

# #1406 RIP Austerity, the American Rescue Plan and the End of Reaganism

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to today's episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall learn about the American Rescue Plan and discuss what it does, where it falls short, and whether it could signal the end of an era. Clips today are from The Bradcast, Democracy Now!, the Thom Hartmann Program, Off-Kilter, The Majority Report, The Zero Hour, Unf\*\*\*ing the Republic, There Will Be Swearing, and Pitchfork Economics.

## Biden's 'American Rescue Plan' May Ultimately Be Seen as the End of the Reagan Era Part 1 - The Bradcast - Air Date 3-11-21

**BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST W/ BRAD FRIEDMAN:** [00:00:27] Ron Klain said we want to move as fast as possible; we will hold our celebration of the signing on Friday as planned with congressional leaders. Presumably, that will only be Democratic congressional leaders since no Republicans in either chamber voted in favor of the bill despite some of them going on to Twitter on Wednesday to sing its praises.

**DESI DOYEN:** [00:00:52] Of course they did.

**BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST W/ BRAD FRIEDMAN:** [00:00:54] As if they had voted in favor of it. So don't be fooled. Zero. Zero Republicans voted for what is now not just a stimulus bill but a landmark recovery, relief and stimulus bill that is structured wildly differently from anything before it in modern times pumping a huge amount of money where it's actually needed, including mostly to the poor and the working class who have struggled the most over the past year, not to mention the past, Oh, I don't know, four decades.

**DESI DOYEN:** [00:01:27] The people who actually build then make the country run

**BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST W/ BRAD FRIEDMAN:** [00:01:30] This nearly \$2 trillion package sees most of its funds go to the poor and the working class, and yes, it received zero votes from Republicans. That by way of contrast with the Republican tax cuts from 2017 that cost the same nearly \$2 trillion with 65% of the benefits from that bill going to the wealthiest, the top 1% of the nation and that \$2 trillion bill was voted for by every Republican in both houses which I hope gives you an unvarnished, non-partisan, clear picture of the priorities of each of the two major parties. Money, child support, healthcare expansion, unemployment payments meant to help those most in need in the country, such as the middle class and the working poor, that was opposed by every single Republican.

Money and long-term tax cuts for the wealthy and for corporations, at a time when profits for those same people were never higher before the bill was passed, was supported at the time in those tax cuts by every single Republican. Got that? And that is not a partisan statement. This is just an historical fact that I want to point out because I want you to keep

this in mind and share it with your friends and family when the next elections come around in less than two years and you don't have to be a partisan to do so: to share these actual facts of who voted for what and who voted against what now, in fact, while only time will tell, what I've come to learn about Joe Biden and the Democrats' \$1.9 trillion American rescue plan is that it is so radically different from how we have operated in recent decades with these sorts of bills as far as how the benefits are distributed to the American people, that we may look back on this day -- I know I'm going out on a limb here, Desi Doyen, I'm making another prediction -- but I think we may look back on this day and see this day as the official end of the Reagan era. Really. I don't know, that's how different this -- I believe, anyway -- that this package is. And by the way, it's just one of the reasons that yes, every Republican voted against it. If Democrats can keep this up, and of course that remains a big if -- they are Democrats after all, and it does rely on voters -- this could be a sea change really in the country for a generation of Americans like myself, by the way, who were largely brought up in a nation under the notion that the federal government does next to nothing other than make life easier for rich people and for corporations. That has pretty much been what I have seen for the bulk of my life, certainly the bulk of my adult life. And now if that begins to change, if people across the country, yes, including Republicans, yes, including Trump Republicans, if they start to see \$1,400 checks, as they will, and they start seeing monthly checks for children, up to \$3,600 annually for each child, when they continue to see an extra \$300 on top of their state unemployment checks, when they realize that their monthly insurance premiums, health insurance premiums, could be going down in some cases to zero, all, thanks to this bill, when they begin to see an influx of cash to their children's schools to make improvements, to make them easier to reopen safely -- it is going to be very hard for Republicans to continue their claims that, Oh, Democrats are terrible. These guys are horrible. Radical. You hate them. They're socialists. All of that socialism needs to stop. That American parents really in truth don't want that \$300 or \$600 or \$900 monthly child tax credit checks coming into their houses anymore. They just don't want that. Good luck with that argument, Republicans. Good luck telling your constituents in 2022 why all of this must be stopped immediately and why their insurance premiums need to go up before the next midterm elections.

To me, this seems like an astounding act of political malpractice, in fact, by the Republicans. I'm not a political insider. Certainly, I'm not a Republican political insider, so I certainly can't even begin to guess what they may be thinking with what seems and historic act of political miscalculation on their parts.

Again, time will tell, but good luck telling 70%, 76% of the nation which supports this bill right now -- including 60% of Republican voters -- good luck telling them why you voted against it and how it is that you want to end the improvements that this measure of the American Rescue Plan makes in the lives of the vast majority of the country including, yes, Republican voters.

**In Rejection of Austerity, Democrats Push Forward  
Landmark \$1.9 Trillion Relief Package - Democracy  
Now! - Air Date 3-10-21**

**JUAN GONZALEZ - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:06:59] Well, Stephanie Kelton, could you be a little more specific in terms especially of what has to be the most — the newest part and the potentially most far-reaching part, is this child tax credit, and explain how it would work? Because there had been a child tax credit passed in December in the last stimulus package, but this would extend it for another year, throughout 2021, as a monthly payment per child to families in America. Explain the mechanics. And also, it's only for last year and this year. What about the future?

**STEPHANIE KELTON:** [00:07:37] Yeah, you're right. So, this is a temporary expansion and an increase, as well. And so, what many families are going to see is a check show up in the mail. And for each child, on average, people would be looking at something like \$300 per child per month. It's a significant increase over what was done in the past, which was \$200.

