

Updating the True Cost of Economic Security: What It Takes to Thrive in the US

Speaker Biographies

Gregory Acs is vice president for the Tax and Income Supports Division at the Urban Institute, where his research focuses on social insurance, social welfare, and the compensation of workers. Previously, he served as unit chief for Labor and Income Security in the Congressional Budget Office's Health and Human Resources Division and as vice president of the Association for Policy Analysis and Management. His recent work examines economic and social mobility and economic security with a focus on low-income working families. In the past, Acs has studied the employment patterns of young women to determine the paths women take to obtain jobs paying enough to leave them better off working than on welfare. He has also examined the well-being of children across living arrangements, the ways welfare policies influence family composition, the status of families leaving welfare, and how policies affect the incentives families face as they move from welfare to work. Acs has a PhD in economics and social work from the University of Michigan.

Afua Atta-Mensah is NYC Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the NYC Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice. A nationally recognized strategist, organizer, and lawyer, she brings more than two decades of experience advancing racial justice and reshaping the systems that determine who is seen, heard, and served in public life. Under the Mamdani administration, Atta-Mensah leads New York City's efforts to advance racial equity across municipal agencies and to create and publish the NYC Preliminary Citywide Racial Equity Plan within the administration's first 100 days. Her work is grounded in the belief that equity requires both structural reform and sustained partnership with communities most impacted by inequality, and that progress demands not only vision, but measurable action. Throughout her career, Atta-Mensah has applied a contemporary lens to issues of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and economic justice. Before joining the Mamdani administration, she served as Chief of Programs at Community Change and Community Change Action, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard, and Director of Litigation and Policy at the Urban Justice Center, where she helped expand civic power, defend fair and equitable housing and strengthen movements for social and economic justice. A Fulbright Scholar, Atta-Mensah holds a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law and a BA in sociology and Africana studies from Trinity College

Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO, author, public speaker and radio host, has led and secured monumental changes in social policy and law to strengthen and empower the disenfranchised and marginalized. She chaired the first in nation NYC Racial Justice Commission, where she led the development and passage of three unprecedented proposals to amend the City's charter to dismantle structural racism and embed racial justice and equity in all government functions; and the NYC Board of Correction where she presided over rule-making to end solitary confinement in City jails. She is Vice Chair, Board of National Action Network; Co-Chair, National True Cost of Living Coalition to effect a new, national measure of need based in economic security; Commissioner, NYS Community Commission on Reparations Remedies; founding member, NYS 400 Years of African-American History Commission; Advisory Board member, Fordham University Feerick Center for Social Justice; and Advisory Board member, Center for Law, Brain and Behavior at Harvard University.

Mary K. Cunningham is senior vice president for research management and programs at the Urban Institute, overseeing Urban's research and policy divisions. Previously, she was Urban's vice president for metropolitan housing and communities policy, where researchers and policy experts work to bolster affordable housing, eradicate homelessness, facilitate land-use and zoning reform for equitable development, improve transportation access, foster opportunity-rich neighborhoods and cities, and fortify communities against the challenges of climate change. As a researcher, she studied housing and homelessness for more than 25 years. Cunningham launched and directed the Homelessness Research Institute, the research and education arm of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. She also cochaired a research council on homelessness composed of nationally recognized academics and policy researchers. Cunningham has been cited in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. She has been a guest on *The Weeds* podcast, *News Hour*, and *CBS Morning News*. She started her career as a caseworker for families with housing vouchers at Metro Housing|Boston (formerly, the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership) and has an MPP from Georgetown University.

Ilham Dehry is a senior research associate in the Tax and Income Supports Division at the Urban Institute, where her work focuses on social assistance programs. She works on the TRIM3 and ATTIS microsimulation models and codirects the Welfare Rules Database, which documents Temporary Assistance for Needy Families policies across time in states and territories. Dehry received her master's of public policy from the George Washington University.

Heidi Goldberg is the Senior Director for Economic Opportunity and Workforce at the National League of Cities (NLC), an organization that supports municipal leaders that are focused on improving the quality of life for their residents. She has over 30 years of experience working to improve equity and economic well-being of families in the U.S. In this role, Goldberg leads three program teams providing guidance and funding to municipal leaders and their staff to build thriving cities by strengthening the economic and financial health of families and communities. Since she started at NLC in 2005, she has conceptualized, developed and implemented multiple initiatives which have helped cities implement economic mobility strategies, reduce the harmful impacts of municipal fines and fees, create children's savings account programs, and develop anti-hunger and benefit enrollment strategies. Her work has included numerous publications and toolkits, and she has been quoted in a variety of local and national media outlets, including the *New York Times* and *CBC Radio*. Goldberg previously held positions leading local initiatives at Wider Opportunities for Women, at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, specializing in state and federal TANF policy, and as a manager of a residence for formerly homeless women in Boston. Goldberg received her B.A. from Vassar College, and holds a MPP and MSW, both from the University of Michigan.

