

Americans need relief, not war

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Americans are paying nearly 60 cents a gallon more to fill up their gas tanks following President Donald Trump's war with Iran, a war seemingly of choice, not necessity. What is of necessity is addressing the economic stress already reverberating across America.

Today, millions of Americans are being squeezed in every direction and finding it harder and harder to afford the basics to keep a roof over their heads, meals on the table and the lights on. These were the issues people voted on in November, and it's only getting worse. People are demanding relief, not war.

We recently surveyed our own members—educators, healthcare professionals and public workers—about how they are coping with these rising costs. Seventy-four percent of respondents report living month to month, paycheck to paycheck, and more than a third say they are unable to cover all of their monthly bills. More than half reported being worse off financially since Trump returned to office. And troubling numbers of people are turning to debt and predatory “buy now, pay later” loans just to get by. Nearly half of respondents reported paying for medical or dental care with a credit card over the past 12 months, and nearly a third say they've used a credit card to pay their utilities.

Matthew, a teacher in Texas, told us that his electricity was cut off right before Christmas because he just couldn't keep up with high energy costs and paying off debt for his child's medical needs. Jodi, a nurse from Oregon, told us that the pressure of not being able to pay her bills and afford food is affecting her physically, mentally and emotionally. These are people who teach our kids and care for our communities, yet they are being stretched to their breaking point.

This is a five-alarm emergency. But instead of providing people with the economic relief he promised, Trump continues to deny, deflect and double down on policies that magnify people's economic pain.

This war isn't just driving up gas prices. It is costing a billion dollars a day and increasing the cost of moving food and practically

everything we buy—costs that are being passed on to consumers. Families are paying \$1,200 a year more for the basics because of Trump's tariffs—tariffs Trump has refused to back down on even though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional. The refusal of Trump and congressional Republicans to extend Affordable Care Act subsidies has increased premiums by up to 114 percent for families. The list goes on and on.

While Trump used his State of the Union address to attempt to rewrite his failed economic record, my union is stepping up to help people navigate a path out of debt and put money back in people's pockets.

Working-class Americans need a tax cut now.

As a union, we continue to organize and fight for collective bargaining contracts that lift wages, ensure people can retire with dignity, and address so many other kitchen-table issues. We've also launched a new Fight for Affordability campaign that includes a suite of new consumer empowerment tools and expanded debt and financial literacy clinics. This work builds on what we've done to help

over 1 million people get the public service student debt relief that former presidents and Congress had promised them. America's affordability crisis should not result in a debt sentence for families just trying to get by.

Working people need cash now so they can afford their rent, pay down debt and save for their retirement. Working-class Americans need a tax cut now. I was proud to join Sens. Chris Van Hollen and Mark Kelly, the Patriotic Millionaires, the AFL-CIO and AFT members last week as they introduced the Working Americans' Tax Cut Act, which would provide immediate relief to 104 million adults and 26 million children by exempting them from taxes if they earn less than a living wage. And it would be paid for by millionaires paying their fair share in taxes. This relief for working people is in stark contrast to Trump's so-called Big Beautiful Bill, which handed out \$1 trillion in tax breaks to the top 1 percent while leaving working people high and dry.

Congress should be focused on getting money back into people's pockets rather than making it harder for people to vote or funding a war whose justification changes daily.

One job should be enough to afford a decent life free from debt and anxiety. It's time for real economic relief for working people. Let's restore the promise of America as the land of opportunity for all.



Weingarten speaks at a press conference in support of the Working Americans' Tax Cut Act in Washington, D.C., on March 12.

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