And you're right to point out that it's temporary. And Democrats definitely hope that it will not remain temporary, that this is something that they can move forward to make permanent in the years to come, because, you know, Juan, a lot of countries have programs like this. They have a child dividend. They provide monthly support for families with certain income levels. And it's pretty generous. Most families will, in fact, benefit from this. So, this is something other wealthy countries have done for a very long time. The U.S. has been a laggard in this respect. And so, we're beginning to catch up with many other wealthy countries around the world. Sending direct payment to families with children allows them to, you know, cover child expenses, which, of course, are incredibly high in this country.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:08:51] If you can talk more about the significant shift of what this means for the American people? And even though the Republicans aren't joining in and supporting this, there's actually little fundamental criticism of this shift, the whole idea of a kind of European socialism, that's very well accepted throughout Western Europe, and the idea that, I mean, you have parents of 93% of American children, 69 million people, will be getting monthly checks, you know, really particularly will impact the poorest children, children of color, though it will help most everyone in the country. And whether you think this can continue, which, of course, is the fundamental hope of many, not just a bailout this year, but a new model for guaranteed income, a floor for families in this country?

**STEPHANIE KELTON:** [00:09:51] I think so, Amy. I mean, it would be — in some sense, you know, it would be cruel to demonstrate that the federal government has the capacity, with one piece of legislation, to change the lives of tens of millions of Americans, to just lift half of all the kids in this country who are today living in poverty — will not be living in poverty in the coming weeks and months because of this piece of legislation. Now, so many of the provisions that we've been talking about are temporary, and that means that when they expire, if they are allowed to expire, those very same families, many of them, will fall back into poverty.

So, what the government is doing with this bill is demonstrating that, in a sense, poverty is a policy choice and that Congress can step up and change that with a piece of legislation, with a further commitment, with a doubling down on some of these programs that make them permanent and that demonstrate the government is committed not just to alleviating strain in a time of crisis, but to fundamentally eradicating poverty in this country.

## **End of Conservative Era? - Thom Hartmann Program - Air Date 3-15-21**

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** [00:10:58] . . . and that is that we are at the end of an era. Peter Church had published a really provocative piece about a decade ago, 10 years ago, in *Nature* magazine. And in that piece, he pointed out that politics tends to go in roughly 50-year cycles. Sometimes they're as short as 40 years; sometimes they go as long as 60 years, but typically the sweet spot is 50 years. And he pointed out that 1971 -- well, he didn't point it out; he just referenced that period of time -- I pointed out in my piece over at hartmanreport.com that 1971 was when the Powell memo was written. It was when the entire right mobilized. Within four or five years of that, you had the Federalist Society created, the Heritage Foundation created, the Charles Koch Foundation became the Cato Institute. You had . . . State policy networks started growing and every single state. We now have a billionaire-owned and driven political infrastructure, with all of these groups, that is larger than the Republican party itself.

So, I had a great conversation last night with Dean Obeidallah on his show here on Sirius XM. And we were talking about this and just laying this out. Why do Republicans . . . For example, the tax cut that Trump pushed through back in 2017 had 25% approval among the American public -- 25%, according to Quinnipiac. And every Republican voted for it. This American Relief Act, which is what Biden is calling it, now has 65% approval, more or less, across the board. And even a majority of Republicans approve of it. It depends on which study you're looking at and when it was done, because Fox News has been pounding on it, how horrible it is for, a couple of weeks now. They are capable of shifting opinions, but the bottom line is it's very popular and yet every Republican voted against it. And you ask why? Because it's not the Republicans who control the Republican party. It's a handful of right-wing, cranky, right-wing billionaires who put their, who use their money to basically buy politics. And I think their day has come to an end. I think this 50-year cycle -- since 1971 to 2021: that's 50 years, or from Reagan to today: that's 40 years; Reagan became president in January of 1981 -- and if you look at those cycles, I think that the . . . I'm going out on a limb here, but I really believe that you and I will be having this conversation a year, two years, three years, certainly four or five years down the road, looking back and saying the American Recovery Act and Joe Biden's speech -- and I get it; Joe Biden is no Bernie Sanders -- but nonetheless, we are going to be looking back at this moment and saying the American Recovery Act and Joe Biden's speech marked the beginning of the turn, the beginning of the end of the era of Reaganomics. As I pointed out in my piece over at hartmanreport.com that the thing that really brought it to a head was the Trump presidency.

## **Biden's 'American Rescue Plan' May Ultimately Be Seen as the End of the Reagan Era Part 2 - The Broadcast - Air Date 3-11-21**

**BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BROADCAST W/ BRAD FRIEDMAN:** [00:14:02] Clinton economic advisor Larry Summers, he notes, was particularly incoherent. He says that Summers didn't mind a lot of spending, it's just that it should be channeled to public

investment, not just giving away a bunch of money. Dan says this is critically wrong on a number of levels, but the biggest is that the ARP, the American Rescue Plan, does in fact bring lasting public investment which makes it a huge one-year investment bill, as well as everything else.

Much of these investments prevent deterioration, but he says a smaller hole to drag out of will be created in the future. And it certainly helps some of these investments will create pockets of durability that will be remembered as part of the ARP. That's especially true, he notes, if key investments are eventually made permanent. He goes on to cite just some of those investments in this sweeping bill that have not yet received as much attention, for example, as the one-time \$1,400 individual checks which are coming soon, he says, let's start with the health insurance the health infrastructure investments.

He says there's a section on providing medical supplies and personnel for rural health care providers, something that will be difficult to dislodge post-pandemic. He says there's \$7.6 billion for state and local health department workers and another \$7.6 billion for community health centers which provide basic care in poor communities.

For context, he notes Bernie Sanders got \$11 billion for community health centers in the Affordable Care Act. But that \$11 billion was to be spent over five years. Nonetheless, it made a significant difference. This bill, by contrast, this is \$7.6 billion in investments in one single year. Wow.

Then there's the school funding: \$128 billion is dedicated to a K through 12 which will deliver more to the poorest schools up to \$8,000 per student in low income districts like Cleveland. \$8,000 more per student meaning that money can be used to make long-term investments in schools like improving ventilation which can serve as both pandemic preparedness and better learning environments; these have proven to make a difference in the classroom, he notes. The \$39 billion in childcare grants can -- and that's separate by the way, from the from the \$300 monthly checks that folks will be getting per child -- \$39 billion in childcare grants can rebuild care infrastructure which is desperately needed, thought about as a one-year investment. It's absolutely enormous, \$39 billion. There's also \$7 billion emergency connectivity fund for remote learning, which he says comes a bit late, but can help to provide lasting broadband infrastructure. There's also more than \$30 billion for public transit which will go toward arresting the sector-wide crisis for low pandemic ridership on public transit which he says easily could have spiraled into permanent cutbacks to those public transit systems. This will sustain transit budgets until 2023 in some areas. And I believe, Desi Doyen, you will discuss that a bit more in another aspect of the ARP in your green news report a little bit later today.

