

Women's Equal Pay

“Equality will be achieved when men and women are granted equal pay and equal respect.”-Beyonce. The definition of the gender wage gap is the difference between what men get paid and what women get paid. The equal pay act is made so women and men have equal pay for equal work. The jobs do not have to be exactly the same for equal pay to be given. Women's work is undervalued in society. For example, when large groups of women enter a work space the common wage seems to get lower. And even when women are college-educated and men aren't, the pay gap is no different between men who are educated. How does this make sense? My specific political message is women's equal pay. In rural places, women of color are part of the lowest paid workers. Big wage gaps could affect women in the long run.

Black and hispanic women earn just 56 cents for every dollar a man makes. Native American women earn 59 cents to every dollar (Hann, March 1 2024). Women of color are among the lowest paid workers in the U.S due to sexism and racism. They make almost half of what the majority of white women are paid. Black women have a wider than average wage gap, despite the fact that they take part in the workforce at a much larger rate compared to other women. During 2019 in the U.S, the average wealth of black households was \$24,100, compared to \$189,100 of most white households. This means that black households only owned 12.7% of typical white households (Harts). Women of color are part of the lowest paid workers, it is completely unfair how little recognition they get for the hard work some of them do.

Unequal pay also affects how women can provide for their families. Women who have a college degree are paid 26.8% less than men, this translates to a gap of \$13.52 hourly. These statistics show that for full time workers the annual pay gap is roughly \$28,000 (Gould, 2024). Due to the wage gap families struggle to make a living, save money to invest in the future, and pay for everyday goods. Around 63% of women who have children under the age of 6 are employed in some kind of job, but 71% when the children are 6 or over. But if you compare this to men it's no different (Miranda, 2024). The wage gap affects how women provide for their families every day.

Women's equal pay is an important political message. We as a society can help empower women for the better. If every woman from every background could be paid equally, poverty would go down, ensuring that families are able to have access to the things they need, and will help inclusion and diversity in the work area.

-Zahra

Drug and Alcohol Abuse in Teens

If you could secure a healthier and brighter future for yourself, would you? Or would you throw it all away to feel a quick relief right now? Drug and alcohol overuse is responsible for 106,000 deaths per year, as well as depression and homelessness. In teens, drug use has increased by 61% since 2016. For seniors in highschool, 62% reported they have abused alcohol. Additionally, 50% of all teens have used unprescribed medications in the wrong use at least once(NCDAS, 2024). Moreover, substance use in teens is often overlooked and has gone unnoticed for many years. Unfortunately, some adults whose children use drugs and alcohol are often unaware, or figure there is no point in trying to prevent them from using. Furthermore, many teens utilize drugs for various reasons, some similar to the motive of an adult. This can be extremely harmful to their health, learning, and many other important aspects of their lives. "Addiction is just a way of trying to get at something else. Something bigger. Call it transcendence if you want, but it's like a rat in a maze. We all want the same thing. We all have this hole. The thing you want offers relief, but it's a trap"(Tess Callahan). Alcohol and drug prevention in teens is an important, political message. In all, drug use and alcohol consumption at a young age negatively affects one's life in various ways. However, we can prevent substance use by finding a natural high or passion to pursue as a teen.

By using drugs and drinking alcohol, a teen can permanently ruin their future, relationships, and life. When a teen starts using a young age, they dig themselves into a hole that is extremely difficult to get out of. Though first, why do many teens begin to use? "Drug usage for many adolescents represents a neglect of responsibilities at a time when more important developmental experiences are required. Adolescents are at a crisis period in their lives, and when you intrude regularly at this point with powerful chemicals, the potential to solve these problems of growing up by living them through, working them out, is stopped"(Britannica, 2015). This shows how often drugs can allow a teen to temporarily escape from their problems, but all it does it slow their development as a person down. Additionally, other motives behind using drugs or drinking include peer pressure from others, curiosity or experimentation, to relieve boredom, or to rebel against guardians or authority. "Teenage drug use impacts the impulse control part of the developing, not-yet-mature brain. Due to the immaturity of the adolescent brain, individuals who begin using substances as teenagers are at greater risk of becoming addicted compared to those who begin substance use as adults"(Indian Health Service, 2018). Over time, repeated drug or alcohol use at a young age can also result in a risk to the physical health or growth of a teen. In all, only poor habits and health can come from drinking and using drugs as an adolescent.

