Important benchmarks for recommending wage increases in CT…

The growing income disparity in this country is what keeps me up at night. This trend has been steady since I reached the age when I was looking for my first job. My sister and I talk a lot about how we grew up in America’s golden age, when the New Deal programs were established after two world wars to BUILD not rebuild the middle class. What does our current state of income disparity say about the values we hold as a nation?

Let’s take a closer look at some recent data put out by CT Voices for Children. Last week they reported that the median and bottom 10 percent of wage earners have seen their wages decline by more than 2 percent since 2002, while the top 10 percent have experienced growth of more than 11 percent. The tax burden on those high earners is far less than it was when I was a little girl, yet that same 1% shuns all public policies that would require them to pay more.

The same goes for multi-national corporations. Yes, they truly have no country of allegiance, nor do they see the value that each and every employee brings to their bottom line. But for the lowest-paid employees in multi-national companies, those businesses would see no profit. Profits do not trickle down they go to top management and shareholders. What CEO’s time, talent, and skills is worth $30million dollars per year? And how much is each shareholder squeezing out of low wage workers compared to 50 years ago?

I work for a union that represents 3,000 child care providers who make it possible for people to get to work every day. Yet they themselves earn less than minimum wage given the long hours they work. Business has not seen fit to champion the value that child care providers bring to the American economy in the short term and we all have missed the mark in ensuring that child care providers are well paid for the important job they do in helping to raise America’s next generation – shame on us!

In the larger scheme of things, I consider the underpayment of child care providers as a national security issue. Seventy percent of women are in the work force and as we all now know, if we don’t get it right during the first three years of life, we pay the price in later years. “Getting it right” includes the need to instill in children the sense of belonging to a society that they care about, the comfort of relationships and the importance of community. You might say that my benchmark is this. “How is our economy treating families and children?”

Support or oppose raise in minimum wage? Why? Indexing?

If it takes a mandatory raise in the minimum wage to $15 over the next few years to help reset the balance that this country has lost over the course of my lifetime, then let’s do it. We have a moral obligation to do so. In addition, until we can right the ship even further with tax reform, regional planning and governance, universal health care and so on, we must index that minimum wage to something. The question for me is: Should it be indexed to the GDP or inflation? As inflation has held steady, our GDP has grown. With the growth of income relegated to the top earners, and stagnant wages at the bottom, this means that businesses and the top ten percent have reaped the benefit of our economic growth, while several generations have been left without hope. We once thought the middle class was important and we put our money where our ideals led us. There is no going back, but we CAN hit the reset button.