All of this is on top of the \$350 billion investment in state and local governments which thanks to a last minute change can go towards service improvements in things like water and sewage and broadband. \$350 billion. That's some real money. Some of this money will pour into lasting investments and upgrades in key systems around the country. Remember, I remember going to a national parks and state parks and stuff and seeing stuff that was built after the Depression or during the Depression by FDR. Yeah. We could be looking at investments like that that decades down the road we're looking back at the ARP and the infrastructure improvements that it has made. Similarly, he notes the \$31 billion for tribal governments, the largest investment in those communities in a very long time, that will

include lasting infrastructure, some of it earmarked for housing. And when you have legislation that for one year would reduce poverty from almost 14% down to about 9% and cut child poverty by more than half, he notes, you are freeing people from many day-to-day stresses and putting them in position to succeed. This is the largest anti-poverty bill in decades.

## Help Is On the Way - OFF-KILTER with Rebecca Vallas - Air Date 3-12-21

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER WITH REBECCA VALLAS:** [00:19:12] You have to talk about both when you talk about income-boosting provisions within the tax code that reach lower and moderate income families and workers. In the case of the EITC, one of the biggest gaps over the years that advocates have been ringing the alarm bells about and pointing to in terms of the agenda to eliminate poverty in this country is that it has really left behind workers who don't have dependent kids. So, here we've been talking about the child tax credit, which is for families with kids, but for folks who are struggling with low wages but don't have dependent children, the federal government taxes them deeper into poverty. And in fact, that's the only group that is taxed deeper into poverty or into poverty by the federal government of all workers. This law also actually starts to fix that as well.

**SETH HANLON:** [00:20:06] Yeah, that's right. So the the earned income tax credit for workers without children is basically tripled. So, the maximum credit had been \$543 which is very small compared to families with children would get \$2,000, \$3,000, sometimes \$4,000. So, it was only about \$500, and this bill basically triples that to \$1,500. And, like you said, the childless workers are the only group that are taxed further into poverty by the federal income tax.

And a lot of the people who are considered not to have children for the earned income tax credit are actually helping support children. It's just that if they don't have children in their home most of the time or don't have custody over [them]. So, a lot of them are actually parents.

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER WITH REBECCA VALLAS:** [00:20:51] There's another tax credit as well that I feel like is the sibling of the child tax credit and the even less attention and visibility sometimes than those two do. And that's the child and dependent care credit which has a lot to do with helping families afford childcare and dependent care. That gets some love in this law as well.

**SETH HANLON:** [00:21:10] Yeah, it does. And I think it's really one of the overlooked major expansions of tax credits in the law. Basically, the child and dependent care tax credit -- so this is separate from the child tax credit -- but it's a tax credit for childcare expenses for people who need childcare to go to work. And it was just the most weirdly designed tax credit where it was totally nonrefundable so the people with low incomes got absolutely nothing. But then once you got into the middle class, it phased down so quickly that people got only at most of very small benefit from it. So it was this kind of weird thing in the tax code that didn't really benefit anybody that much. And so this is a major expansion and basically what it does is for low and middle income families, it creates a fully refundable tax credit that's essentially going to cover half of a family's childcare expenses up to, if you have

two kids, up to \$16,000 a year. So, potentially people can get a tax credit of \$8,000 if they have \$16,000 of childcare expenses. So, it's a huge step forward in helping people afford childcare.

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF-KILTER WITH REBECCA VALLAS:** [00:22:20] And obviously part and parcel of this law is also an historic investment in childcare. I believe \$40 billion is the number that ended up making it in, not nearly every dollar that we need in terms of childcare investment right now to catch up with where we need to be, but huge steps in the right direction. There's also -- and this is the final thing we'll put on the table before we switch gears a little bit -- there's also a piece in this law that has gotten almost no attention, relatively speaking, and certainly compared to, say, the child tax credit expansion or the direct payments or the unemployment insurance, and that has to do with healthcare premiums particularly for folks who have lost their jobs during the pandemic.

**SETH HANLON:** [00:22:59] Yeah, COBRA health care coverage, right? If you lose your job, you can stay on a plan but you really have to pay for it on your own. And there had been some help from previous bills. But this bill covers 100% of COBRA premiums. So, if somebody loses their job, they can essentially stay on and the government's gonna pick up the cost of the premium, which I think is obviously crucial for people who lose their jobs and lose their health insurance with it.

And then also there's 12 million people who get health insurance through the marketplaces that were established by Obamacare. And this the rescue plan lowers the premium substantially for people who get healthcare on those marketplaces.

## **The End of Trickle-Down Economics Joe Stiglitz on the "Transformational" \$1.9T American Rescue Plan - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-12-21**

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:23:42] I mean, the child tax credit, on its surface, might look like just another tweak to the tax code, but it defines a profound shift in how we view society, confronting poverty much like the New Deal's creation of Social Security and what that did for the elderly. Could this continue?

**JOSEPH STIGLITZ:** [00:24:03] I believe it can. I mean, when you think about it, children don't choose their parents. And if there is any concern about the future of the country, you want to make sure that the children, no matter who their parents are, can live up to their potential.

One of the things that I pointed out in my research is that the American dream is really a myth. The life prospects of a young American are more dependent on the income and education of its parents than in almost any other advanced country. It's absolutely the opposite of the way we think about ourselves. And so, this is transformational. It says, "We are actually going to live up — try to live up — to our aspirations."

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:24:53] You have also the \$5 billion for farmers of color, for Black farmers, in debt relief. The Republicans are trying to make this the

kind of poster child example of — well, they're talking about reparations. But how key is this, Professor Stiglitz?

**JOSEPH STIGLITZ:** [00:25:15] Well, this addresses a kind of legacy of discrimination that we've had. When you've had a legacy of discrimination, you have to undo it. It's not a question of reparations, although I think there's a strong argument that can be made for reparations, but just for our society to go forward with a modicum of equality is going to necessitate dealing with some of the consequences of the discrimination of the past.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:25:52] Is this the end of trickle-down economics?