However, through finding a natural high, or an activity to be involved in, teens can distance themselves from drugs and alcohol. A natural high includes some form of pursuit that releases natural-feel good chemicals inside of your brain, such as dopamine. "Did you know that we come hard wired with "happy hormones"? It's true! Dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins are all hormones that produce positive feelings and can be boosted by simple activities. We are built to experience a true natural high from pleasurable things like exercise, eating, laughing, affection, and sleeping"(Bethany, 2021). This collected information shows how rather than using drugs to feel relaxed or more content, your brain can feel the same from enjoyable experiences or activities. Moreover, through the Natural High Organization, teens everywhere can manifest a fuller and longer life by canceling out any drug or alcohol use. "83% of youth participating in the program reported that having a natural high will help fight the temptation to use drugs or alcohol"(Natural High,2024). Apart from this, many athletes and other celebrities, including Tony Hawk and Bethany Hamilton, have supported the Natural High Organization and told their own stories on the impact of substance use in their lives.To conclude, real and working alternatives to alcohol and other substance use exist,such as playing sports or instruments, and can bring you farther in life.

Altogether, alcohol and drug abuse has a negative impact on young people's health and future, but there are better alternatives that can prevent them from addiction. This is an important topic for several reasons, including an ensured brighter future for upcoming generations, and healthier, longer, lives for all. In the end, it is evident the health of our youth needs to be in better hands, and we can do this by supporting youth programs, or counseling in schools. When we can get an adolescent to find a passion or just to have someone to talk to, we can prevent substance use in teens day by day.

-Samuel

More Voices Against Assault

Misogyny and sexism run deep in our society, which pressures women to keep quiet about abuse, assault and harassment, and are taught it is normal and can be expected. We hear things such as “It wasn’t that bad,” or “well what were you wearing?” or “You should’ve told him to stop.” The definition of misogyny is “having a bias or prejudice against women and girls, thinking men are superior.” This is brought on by our patriarchal society. A patriarchy is a society run and operated by men, thinking that they are the superior gender. This is the deeper reason that sexual harassment and assault are so normalized today. My specific political message is about sexual assault and speaking up about it. The majority of those harassed or assaulted are women, and there are many reasons they may not speak up about it.

The main target of sexual violence or harassment are women. A study conducted in the UK shows that around “97% of women in the UK have been sexually assaulted.” (Geiger, 2024). 97% is an extremely high number of people, and that number is only women. In the US, only approximately one in three assaults get reported, and only 25 out of 1,000 perpetrators get convicted. (RAINN). The sheer amount of women getting assaulted and harassed is unbelievable in and of itself, but just think about how many go unnoticed and unreported every single year.

It’s frustrating, the amount of assaults that go unreported, but there are valid reasons someone might not say anything. Some of these reasons could be related to the perpetrator, “20% feared retaliation, 13% believed it was a personal matter, and 7% did not want the perpetrator to get in trouble” (RAINN). Lots of people believe that the perpetrator wasn’t doing anything wrong, or didn’t want them to get in trouble. Other reasons could be related to the officials that deal with these cases. “13% believed the police would not do anything to help, 8% believed it was not important enough to report, and 2% believed the police could not do anything to help” (RAINN). There is admittedly some trouble in getting people to believe these reports, as due to societal pressures, misogyny in our justice systems, or even things such as spouses or religious beliefs.

In conclusion, more attention is needed on assault victims and making people feel comfortable and safe reporting it. With just the sheer amount of people who go through this during their lifetime, I think it is an important matter to focus on.

-Nora

Struggles in the U.S.

"Because the homeless population is constantly shifting, the number of people who experience homelessness at some time during the course of a year is much greater than the number of people who are homeless on a given night"(The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024). Homelessness and Healthcare have been a massive problem with most results of homelessness being caused by a lack of treatment. This problem could easily be solved if the United States Lowered the amount of money they spend on military and foreign aid. My specific political message is: The United States should spend less money on the military and foreign aid and put that money toward homelessness and healthcare. Homelessness has become a massive problem affecting millions of people every year. Foreign aid money and military spending have put the U.S. into massive amounts of debt.

Homelessness is something that we are all aware of as it is a massive problem in our world right now with homelessness affecting 18 out of every 10,000 people. "Few social problems are as visible as the plight of homeless people. Once almost invisible and easily ignored, homeless people are now a common sight in cities, suburbs, and even some rural areas."(The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024). As homelessness has become more common more people can be affected by homelessness with numbers skyrocketing in recent years with a majority of the homeless population being African American "In 2019, 40 percent of homeless people were African Americans, though they made up only 13 percent of the country's population overall."(The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024). Normally you would think that a small percentage of the U.S. wouldn't make up such a big part of homelessness but sadly it does. Homelessness can also be caused by an increase in taxes from the U.S. increasing the amount of foreign aid money. "Since the end of World War II, generations of American taxpayers have watched their government spend well over \$3 trillion on foreign aid. But most aid projects have failed to solve the long-term problems of poverty and bad governance, and they will never be able to succeed." (James Robert 2023). Homelessness happens is that mental or physical disabilities can stop people from getting jobs and with low amounts of money already treatment towards the disability could potentially never happen "They may be unable to find work because of a recession or because of physical or mental illness. The loss of a job can cause some families to join the ranks of the homeless for a period of days, weeks, or months until another job is found."(The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024).

