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FIGHTING FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Our economy is stacked against everyday Americans in the workplace – both workers and small business owners alike are feeling the squeeze from an economic system that is set up to benefit giant corporations, their executives and shareholders.

Since the 1970s, income inequality in America has spiraled out of control. For the last 40 years, we have become more productive at work but most of those productivity gains have gone to the 1% while the average American hasn't seen a raise. Meanwhile, the top 20 hedge fund managers and traders in our country collectively made over \$10 billion in 2018 alone.¹

Before the 1970s, getting a good union job or starting your own business were both reliable and accessible pathways into the middle class (although much less so for black and brown workers or women). But today those pathways have largely disappeared, along with the middle class itself. The result is out-of-control income inequality: just three families in our country control more wealth than 160 million Americans.

Here in West Virginia, nearly 25% of our workforce is employed in jobs making \$24,000 a year or less. And since 2008, job growth has been concentrated in low-wage work.² The result is that more and more of us struggle to get by: working multiple jobs, struggling to afford housing, transportation and childcare.

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The only way in which workers have won gains in wages and working conditions in the past is by coming together to fight for them. In the 1910s and 1920s, West Virginia coal miners and their families struggled and died for the right to organize in the face of oppressive coal industry rule. In the 1930s, workers nationally won the 8-hour work day, overtime pay and a federal minimum wage after decades of labor organizing, as well as forcing the federal government to pass other New Deal programs like Social Security. Just in the last couple years, teachers and school employees

¹ N. Vardi and A. Gara, "[The Highest-Earning Hedge Fund Managers and Traders](#)," Forbes, March 20, 2019.

² S. O'Leary and R. Wilson, "[2017 State of Working West Virginia: Understanding low-wage work in West Virginia](#)," WV Center on Budget and Policy and American Friends Service Committee, 2017.

across the country – inspired by West Virginians – have won raises and increased funding for public education.

Because of the power that working people have when we fight together, the bosses and moneyed interests have always tried to stop workers from organizing, intimidating workers and making it harder to form unions. For the last 40 years, the bosses have been winning the fight. Union membership has been declining, wages have been flat for 40 years, and working conditions are getting worse in many industries (including the resurgence of black lung disease among younger coal miners).

We can turn this around. In Congress, Cathy will stand with working people to fight for:

- **A stronger union movement.** Cathy supports repealing the Taft-Hartley Act, which would make it easier for workers to join a union by making so-called “right to work” laws illegal. Taft-Hartley was passed in 1947, in retaliation against the labor organizing that resulted in major gains for working people during the 1930s and 1940s. Cathy also supports “card check” – which would require an employer to recognize a union when the majority of workers sign authorization cards to join the union.
- **A higher minimum wage.** Cathy supports raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour and indexing it to inflation. This would improve the lives of more than 75,000 workers across the 2nd Congressional district.³
- **Paid sick days.** None of us should have to come to work sick. Cathy supports the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784), which would require all employers with more than 15 employees to provide paid sick leave to their employees.
- **Fair scheduling.** Cathy supports the Schedules that Work Act (H.R. 5004), which would require all employers with more than 15 employees in the retail, food service and cleaning industries to provide work schedules at least two weeks in advance.
- **Medicare for All.** Cathy supports a single-payer healthcare system that would cover everyone and allow everyone to get the care they need, including dental, vision and long-term care. A Medicare for All system would also remove the burden of paying for healthcare from employers, helping to make American businesses more competitive.
- **Universal childcare.** In some parts of West Virginia, like Calhoun County, there are no licensed childcare professionals.⁴ And in all parts of our state, childcare is too expensive for working families to afford. Cathy supports universal childcare to make low or no-cost childcare available to all families.

³ [“The Impact of Raising the Minimum Wage to \\$15 by 2025, by Congressional District,”](#) Economic Policy Institute, July 25, 2019.

⁴ R. Malik, K. Hamm, L. Schochet, C. Novoa, S. Workman, and S. Jessen-Howard, [“America’s Child Care Deserts in 2018,”](#) Center for American Progress, December 6, 2018.

- **Affordable housing.** Lack of affordable housing is a huge problem across our state. Nearly 100,000 West Virginians pay more than half of their income for housing.⁵ For decades, the federal government has underfunded construction of affordable housing, leading to long wait lists. Cathy supports greater funding for the national Housing Trust Fund⁶, investment in repairing and modernizing existing public housing, and fully funding Section 8 rental assistance. Cathy also supports the Equality Act to end discrimination in housing and employment.
- **Social Security.** Cathy supports increasing benefits (H.R. 1170) and lifting the cap on taxable income for Social Security to ensure that the program can continue to paying full benefits to seniors for decades to come.
- **Pensions.** In the 2008 financial crash, many pension plans lost value, jeopardizing the retirement benefits that had been promised to workers. Yet instead of bailing out everyday Americans, our government bailed out the banks whose recklessness led to the crash. Cathy supports legislation, including the Butch-Lewis Act (H.R. 397), that would provide federal backing to multi-employer pension plans to make sure they stay solvent and can make good on their promises to workers.
- **Aggressive enforcement of labor laws.** Cathy supports legislation – including the PRO Act - to impose penalties on employers who illegally fire or retaliate against workers attempting to organize.
- **Protecting migrant workers from exploitation.** When migrant workers are not protected against exploitation, it is bad not only for those workers but for businesses that are treating their workers fairly. For example, the lack of labor protections for migrant farmworkers makes it harder for small farmers in West Virginia to compete with corporate agri-business. Cathy supports greater labor protections for farmworkers, domestic workers and others in underregulated industries.
- **A wealth tax.** A tax on the wealth of the top 0.14% of American households would yield over \$4 trillion over the next decade, funding programs for the benefit of all and reducing the insane levels of wealth inequality in our country.⁷
- **A child allowance.** Cathy supports bi-partisan legislation to establish a \$1,000-\$1,500 per year allowance for every child in the country. This approach avoids the problems with the current child tax credit, which does not reach the poorest families in our country.⁸

⁵ [“West Virginia Federal Rental Assistance Factsheet.”](#) Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 10, 2019.

⁶ [“The Housing Trust Fund.”](#) National Low-Income Housing Coalition, March 10, 2017.

⁷ T. Golshan, [“Bernie Sanders’s Wealth Tax Proposal, Explained,”](#) Vox, September 24, 2019.

⁸ D. Matthews, [“Mitt Romney and Michael Bennet Just Unveiled a Basic Income Plan for Kids,”](#) Vox, December 16, 2019.

**WE NEED TO
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Our democracy can never function well when wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, when just a handful of individuals control more wealth than half of the population. If we want a vibrant democracy, instead of one bought and paid for by special interests, we need to reverse the trend of the last four decades towards ever-increasing economic concentration. We need to guarantee labor rights and ensure that all of us have healthcare, decent income and secure retirement. We need to level the playing field for small businesses by enforcing anti-monopoly laws and closing loopholes so that the wealthy pay their fair share (see our small business plan, “Standing Up for Small Businesses that Keep Wealth in West Virginia”). In short, we need to return political and economic power to where it belongs, in the hands of the many, not the few.