**JOSEPH STIGLITZ:** [00:25:54] I hope so. I hope we've learned that, as I mentioned earlier, the 2017 bill of Trump was, hopefully, the last gasp of trickle-down economics. The theory was giving all that money to the corporations and the billionaires would lead to sustained economic growth from which everyone would benefit. What we saw in that bill was that the money overwhelmingly went to share buybacks, dividends, very little that trickled down to ordinary workers. That was a real demonstration that trickle-down economics didn't work. And this is the antithesis of what Trump did. It's building up the economy from the middle and the bottom.

## **What's In Biden's Relief Bill - The Majority Report w/ Sam Seder - Air Date 3-13-21**

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT W/ SAM SEDER:** [00:26:45] Give me a sense of . . . All right, so let's put this into context. It implies at the very least, or is maybe explicit, that there is a fundamental shift. People are talking about this as the end of the Reagan era of thinking. How durable is that? We're past COVID; the economy is booming -- I'm just hypothetical -- the economy is booming. We don't need to do these things anymore. Or. Do we learn the lesson that, Hey, the economy is booming because we did this. This is making people suffer less. That's a good thing. We should not change that.

**DAVID DAYEN:** [00:27:24] It's entirely based on what happens within the next year.

Whether or not we carry this forward and make this, make these things permanent features of our safety net or not. There's people like to quote this thing that Biden said, I think at a fundraiser where he said, nothing will fundamentally change. So, in this bill, something did in fact fundamentally change, and it was this change in philosophy, this change in what the public needs are. But it's only a temporary shift and it won't be a fundamental shift until we make that decision. Now, I think the administration believes that they have a really good argument to make once they have now given the families this advanceable support. So, instead of waiting for their taxes, they get it every month. The child tax credit existed, it was a \$2,000 per child tax credit, but now it's first of all available up to age 18. Second of all, under six it's you get more money for those individuals. And third of all, it's advanceable, so you get a monthly check rather than having to wait once a year in your taxes. So, once people are getting that check, it's going to be the theory is it's going to be very hard for the political system to say, you're not getting that check anymore. It's an effective tax increase. Because this is the child tax credit, Republicans would have to be increasing taxes on working



families, on all families in America. The theory is that's going to be very difficult to take away from people, and the same thing for the the new Affordable Care Act subsidies which the administration absolutely wants to make permanent.

In theory, that makes sense; in practice, it's very easy to not pass a bill. It's very easy to just continue gridlock on the course that it's on. It is not preordained, let's say, that just because not doing something will cause a bad action doesn't mean that that bad action won't take place.

So I think it's going to be a difficult fight. Now, are they going to use reconciliation to make permanent the child tax credit or the subsidies? You can do that as long as you pay for it. So they chose not to pay really for much of anything in this bill. There are a few minor tax increases in this bill on wealthy families, mostly because they put a cap. They said this is a \$1.9 trillion budget reconciliation, and they actually went over that cap so they had to do a little bit of of tax increases, revenue increases, to offset that.

But if you offset the whole cost, then yes, you can make this permanent in reconciliation. But you have to choose what those offsets would be. And while it's simple in theory getting every member of the Democratic Senate caucus on board for a specific set of tax increases that would fund this specific thing because there's this idea out there that these offsets are finite. And I don't want to use them on that; I want to use them on climate, or I want to use them on education, or I want to use them on healthcare -- I don't want to use it on on this child . . . So, I think that's going to be where some of the difficulty lies here is finding a mix of these particular offsets. Everybody, it seems, in the Democratic caucus wants to continue this child tax credit program. There are differences of opinion as to how you administer it, but the question is going to be, are you going to be able to find the offsets and actually get it done?

## **Prof. Richard Wolff Imagining a Real American Rescue - The Zero Hour with RJ Eskow - Air Date 3-11-21**

**RJ ESKOW - HOST, THE ZERO HOUR WITH RJ ESKOW:** [00:31:22] One of the things that I keep hearing, and it's a quote from, I believe, the National Tax Center or something like this, did the calculation that households in the lowest quintile in the United States, if they have three children, will see out of this bill a 20% increase in income, temporarily, which gets left off a lot of times, but just for one year, will see a 20% increase in income.

And this has been a big part of the celebration of the bill. It's been repeated constantly, and as I mentioned on social media, by the same center's calculations, before the pandemic, the lowest quintile, the average income was \$13,000 something. So what you're celebrating is that households, 20% of the households in this country, some of whom have three children, are trying to get by on less than \$14,000, and you're going to give them a 20% boost, one time. But the quote that came to mind for me was that of that famous democratic socialist Martin Luther King Jr. who said true compassion is not flinging coins to beggars, but recognizing the edifices that make it necessary to beg at the first place.

Am I being unfair here? Because it seems to me next year these people are going to be back at \$13,500 or whatever trying to raise three kids, and maybe there'll be up to \$15,000 if we

can keep some of these provisions. But that to me reflects a horrible condition that we are permitting and even accepting by celebrating this, that one in five houses will live this way.

**PROF RICHARD WOLFF:** [00:33:03] Yeah, it's unbelievable because if \$14,000 is what we're talking about for the bottom quintile and they get improved by 20%, that's \$2,800, most of those people could not possibly change the basic conditions of their life with \$2,800. And everybody in America who pays any attention to their finances knows that. The level of self-delusion you have to be normally engaged in to get really excited that you're giving a family that lives on \$14,000, \$2,800 more. Let's assume an extra big promise, I'm not sure how many of them will even get it, but let's assume they do, that's not going to change anything. They're going to be as unable to send their kid to college as they always were. They are going to be as unable to live the so-called the American dream as they always were. The gap between how they live and how rich people live will be as jarringly immense after this as it was before.

Again, you're not changing this country's problems. The inequality has gotten much worse over the last 50 years. Every statistic shows it. We've had a massive redistribution of wealth from the bottom and the middle to the top. All this bill does is make a very modest return to some of the most aggrievedly hurt in the last 50 years. That's all. It isn't gonna change anything. Or again, if I'm quoting a Nancy Pelosi correctly, this is not transforming anything. And the idea that the poor of this country should fall all over themselves because you're giving them a one shot, 20% boost, which happened, by the way, at the same time that what you might have done is actually lift the horrific level of wages these people are required to live on from the \$7.25 cents an hour of federal minimum, one of the lowest in the world of industrial advanced countries, to \$15 by 2025. You chose not to do that.