Although mental illnesses could be controlled with healthcare effectively lowering homelessness and increasing overall health in people it is too expensive. Healthcare in the U.S costs more than most people can afford with most people that have health care being middle and upper classes" In the rural United States first-contact care is likely to come from a generalist. The middle- and upper-income groups living in urban areas"(Todd, Scarborough 2024). The people that need health care the most are mainly lower and lower-middle class people instead they have to go somewhere else as "There is no national health service, as such, in the United States. Most physicians in the country have traditionally been in some form of private practice, whether seeing patients in their own offices, clinics, medical centers, or another type of facility and regardless of the patients' income."(Tod, Scarborough). Most physicians will overcharge for their services, leaving each person with little money creating problems with all of their expenses. Creating issues in the future potentially makes them struggle for a long time. Foreign aid is something the U.S. spends a lot on not knowing what they are going to use it on "The biggest problem with foreign aid is that it often goes to countries that have troubled histories and deeply entrenched problems. In many of these countries, the most basic functions of government are totally unreliable."(Robert 2023). With the countries not changing just becoming more corrupt. As the years pass foreign aid has not been as useful towards countries. "Back then, foreign aid was a key weapon in the battle with the Soviet Union for the "hearts and minds" of people in developing countries. But that era is over."(Robert 2023). The U.S could have spent all of this money on healthcare saving lives and less fortunate families that can struggle with a visit to the hospital but they don't care "in the United States the nature of first-contact care is less consistent. General practice in the United States was in a state of decline in the second half of the 20th century, especially in metropolitan areas." (Todd, Scarborough 2024). With all of these points, I hope you can see the problems that I see in the U.S..

The United States should spend less money on military and foreign aid and more money on homelessness and free healthcare. Homelessness is a massive problem in the U.S. and with no awareness of homelessness, it just grows at a massive rate. Healthcare also needs more attention as most people in the hospital are not able to leave the hospital with a good amount of money. They need to worry about the amount of money they will have leftover causing them to not go to the hospital.

-Ethan

Teen Suicide And Mental Health`

Ten percent of highschoolers have attempted suicide in the past year. What is tempting students to take their own lives, and what can we do to help? Are there resources we can offer to students that could help prevent this? Teen suicide is a global tragedy that is rising rapidly. Research has found that 12.6 million people between the ages of 18 and 25 have experienced mental, behavioral, or emotional health issues in the past year (JED, 2024). These mental health issues can greatly impact children and young adults in school, work, and their social lives. On occasion these issues can lead to suicide. My specific political message is about teen suicide and mental health. The isolation of the pandemic, tuition rates, and the cost of living are some main factors that are leading kids in gen-z to take their own lives.

The Covid-19 pandemic heavily impacted teens' mental health. The isolation, disruption of routines, and the uncertainty of the future weighed heavily on teenagers during this time. Schools closed, social interactions moved online, and many people experienced loss of friends and loved ones, causing loneliness and anxiety. The constant stream of distressing news and unpredictable future exacerbated the emotions. Many teens found themselves experiencing extreme levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. A great number of kids that suffered with these mental health problems from the pandemic seriously considered or attempted suicide (CDC, 2022). To sum up, stress and depression in young people caused by the isolation and unpredictable future heightened suicide rates.

In addition to the pandemic, inflation of tuition rates and the cost of living is a big factor in teen mental health problems. It has been found to contribute to suicide, especially in the past few years. The cost of tuition has been rising, and will continue to as we get older. This increases stress in teenagers greatly by forcing them to constantly be thinking about money, and some reports of teenagers saying they won't be as successful as their parents. Often the cost of school causes kids to drop out, or not even apply, which increases the possibility of not having a job or stable income. In 2017 five college students at Columbia University committed suicide within the first semester. In 2014 and 2015, suicide rates at the Massachusetts Institute of Tecnology surpassed the national average (Shrikant, 2023). In short, the cost of tuition and price of living greatly adds to youth suicide and mental health issues.

