wealthiest individuals and the largest, most profitable corporations to contribute their fair share.

For too long, our tax system has favored the rich, allowing them to amass extraordinary fortunes while public services and safety nets have been starved of resources. Funding the Affordability Agenda is not a matter of finding new money, but of reclaiming public resources and **economic power** from those who have benefited most from our economy. To that end, May Day Strong is proud to announce that we will be providing direct support to a new generation of local and state-level campaigns aimed at taxing the rich and supporting working families. These campaigns are built on a set of core principles designed to rebalance our tax code and fund a brighter future.

300,000

households control

\$40 trillion,

that's more than

5x's

what the federal government spent last year.

Our tax justice strategy is centered on three key pillars:

1. Taxing Extreme Wealth and Income:

We will champion policies that tax the massive, accumulated fortunes and highest incomes of the super-rich like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk. These are the households that have seen their wealth skyrocket while working families have fallen behind, and it is reasonable to ask them to contribute more to support the communities where their wealth was created.

2. Ensuring Large Corporations Pay Their Fair Share:

We will fight to close the loopholes and raise tax rates on the largest, most profitable corporations like Amazon, Facebook, Google, Exxon, and Walmart . These companies rely on public infrastructure, an educated workforce, a stable legal system to generate their profits, and often direct subsidies—most recently, for things like big tech data centers. Despite relying on these public goods, corporations use complex avoidance schemes to pay little to nothing in taxes.

3. Taxing Predatory Practices:

We will support innovative taxes that discourage destructive behavior by the super-rich and corporations. This includes taxing big oil companies when they pollute our environment, or mega-corporations like Amazon when they pay CEOs several hundred times more than their workers. These tax policies can discourage harmful practices while generating revenue to meaningfully improve people's lives.

Corporate and Wealthy Tax Rates Slashed

Year	Tax Rate	Top Corporate Rate
1945	94%	40%
1955	91%	52%
1981	70%	46%
2000	39.60%	35%
Current	37%	21%

**HOW DO WE PAY
FOR ALL THIS?**

These are not just theoretical ideas. Across the country, advocates are already winning transformative victories and proving that tax justice is politically possible and powerfully effective.

The wealthiest
0.1%
of Americans have
seen their share of the
nation's total financial
wealth surge from
10%
in 2003 to
16%
today.

- In Massachusetts, a voter-approved millionaires tax is now generating an additional \$3 billion each year to invest in public education and transportation.
- In New Mexico, progressive [tax changes](#) and revenues from corporations that extract the state's natural resources are being utilized to fund key health and education programs, including providing free, universal child care for all families, and have helped lead to a significant decrease in child poverty in the state.
- In New Jersey, a [newly won corporate transit fee](#) delivers over \$1 billion a year to fund critical statewide transit investments.

These victories, from the East Coast to the Southwest, prove that taxing the rich and large corporations to fund the public good is not a radical fantasy but a politically viable and popular strategy that is already changing lives. A just tax system provides the resources we need to build a society where everyone, not just the wealthy few, has what they need to thrive.

**THIS IS A FIGHT
FOR THE SOUL OF
OUR COUNTRY.**

Conclusion:**JOIN THE
MOVEMENT
FOR AN
AFFORDABLE
FUTURE**

The affordability crisis gripping our nation is not inevitable. It is the direct consequence of decades of policy choices that have consistently favored large corporations and the super-rich at the expense of working families. But we have the power to make different choices. We can choose to build an America where everyone has an affordable home, access to healthcare, and a job that pays a living wage.

May Day Strong is committed to turning this vision into a reality. We are dedicating our resources to fighting for The Real Affordability Agenda in city halls and statehouses across the country, building a groundswell of support for a future where our economy serves the many, not the few.

This is a fight for the soul of our country, and we cannot win it alone. We call on the public and the press to learn more about this agenda, to join the campaigns in your communities, and to help us build a movement powerful enough to put the makings of a good life back within everyone's reach.

For more resources including sample legislation and where states are leading:

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