It's as if you're saying we're not going to do anything to change the basic horror that makes a CEO in this country currently earn roughly 300 times the median wage of the people he employs. You're not changing any of that. You're leaving that exactly the way it was, which was awful. And you're giving them a one-shot stimulus. I like your image, it's that there have been serious heart problems for this patient, but instead of dealing with those in a comprehensive way, including the possibility of a transplant, you're just gonna hit him with another electric shock, stimulate them, as if you didn't know that all of the problems that come with people in a family trying to live on \$14,000 a year in today's America, as if you didn't know what that meant.

Look, most of the people in Congress either are millionaires or close to it. And the simple understanding that those folks may very well have forgotten, if they ever knew what it's like to live on \$14,000 a year, begins to make sense, because if you don't ascribe it to they're not understanding then you'd have to think that it is sheer evil expediency, pandering to the rich who support them with donations and let the rest of the country just shrink into the poverty ridden back country that we used to think we only see on national geographic television shows.

**Stimulate This Beyotch - Unf\*cking the Republic - Air**

**Date 3-19-21**

**HOST, UNF\*CKING THE REPUBLIC:** [00:37:12] Almost everyone knew that the Cares Act would be insufficient to drive home a full recovery and get many households back on their feet. Despite the fact that not a single fucking Republican in the house voted for this plan, they knew it was going to happen. And had they held the presidency and the power in Congress, they would have done exactly the same thing.

So here we are in the midst of yet another historic measure that will send nearly \$2 trillion more surging through the American economy. In the form of municipal support, direct payments to families and individuals, extended unemployment benefits and a host of other measures like support for public pensions and small businesses.

Republicans dusted off their playbooks from pre-Trump days to argue that it would blow up the national debt. It will. It will send money to people who don't necessarily need it. It will. And it will potentially overheat the economy and cause a surge in inflation. It might. Of course when they were writing the checks, these weren't considerations. 2 trillion in tax cuts to the wealthy blew up the national debt and sent money to people who absolutely didn't need it. In the aggregate between Fed intervention and the Trump stimulus, money flooded the system, causing the markets to rip like a rocket ship. And it brought inflation back in line with only normal expectations, not a total surge.

So there are a couple of things at play here. First off, neither Democrats, nor Republicans managed to accomplish much for the poorest among us. Neither Democrats, nor Republicans were able to see their way clear to raising the minimum wage or even having the fucking conversation.

If you lost your employer-sponsored health insurance, you're still fucked. The only conclusion that has to be drawn is whether this final injection of cash into the system will overheat the economy. It's very likely we're going to do a deeper dive into modern monetary theory in the near future, so hang tight for that, because history is literally unfolding as we speak with respect to this incredibly important theory. But the odds are inflation will creep back as the vaccine takes hold and the economy reopens. The pent-up demand for travel and hospitality is enormous. Household savings in the upper middle class and wealthy Americans is at an all-time high.

And in terms of manufacturing, inventories are still at a cycle low, which means we're not only going to be pressuring supply with new orders, but we're early cycle in a typical recovery that we'll see a huge spike in raw materials, manufacturing and inventory replenishment, because the velocity of money supply, essentially how much we've been able to spend in a locked down economy, has been so low it's offset the increase in money supply, which is historic. Do you know that more than 25% of money in circulation today was invented in 2020. It's never happened before. So the stage is set for a massive economic transformation over the next decade. And we'll finally be able to settle the Keynes v. Friedman debate on how best to operate a so-called capitalist economy.

And if you listen to our capitalism episode on Fuckers, you pretty much know where I land on this argument.

And now for the real point of this entire episode. Finally, right? The United States seems to have lost the ability to govern. And it's given itself over completely to the whims of

corporations that are designing every inch of our lives, our economy, our domestic and foreign policies, and ultimately our national priorities.

In between busts in the boom and bust market cycles, we're only capable of tinkering around the edges. Despite massive public support, we don't even have the resolve to tackle minimum wage, curb homelessness, end mass incarceration, protect indigenous rights, create a proper pathway to citizenship, end our bloody foreign entanglements and unconstitutional interventions by way of airstrikes and drone strikes, provide healthcare for everyone, guarantee a dignified retirement, ensure that no child goes hungry and the beat goes on. Basically everything that we talk about here on Unfucking the Republic.

Now all we can do is just fuck things up and then send a whole bunch of money coursing through the system and hope that it fixes it. Trust me, as much as I believe wholeheartedly in the need for this stimulus, it'll be a pyrrhic victory if we don't fix the structural imbalance in our nation that has repressed and subjugated the poor and the working class. As we mentioned a couple of episodes prior, it begins with getting corporate money out of the system and instituting campaign finance reform. Otherwise, when things recover again this time, and they will for most of us, we'll soon forget that we have a country to run, issues to tackle, poor people to lift out of poverty, and a planet to save.

Don't let these fuckers just tinker. And don't let them act like they're doing you a favor. They're like arsonists who set your house on fire and then run around back and spray it with your own garden hose and say, "You're welcome."

As Biden and company do their little victory lap, let them know you're not impressed.

You want to impress us? End homelessness in the wealthiest nation in the world. Raise the fucking minimum wage. Let every person in prison on weed possession charges out. Now! Expunge their records and pay for their time behind bars. Find the parents of the kids who are stuck at the border. If the financial crisis and the pandemic have proven anything, it's that we can move mountains and print money in a crisis.

So start treating human beings in crisis as the moral crisis that it is, and stop patting yourselves on the back for doing the minimum and giving us what's rightfully ours. COVID is not over. So wear a mask. There are no lizard people and fuck Milton Friedman. Here endeth the lesson.

## **No, the relief bill won't cause inflation (with Austan Goolsbee) - Pitchfork Economics with Nick Hanauer - Air Date 3-9-21**

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:42:53] There is a group of people who look at the size of the rescue plan, \$1.9 trillion, and they say, "Ooh, \$1.9 trillion is a lot. How big is the so-called output gap?" That is the difference between what we think the potential is for the economy and what the actual is. Okay. That's the gap. And in a normal stimulus environment, you're trying to fill the output gap to get us back to where we were in unemployment and output and wages and whatever. The people who are afraid of inflation are saying they don't think the output gap is that big, and this rescue plan is bigger than the output gap, therefore it's going

to overheat the economy, and if you overheat the economy it'll generate inflation. That's their argument.

