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**Hearing Entitled “Federal Reserve’s Semiannual Monetary Policy Report to Congress”**  
**Opening Statement**

At this Committee’s first hearing, we heard from our witnesses the challenges and struggles Americans have faced over the past year.

Anyone who has been doing their jobs has heard these stories. Front line workers – like our transit workers – go to work every day worried they’ll get the virus on the job, and bring it home to their families. Mayors and county commissioners and community leaders wonder how long they can hold on without starting layoffs. Renters see the bills pile up, watching their bank balance dwindle lower and lower, and wondering if this will be the month an eviction notice comes.

Today more than 4 million people are out of a job – and the trend continues upward. Last week jobless claims rose again. We are still fighting the battle against the coronavirus – nearly 500,000 of our fellow Americans have died from COVID-19.

We all know that we are facing two crises – a public health crisis, and an economic crisis. We have to be clear about that – we can’t solve one without solving the other.

We know getting our economy back to full strength requires a massive, wartime level mobilization to get all Americans vaccinated.

We also know that vaccines alone will not put most workers and their families back to where they were a year ago.

We want people back to work and we want kids back in school and we want to see main streets thriving and humming with life again. That requires real federal leadership on a level we have not seen in this country since World War II.

As Bill Spriggs alluded to when testifying before this committee, before D-Day, General Eisenhower didn’t call up the president or the Treasury Secretary and ask, can we afford to storm the beaches at Normandy? Do we have the money in our accounts?

Most people that I talk to in Ohio and around the country aren’t worried about doing too much in the battle against coronavirus; they’re worried about doing too little. They want us to do whatever it takes.

85 percent of Americans still need a vaccine.

Our front line workers still need PPE. Small businesses still need assistance to keep their doors open. States and cities and towns still need resources and support to open schools safely and keep buses running and libraries open and firefighters on the job.

And the experts agree that the best thing we can do for the country right now is to get resources out the door as quickly as possible, to tackle all of these interconnected problems.

Former Fed Chair, now our Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen said that if we don’t do more, we risk a permanent “scarring” of the economy into the future.

Economists from across the political spectrum – including many who have testified before this Committee – tell us that without strong fiscal support, our economy could spiral even further out of control and take years to recover.

Our witness today, Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell, has expressed some of those same concerns. Just a few weeks ago – after we passed the COVID-19 relief bill in December – he said that “support from fiscal policy will help households and businesses weather the downturn as well as limit lasting damage to the economy that could otherwise impede the recovery.”

Chair Powell has talked to all of us about the risk of falling short of a complete recovery, and the damage it will do to peoples’ lives and to the “productive capacity of the economy”—his words.

President Biden understands this moment, and he’s risen to meet it with his bold American Rescue package. It’s a plan to both rescue the economy and to save American lives.

Workers and their families need to see their government work for them, now.

And this rescue plan must be the beginning of our work to deliver results that empower people and make their lives better, not the end. We need to rethink how our economy operates. When a hard day’s work doesn’t pay the bills for tens of millions of workers, and even middle class families don’t feel stable, something in that system is broken.

Workers’ wages have been stagnant for decades, while CEO pay has soared. Corporations get huge tax breaks, and instead of investing in their employees and communities they serve, management reward themselves and shareholders through stock buybacks and dividends.

The wealth and income gaps for women, and for Black and brown workers, are getting worse, not better. Many families still had not recovered from the Great Recession when the pandemic hit.

This didn’t happen by accident. It’s the result of choices made by corporations and their allies in Washington.

They’ve spent years rolling back consumer protections in our financial system, cutting corporate tax rates, and using Wall Street to measure the economy instead of workers.

And the same people that have been advocating for these roll backs, pushing this stock market-centered view of the economy, are the same people who say we shouldn’t go big on a rescue plan. They say that there’s no need for the government to help people – the market should decide who wins and who loses.

But we all know that the market doesn’t work when the game is rigged. And the corporations that have been lining their own pockets have done so with plenty of government help and intervention.

We know that for them, short-term profits are more important than their workers. That’s why we have to stop letting them run things.

Just look at what’s happening in Texas, where a deregulated energy grid failed, leaving millions without power in frigid winter temperatures. People are literally freezing to death in their own homes...in the United States of America.

And without any rules, energy companies can charge consumers sky high prices. They even use automatic debits, taking thousands of dollars directly out of people’s bank accounts. We know climate change is causing severe weather across our country. We need more investment in public infrastructure, not less, and we can’t let corporate greed continue to stand in the way.

Our nation's central bank plays a critical role in all of this.

The Federal Reserve can ensure that the biggest banks use their capital to invest in their workers and lend in their communities, instead of ginning up their stock prices with buybacks and dividends.

The Fed can make sure the response to economic and financial crises doesn't just help Wall Street, it helps everyone else.

It can require that financial institutions take into account the serious risks posed by the climate crisis.

It can help ensure that everyone in this country has a bank account and access to their own hard earned money. And it can start to undo the systemic racism in the financial system, and make workers the central focus of our economy.

Chair Powell, you said just a few weeks ago that, quote, the "benefits of investing in our nation's workforce are immense. Steady employment provides more than a regular paycheck. It also bestows a sense of purpose, improves mental health, increases lifespans, and benefits workers and their families."

What that boils down to is the Dignity of Work. It means that hard work should pay off, no matter who you are or what kind of work you do. It means that we need to start measuring the success of our economy by the success of the people who make our economy work.

Chair Powell, thank you and I look forward to your testimony.

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