

## In Iowa's Interest: Bolstering the Middle Class is the Path to a Sustainable Future

Written by Sen. Tom Harkin  
Wednesday, 20 March 2013 08:40

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By Senator Tom Harkin

Over the last year, I have held a series of hearings focusing on the crisis of the middle class. More and more Americans find that their jobs are insecure, their retirement savings are inadequate, and the American Dream is out of reach. I have no higher priority in Congress than to advance legislation to strengthen and rebuild the middle class.

While the cost of living has continued to rise, our minimum wage has stayed stagnant, creating huge financial burdens for workers at the bottom of the pay scale. Hardworking Americans—like those who wait on customers in restaurants and shops and provide care for our children, parents, and grandparents—deserve the opportunity to earn a wage that can help improve their lives and plan for their futures. The minimum wage should not be a poverty wage. It should be a stepping stone to the middle class—which is why I introduced legislation, [The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013](#) that would gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 from its current \$7.25. It would also index the minimum wage to inflation to ensure that working families can continue to make ends meet even as costs go up.

There has also never been a more critical time to rebuild America's manufacturing sector. Manufacturing comprises nearly 18 percent of Iowa's GDP, with more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs in our state. Despite these statistics, between 2000 and 2010, approximately 48,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in Iowa. We cannot grow our middle class without taking care of the workers who build our country. Congressman Bruce Braley agrees, and together we have introduced the [Rebuilding American Manufacturing Act](#) to spur job growth and make American manufacturing more competitive.

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I've always believed that in America, if you work hard, do your fair share and play by the rules, you should be able to one day live comfortably and enjoy your golden years—yet millions of Americans lack the resources to properly retire after a lifetime of labor. Last year, I proposed the USA Retirement Fund—a universal, private-sector pension plan that all businesses could offer to their employees that would help ensure a secure source of retirement income for their employees. To build on that effort, I recently introduced [The Strengthening Social Security Act of 2013](#), which aims to strengthen Social Security benefits, ensure the program is available for our future generations, and help address our nation's retirement crisis.

Taken together, each of these efforts will put our country on the path to bolstering the middle class and rebuilding the economy over the long term. The middle class is the backbone of this country, and we need to have the backbone to defend it and rebuild it.

For more information, please visit <http://www.harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow Senator Harkin on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.

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