Okay. Fine. That's the reputable version of their argument. That's not the political version. So Larry Summers kind of publicly wrote an article saying that, and then it was followed up by a few other economists saying basically that same style. "This is two, three times bigger than the output gap, therefore it's going to be inflation. It's going to be just like the Guns and Butter episode, and we could be 10 years dealing with inflation." I'm very skeptical for a couple of reasons.

First, we as societies, as economies, have a lot of tools for fighting inflation, and we have virtually no tools for fighting deflation. So that's why people usually, at the outset, say, "A little risk of inflation is a lot better than a little risk of deflation, because what are we going to do if the economy tanks?" But that said, just on straight-up grounds, I think the force for inflation is a lot smaller than they say.

Number 1. If you acknowledge that this is not stimulus, that's the wrong word. This isn't about trying to generate a big multiplier on government spending to raise the GDP, the way normal stimulus is in a business cycle. This is absolutely disaster relief money in which you're trying to prevent permanent damage, like damage of the form somebody's going to get evicted from their house, have their credit score ruined for the next seven years, not able to rent another place.

**NICK HANAUER - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:45:25] Or small businesses closing, et cetera.

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:45:28] Yeah. Small business. We don't want them to go bankrupt or shut down.

**NICK HANAUER - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:45:31] Et cetera. Right. Yeah.

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:45:31] Okay. So that kind of damage means that, in the terminology of the stimulus crowd, the multiplier from relief spending is very low. So if I give you \$1000 that you make your rent payment that otherwise you weren't going to make the rent payment and you were going to be evicted, that doesn't show up as an increase in the GDP. It still can be very beneficial, because it would be even worse if you didn't make the payment, but that doesn't raise measured GDP, it prevents a decline of measured GDP. And therefore the overheating nature of that, I just don't think is nearly as big.

And if you look at the woman who I used to work with at the CEA who went on to become the chief economist at the Congressional Budget Office and now is at the Hamilton Project, she did a calculation of: take that into account, that the multiplier's not that big, and look at how large the output gap is, and look at how large the Biden program is, and the fact that it's spread out over two years, it's not all happening at once, and she shows that by reasonable calculations, you do get over potential output by about 1% for a year.

**NICK HANAUER - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:46:59] Which is nothing. Nothing.

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:47:01] Which is nothing. 1% for a year. Let me just emphasize, when Donald Trump cut taxes by two trillion dollars for big corporations at the peak, really, of a boom, we were over potential output for almost 1% for close to two years. And in the

mid 2000s, we were over the potential output by about 1% for almost three years. And at the end of the 90s, we were 2% over potential output for four years, peaking in the quarter... I like to tease Larry Summers, peaking in the quarter when he was the Treasury Secretary. Okay.

So we've had three times in the last 30 years where we were, for an extended period, running hotter than what this would run without inflation. And if you go look at the Guns and Butter episode of the 60s, they were literally seven consecutive years higher than potential output, peaking at 5.5 to 6% of GDP. Over potential output. So nothing like what we're doing now. So I just think, even on their own terms, it's unlikely to generate inflation. And if it did, we would know what to do.

And then the second thing I would say is many of these people have literally been predicting the imminent danger of hyperinflation for 13 consecutive years. I was in the White House in 2009, the same people were saying, "Oh, Ben Bernanke, there's going to be a hyperinflation, they're expanding the monetary base. The stimulus is going to lead to inflation." The Fed has been predicting they could get the inflation rate to 2% for 13 years, and have not been able to. So if you're going to say that we are in imminent danger of overheating, then you at least need to be a little circumspect and explain how you got it wrong for 13 years in a row.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:07] Oh, okay. So let me just try to summarize your points here very quickly, and you correct me if I'm wrong, okay?

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:49:14] Okay. I can be more succinct, is that what you're saying?

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:17] No. No, it's perfect. Just for the sake of listeners. One: \$1.9 trillion in COVID relief does not equal \$1.9 trillion in stimulus.

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:49:27] Correct.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:28] The amount of stimulus is actually far less than that number.

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:49:31] Correct.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:33] Even if it does take us over potential output for a year or two, it's a tiny bit over, and the historical experience shows that that doesn't have much of an impact on inflation. Is that correct?

**AUSTAN GOOLSBEE:** [00:49:48] Yes.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:48] And three: the deficit hawks have never been right before, so why the hell would we listen to them now? Never! Never!

## **Prof. Richard Wolff Imagining a Real American Rescue**

### **Part 2 - The Zero Hour with RJ Eskow - Air Date 3-11-21**

**RJ ESKOW - HOST, THE ZERO HOUR WITH RJ ESKOW:** [00:49:57] Well, and let me, Richard Wolf talk about another aspect of this plan, one that I have more personal familiarity with in terms of health economics for the health insurance industry. It expands the Affordable Care

Act so that, for example, a 64 year old who, this is according to New York Times, 64 year old earning \$58,000 will see his monthly payments for a health plan decline from \$1,075 to \$412. But what the [New York] Times does not explain is that there are then the large deductibles and considerable copays in Affordable Care Act plans and plans you buy on the exchange. And what's being celebrated here is a premium, it's not out-of-pocket costs, but premiums for upper middle income Americans as they are defined, will cost no more than 8.5% of an individual's modified, adjusted gross income.

Now, I don't know how many middle class people, even upper middle class, who generally can write off pretty much \$1 in every \$10 they make to insurance that doesn't cover them in times of extreme need. I do know that the actuarial for Milliman estimated that a family of four with "good coverage" will pay more than \$11,000 a year in out of pocket cost of various kinds. That to me suggests not only gross inequality, which we talked about earlier, but a broken healthcare system that is being addressed in this bill primarily by funneling more money from the public economy to the private insurance sector. Some of that will trickle down to people in marginal ways, but we will still have Americans dying because they can't afford the \$120 copayment for their flu antibiotic. Am I reading that wrong?

**PROF RICHARD WOLFF:** [00:51:58] No. It's again, marginal adjustments leaving in place the basic absurdity of not providing a national affordable health [plan]. Look, I'm an economist so let me put my economics hat on. The test of an economy is how well it serves the people living in and under it. In order to have adequate food, adequate shelter, adequate clothing, there has to be an appropriate match between the prices, those things cost, if you're going to use a market system, and the incomes that people earn with which they buy those things. If the prices are too high relative to the income, or the income too low, relative to those prices, your economy is failing. That's its job is to do that. Throwing up your shoulders and go, "well, you know, the people can't afford it" that's your problem. That's not your answer. That's the problem. You have failed to do what an economic system into which all these individuals are born, naked as babies, you either have it set up for them or you don't and our society doesn't. And the medical care is the same.

