

Written Testimony of Jared Bernstein
Nominee for Chair, Council of Economic Advisers
Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
April 18, 2023

Chair Brown, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to come before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA).

I began working for the President as an economic adviser when he was Vice President in 2009. I was honored when he asked me to join the CEA as a member of this Administration and also by his recent decision to nominate me for the position of Chair. I would not be here today were it not for the President's faith and confidence in my work, along with our shared vision of an economy that provides opportunities for everyone from all walks of life to reach their full potential.

I would also not be here without the support of my family. My father, a veteran of the Second World War, has long been an inspiration to me, even though he died when I was 7-years old from a kidney disease he contracted during the war. He came from extremely humble beginnings and was the first member of his family to go to college, eventually going on to earn a Ph.D. in physics.

This path would have been closed to him were it not for the GI Bill, and he made sure his children knew how important that policy was to his and to our lives.

After he died, my mother supported me and my two sisters through her job as a public-school teacher, and by working weekends as a waitress to help make ends meet without my father's salary. Though I'm sure I wasn't thinking about it in economic terms at such a young age, the importance of a paycheck was embedded in my young consciousness.

Though my early career was in music, I never lost sight of the role of government policy and strong labor markets to provide economic opportunity. As a resident of New York City in the 1970s and 80s, I personally observed a period of rising inequality and "sticky" poverty rates (meaning rates that were unresponsive to overall economic growth), and increasingly realized how important it was to try to help those less privileged than myself.

That led me into social work, and I spent a number of years as a social worker in New York City. In one formative experience, I vividly remember working with an older veteran of both World War II and Vietnam. He clearly needed further medical support but after giving so much to his country was not able to access the services he needed – and deserved.

This experience was deeply troubling, and fed my desire to want to intervene on a more systemic basis. This led me to a Ph.D. program at Columbia University that addressed social welfare problems using the analytic and policy tools of economics. Were it not for the rigor of that program, as well as the guidance of my dissertation advisor, Irwin Garfinkel, I would likely not have the honor of coming before you today.

As I was writing my dissertation in 1992, I came to Washington to work for a year at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), where I would co-author my first book, “The State of Working America,” with labor economist Lawrence Mishel. Based on the quality difference between DC and New York bagels and pizza alone, I assumed I’d soon be back in New York.

But my work with Dr. Mishel on the importance of strong labor markets to working American families was so compelling, that I stayed on at EPI and eventually co-authored nine editions of the State of Working America.

Far more important, however, was the life-changing moment in 1994 when I met my wife, Kay Arndorfer, who is here today, along with two of our daughters, Kate and Ellie. In what I fear was a weak effort to impress Kay on our very first date, I showed her an early print edition of State of Working America. Since then, my family has been an unceasing source of support in my work and personal life.

I believe that all these experiences, as well as working for Chair Rouse these past two years, has left me in a uniquely strong position to, if confirmed, serve as Chair of the CEA. I am committed to carrying on the work we’ve done, including careful analysis of the dataflow on behalf of the President and senior staff, the writing of our annual Economic Report of the President, participation in administration-wide policy processes, and providing top-level advice to the President on economic policy. If confirmed, I also look forward to continuing Chair Rouse’s efforts to ensure the diversity and excellence of CEA’s staff.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.