Kirabo "Bo" Jackson is a labor economist who studies education and social policy issues. He has analyzed several important aspects of education policy such as the importance of public school funding on student outcomes through adulthood, the effects of college-preparatory programs on students' college and labor market outcomes, the effects of educational tracking on students' academic achievement, and the effects of single-sex education on students' academic performance. Jackson's scholarly articles have appeared in leading economics journals such as the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *American Economic Journal*, *Journal of Labor Economics*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, and *The Journal of Human Resources*. His research has been featured in a number of mainstream media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and others. Jackson's work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Smith Richardson Foundation, and other organizations. Currently, Jackson is a co-editor at the *American Economic Journal*:

Economic Policy, and he was previously co-editor of *The Journal of Human Resources*. He previously served on the American Economic Association's committee on the status of minority groups in the economics profession and is a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. In 2020, he received the David N. Kershaw Award from the Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management, which recognizes distinguished policy research contributions for scholars under 40. He is an elected member of the National Academy of Education. Jackson earned his bachelor's degree in ethics, politics, and economics from Yale University in 1998 and his PhD in economics from Harvard University in 2007. He was assistant professor of labor economics at Cornell University between 2007 and 2010, and then moved to Northwestern University where he subsequently earned tenure in 2012.

U.S. Congresswoman Gwen Moore has been at the forefront of some of our nation's most significant legislative achievements throughout her more than 40 years of public service and has gained the reputation of a fearless advocate for women and children. Congresswoman Moore earned a B.A. in Political Science from Marquette and went on to serve as a community leader spearheading the start-up of a community credit union as a VISTA volunteer for which she earned the national "VISTA Volunteer of the Decade" award from 1976-1986. She was also a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate before serving in Congress. Congresswoman Moore was elected to represent Wisconsin's 4th Congressional District in 2004, making her the first African American elected to Congress from the State of Wisconsin. She is a member of the esteemed House Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Social Security system, Medicare, the Foster Care System, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Unemployment Insurance, and all taxation, tariffs, and revenue-raising measures. She serves on the Social Security, Tax, and Worker and Welfare Subcommittees. Congresswoman Moore also serves on the Joint Economic Committee. Congresswoman Moore is the proud mother of Jessalynne, Ade, and Sowande "Supreme," a grandmother of three, and a blessed great grandmother to three.

Jim Taylor is the inaugural chief institutional health and culture officer at the Urban Institute. In this role, he fosters a fair and inclusive workplace and providing support for all Urbanites. Taylor comes to Urban from BoardSource, where for over three years he led BoardSource's efforts to support nonprofit boards' leadership on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Taylor has also served as vice president of multicultural leadership at AARP, where he developed partnerships focusing on health, wealth, and "quality of life" programs for Black Americans age 50 and older. At Capital One, as Community Reinvestment Act officer and director of community relations, Taylor led the organization's philanthropic, volunteer, and programmatic strategies to serve lower-income populations. As director of product innovation at Fannie Mae, he developed first-time homebuyer programs to create homeownership opportunities in underserved communities. Taylor was also a key member of the Fairfax County, Virginia, government strategy team that implemented the county's racial and social equity policy, One Fairfax. Taylor holds a BA from the University of Virginia and an MBA from UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School. He also completed the AgL Leadership Program at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. Taylor currently serves on the boards of Carpenter's Shelter, LearnServe International, and the Giving Square. He is a member of the Leap Ambassadors Community (a private community built around nonprofit leaders, policymakers, and other social-sector stakeholders). Taylor also serves as a judge for the American Express NGen Leadership Award presented by Independent Sector.

U.S. Congressman Marc Veasey is an advocate for Texas' middle-class families and is committed to creating jobs, improving public education, fighting for immigration reform, and ensuring access to quality healthcare and women's reproductive rights.

Congressman Veasey was appointed in the 118th Congress to serve on the Energy and Commerce and House Armed Services Committees. Prior to his committee appointment, Rep. Veasey served on the Small Business Committee, and the Committee on Science Space and Technology. Throughout his time in Congress, Rep. Veasey founded the first Congressional Voting Rights Caucus to address the immediate need to eliminate the barriers and discrimination too many Americans face at the polls. In the 117th Congress, he accepted his appointment as an Assistant and Regional Whip. In the 118th Congress, the Congressman was appointed to serve as a Whip for the Gun Violence Prevention Taskforce. Rep. Veasey is currently a member of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Congressional Black Caucus and the New Democrat Coalition. He also co-launched the Blue Collar Caucus with Congressman Brendan Boyle to find solutions to problems too many middle-class Americans are facing. The Blue Collar Caucus supports unions and focuses on addressing wage stagnation, offshoring, and job insecurity for those in the manufacturing and building trades. First elected to the Texas State House in 2004, Congressman Veasey represented District 95 – an area now part of the 33rd Congressional District. As a member of the Texas State House, Rep. Veasey served in a number of leadership positions including Democratic Whip and Chair of the Democratic Caucus. Issues he championed included fighting for affordable healthcare, funding for better schools, and advocating for a livable wage. Prior to serving four terms in the Texas House of Representatives, Rep. Veasey worked as a congressional staffer in North Texas for Congressman Martin Frost. The Congressman was born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife Tonya live in the Metroplex and have a son, Adam. Rep. Veasey earned a BS from Texas Wesleyan University, where he majored in Mass Communication.