Let me get out of it one more way. Recently my doctor, I live here in New York City, recently my doctor came to me, as he did to all of his patients, and he said to me, I am a developing a concierge service. I had no idea what he was talking, I thought concierges are people who work in residential buildings and help you get a cab or tickets to a show or something. No, no, no. It's a new phenomena in the medical profession, it has been around a few years. I've learned that now. Basically, he says "I'm paring down my practice and I'm going to only have concierge people."

"Well, what's that?"

"You pay an annual fee to me and you pay that every year, no matter what you do or do not use in the way of my services. If you have a simple need to get checkup that's included, but anything that takes my time beyond that," which is virtually everything "I will still charge you with various fees that are normally the fees in my specialty. But you will have access to me 24/7."

As he listed what I will have, I pointed out to him, as politely as I knew how, that I already had that with him or thought I did. He giggled and said, "well, um, there will be a few people who can't afford to be a concierge. I will still keep them, but they will not be able to get me



24/7, and they will not be able to get a phone call back within an hour. And then he rattled off all the things they wouldn't get that I would get if I became a concierge. This is the privatization of further privatization of an already private system.

Here's the second example. One of the biggest growth areas is called private power grid. What this is, and you can imagine it exploding in Texas and California, if you want to know that your business or your home will have uninterrupted electrical service, and you know you cannot rely on the publicly available provider. You can now install solar or wind, a whole system to gather the electricity, hooked up the batteries in your basement that will store the electricity so that you will not be... it cost \$40,000, very expensive, but for rich people, you will now be able to provide what we all thought we once had, like a doctor, namely the security of knowing a well-maintained electric system in a house that is fully electrified.

You're seeing what's happening. The people at the top are rearranging the services of our society for them. And the rest of us will live with whatever is left over. It is really the perfect analogy to a Dickensian novel about mid 19th century England. Where the wonderful food being served at the elegant dinner table when whatever is left is scraped off the plate into a little bag that is taken outside and left on the steps so that the poor people in the neighborhood can come by later and quietly eat because otherwise they'd have nothing at all.

**RJ ESKOW - HOST, THE ZERO HOUR WITH RJ ESKOW:** [00:57:01] Well, I know you have to go, but what you're describing in the words of an old reggae song, "it's harvest uptown, famine downtown" is the future they're trying to build. Now, I have one more example too, it's my old employer, AIG. In San Diego, when they had the fires years ago, private fire service. Private fire, they came with their home insurance at a large premium, the firetrucks would come to your insured house while your neighbor burned down. And then these people come out of there enclaves and announced to the rest of the world that they're backing candidate X, because after all, we're all in this together.

## Summary

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:57:40] We've just heard clips today starting with The Bradcast, laying out the stark differences between the parties and their priorities. Democracy Now! looked specifically at the child tax credit and how the U S may be catching up to standard practices of more civilized countries. The Thom Hartmann program predicted the end of the Reagan era. The Bradcast listed many of the policies laid out in the rescue plan. Off-Kilter discussed childcare investment and healthcare premium support. Democracy Now! also looked at the child tax credits with an eye toward the end of the age of austerity. The Majority Report explained the stickiness of good policies that help people and the change in political philosophy that this law signals.

Not to paint too rosy of a picture, The Zero Hour then spoke with Richard Wolf about the insufficiency of the rescue plan in the face of the problems we have. And Unf\*\*\*ing the Republic laid out some more ideas of fundamental changes we need to make before we get tired of patting ourselves on the back and move on.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from Pitchfork Economics explaining, in a wonderfully wonky way, why this rescue plan is extremely unlikely to cause



any problems with inflation. And The Zero Hour spoke more with Richard Wolf, this time about the rescue plan's expansion of the Affordable Care Act and the absurdity of not having universal health coverage.

For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and our part of the transcript for today's episode, so you can still find them if you want to make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at [BestoftheLeft.com/support](https://BestoftheLeft.com/support) or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now we will hear from you. But a quick note on these messages: I have a couple of these voicemails that came in way back in November, early November, about child tax credits that I never ended up finding a time to play during the show. But I think they fit as responses to today's episode, so we're going to hear them now.

## Universal earned income benefits - Scott

**VOICEMAILER: SCOTT:** [00:59:57] Hey, Jay!, how you doing? I just wanted to share some thoughts I was having after I heard the segment from a week ago about the tragic cost of American child poverty from The Majority Report. And they were talking about the beneficial impact of universal child benefits. Anyway, it made me think about the political feasibility of giving \$5,000 a year to everyone under 18 in this nation, as they discussed on the show.

And then I remembered that we already do that, or rather kind of something similar for middle and upper class families. You know, if you make less than a \$400,000 a year and you pay a certain amount of taxes, you are of course eligible for your \$2,000 reduction in your income, called the child tax credit, also known as claiming someone as a dependent.

Anyway, I just thought it was a good example of why we need to stop thinking of tax rebates as different than other government programs or the benefit of a universal program in this case. Because tax rebates are really just means-tested programs in disguise.

The government already agrees, based on their child tax credit program, that people who have kids need more cash on hand to spend on them. That provides them with better outcomes in life, in the longterm. And that's worth it to us, like as a society, also in the long-term to have people have better benefits, like when they become adults.

So we just need to make sure that, you know, the benefits of that extra cash on hand can go to everyone. And you know, it isn't just for people who meet certain tax requirements.

## No Payments to Families with Children - Rich

**VOICEMAILER: RICH:** [01:01:44] Jay!, in episode 1377, Building a Solidarity Economy, speakers promoted payments to families with children. As a progressive I'm sympathetic with parents struggling to afford to raise their young children. But the government giving money to these families is the wrong approach. Paying people to raise children subsidizes population growth.

But overpopulation is one of our biggest problems. Right now, to feed a growing population, we are cutting down tropical rainforests in the Amazon, Indonesia and other forested areas critical to our survival. We are over-fishing the oceans. We're wiping out species at a rate that, over the next several decades, will kill off all species on earth.