To conclude, teen suicide and mental health is a big concern globally and is effecting more young people as time passes. It has been elevated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the cost of living. As we are living in a post-pandemic world where inflation is only getting worse, how can we change these statistics, and help our youth not feel alone?

-Moth

Ending Fossil Fuel Dependency

In 2016, thirty six countries came together and signed the Paris Agreement. They agreed to reduce their fossil fuel consumption between 2016 and 2019. However, according to a study by Stanford University, “carbon dioxide emissions fell at roughly one tenth the rate needed worldwide to hold global warming well below 2°C relative to preindustrial levels.” (Stanford University, 2021). Additionally, the countries not participating during that period continued to increase their emissions. From 2016 to 2019, global emissions saw a net increase of 240 million tons (Stanford University, 2021). While the Paris Agreement did not have the effect that was intended, it showed that such measures can be successful. However, current plans are not ambitious enough, and many countries are not following the plans that have already been put into place. The need to eliminate fossil fuels is urgent, and it cannot be ignored. However, the sheer power of fossil fuels cannot be replaced by renewables alone.

The need to increase reductive measures has never been clearer. According to Phillippe Squarzoni, “The notions of growth, profit, and competition all dictate values and attitudes that are incompatible with the moderation needed to preserve the climate” (Climate Changed, 2016). The free market does not have the kind of willpower needed to restrict cheap energy like oil. Energy production needs to be monitored and controlled by an impartial government. In fact, if disaster is to be averted, “the inhabitants of rich countries must immediately decrease their emissions to the level of a malnourished person” (Climate Changed, 2016). At the same time as this climatic crisis, society also faces a resource crisis. According to Hélène Gassin, “Various sources estimate that we will reach global peak oil before 2030...by 2030 we'll have entered an era of oil shortages” (Climate Changed, 2016). Oil and gas are running out fast, and no matter how we respond to the climate crisis, we will face a rapid decline within decades.

Fossil fuels are problematic, and they must be eliminated. However, they can never be fully replaced by renewables. The density of energy in fossil fuels is unmatched by any other energy source. The plan moving forward should not be to simply replace fossil fuels, but to reduce overall consumption as well. Resource consumption should be drastically reduced, then the consumption that is necessary should be covered renewably. One example of renewable energy falling short of the exorbitant demands of developed society can be found in California. A study by Stanford University shows that “For energy purchases dominated by solar power, an entity generates far more electricity than it uses during the afternoon and sells the excess. Then at nighttime it purchases power from the grid, which is much more carbon-intensive if generated by burning of fossil fuels” (Stanford University, 2019). This study shows that renewables cannot solve the climate crisis on their own. They must be paired with reductive measures to ensure effectiveness.

In conclusion, fossil fuel dependence is a serious problem. However, using a combination of renewable energy production and legislation to reduce energy usage, it can be eliminated. If you don't want to live in a world where global warming is rampant and your electrical bills fluctuate wildly, it is time to end your dependence on oil, coal and natural gas.

-Milo

School Shootings in the U.S.

Gun violence in schools is a big issue in the United States and can be complicated. How many school shootings happen in the U.S.? How many kids die each day from gun violence? What states have the highest amount of school shootings? How many school shootings have happened this year? These are all things we think about when we think about school shootings. School shootings are when an armed intruder enters a school and injures or kills the people in the school. These are very dangerous since most of the time they are uncalled for and they occur frequently in the U.S.

To begin, many kids die from school shootings each year. Half way through 2024 we have already had a number of school shootings. There have been at least 18 school shootings so far, these included shootings on college campuses and at K-12 schools (CNN, 2024). This is a problem since there are many kids that die each day at these shootings. Every day 12 children die from gun violence in the U.S. and 32 are injured (Sandy Hook Promise, 2024). It is important to think about these facts since school shootings are drastically impacting the lives of students in the U.S. In the long run, school shootings affect many kids and cause problems for many people.

Although school shootings kill many students, the U.S. has many more school shootings than other nations. School shootings happen all over the world but, the United States have had the majority of school shootings especially since the late 20th century (Pew Research Center, 2023). This means that we have had a recent increase in school shootings in the U.S. and now have 57 times more shootings than other nations (CNN, 2024). Out of all the states in the U.S. Texas has had the most school shootings with 58 shootings since 2008 (CNN, 2024). This is because Texas has less gun laws than other states. In the long run, it is important to think about these facts since it shows how the U.S. has increased in gun violence over the years.

Overall, school shootings kill many students and the U.S. has many more school shootings than other places. This is important since the lives of students in the U.S. are being changed because of school shootings. We need to try to prevent shootings so students can be safe at school and have a better future.

-Lucy