As a human, I don't want to be on that target list. Rather than direct payments to parents to provide childcare, we can address this problem a lot better by increasing the minimum wage enough for each person to afford a child. For example, in my area of Oregon, the living wage for a single parent with a child is about 22 and a quarter dollars per hour, according to the MIT living wage calculator. The minimum wage here in Metro Portland is 13 and a quarter dollars per hour. So it is virtually impossible to raise a child on the minimum wage in this area. If you're making minimum wage, having a child plunges you deep into poverty. This is the actual problem parents face. Wages are too low for many people to afford children. Instead of patching up the problem with various subsidies, we should eliminate it by increasing wages.

And this demands we ask why it is so expensive to raise a child. Overall, the cost of things is related to how much competition there is for those things. With nearly 8 billion humans competing for resources, those resources are now very expensive. Not just that, but they are bound to become more expensive, because the United States has been in a privileged position to acquire and consume resources. That's the legacy of winning the second world war, but that is a position we can't count on to subsidize our consumption into the indefinite future.

Progressives should support policies that don't promote additional population growth. But the cost of raising a child is a serious issue for millions of Americans. The best way to address that problem is to raise the minimum wage and support policies that encourage domestic production of products. Then each person will have a real choice, whether to have a child free from worry about whether they can afford that child.

Thank you, Jay!, for your hard work and good luck on Best of the Left.

I look forward to more episodes.

## **Final comments on child welfare programs and perverse incentives**

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:04:20] Thanks to all of those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991, or write me a message to [Jay@BestoftheLeft.com](mailto:Jay@BestoftheLeft.com).

In quick response to Scott, the first voicemail we heard who discussed the need for a universal benefits for people, even if they don't have kids, it sounded like Off-Kilter was exploring that a bit with earned income tax credits for people without children. And that was part of this rescue package. So I would be interested to hear either his thoughts or anyone else's of course on that, but Rich in the second message, he was definitely going against the grain by bringing up the dreaded topic of population. And I think that this is a good

opportunity to refresh ourselves just on fundamental aspects of government regulation, taxation, subsidization.

So the classic argument goes this way, and this is just good for everyone to know. In short, the argument goes, you should tax the things you want less of, not tax than the things you want more of, and subsidize the things you want a lot more of. And it makes a certain amount of sense right there on the surface, but it's not an amazing rule of thumb because it has lots of exceptions to it.

And it's not just that we don't follow the rule from a progressive perspective, like how we subsidize fossil fuel production, but it can also go awry in other ways. For instance, if we think that over consumption and consumerism is bad, and wages are good -- which they both are -- then some would argue that we shouldn't tax wages, but we should tax consumption.

And that makes a certain amount of sense again, for a second, until you realize that in practice, that would be giving a huge tax break to the wealthy and put a huge tax hike on those who spend a higher percentage of their earnings on basic consumption of necessities. So like I said, taxing what you don't want and subsidizing what you do want is a reasonable starting point when discussing the values of a society and what we want and what we don't want.

But the devil is always in the details, like in the case of what Rich is bringing up. On one hand, it's good to support people in poverty, and on the other, we don't want to create a perverse incentive that drives overpopulation.

So to start, let's mention the myth aspect of this. I just found this from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, one of our most trusted sources, in an article titled "Five media myths about welfare." And it says "Repeated studies show no correlation between benefit levels and women's choice to have children. States providing relatively higher benefits do not show higher birth rates among recipients. In any case, welfare allowances are far too low to serve as any kind of incentive. The average family receiving benefits has 1.9 children, about the same as the national average."

So it's been a long running myth in the US that child welfare programs encourage poor women to have more kids. And to boot, that is a deeply racist and classist dog whistle argument that people use when arguing against government spending and trying to get people to think, well, we're only supporting poor black women who shouldn't be having more kids anyway. But the key to that myth mentioned in that article is that the benefits are too low to serve as an incentive.

So it is conceivable that, if incentives were high enough, then it could potentially influence the birth rate. To take an absurd example to prove the point, if the government gave you a million dollars for each child you had, you would probably genuinely consider having more kids because of the incentives.

So there is a line somewhere that begins to create that incentive. But by and large, the us has not hit that line nor have we really come anywhere near it. Now in some European countries, it has been a mixed bag. And for reasons that go beyond welfare policy, many European countries have robust social safety nets, but still maintain relatively low birth rates.

But on the other hand in Norway, birth rates are apparently higher than the rest of Europe, but that doesn't seem to be explained entirely by policies alone. And apparently there's a large cultural aspect to it as well. There's like a higher percentage of people in Norway that attach having kids to the ability to live the good life, like having kids as a necessary part of having a good life.

So in short, it's complicated. But while we're at it, let's look at other aspects of child welfare policy, because I don't think it's good to just compare direct payments or tax credits versus higher wages, as the caller was doing. A healthy child welfare system would include many, many interrelated policies, like mandatory maternity and paternity leave and childcare support and universal health coverage for everyone, including kids, obviously, universal high quality schooling, high quality school lunch programs, and so on and so on.

So in one framing, when thinking about population levels, one could see all of these things as subsidizing and encouraging population growth. And you could therefore be against those things. But we would want all of those things to be in place for the sake of a healthy society even in a world in which we have sustainable population and manageable birth rates.

So it just seems more complicated to me than being in favor of higher wages rather than child welfare support. You know, a system that appears to have perverse incentives for unsustainable population growth may ultimately have less of that worrisome impact than many would fear, but would also likely produce much healthier, happier, and more economically stable families. Whereas an alternative system that attempts to avoid incentivizing higher birth rates may have minimal impact on that specific desired metric, but then leave gaping holes in our welfare system by pushing off all of the responsibility onto the individuals with the carrot of, well, we're going to have wages be higher so that you can take care of yourselves instead of treating the support of child-raising parents as the social responsibility that it rightfully should be.

But again, it's complicated and I would love to hear anyone else's thoughts on this. Like Rich. I am also in favor of lower birth rates for environmental reasons, but how to get there always seems to be a topic fraught, first of all, with misinformation on one hand, and also many, many unintended consequences on the other.

So keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991. Or emailing me to [Jay@BestoftheLeft.com](mailto:Jay@BestoftheLeft.com) if you have any thoughts on this.

That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the monosyllabic, transcriptionist trio, Ben, Dan and Ken for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism, segments, and so on.

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For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all of that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [BestoftheLeft.com](http://BestoftheLeft.com).