

**Opening Statement**  
**JEC Hearing on “Measuring Economic Inequality in the United States”**  
**October 16, 2019, 2:15pm**  
**2020 Rayburn House Office Building**

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Thank you, Vice Chair Maloney, for calling this hearing.

Inequality has been a hinge of American politics, and indeed in all democracies, for as long as there have *been* democracies. And with good reason. The concentration of economic power can be as dangerous as the concentration of political power.

Unfortunately, the debate about inequality – like many debates these days – can be easily swept up into a partisan exercise of talking past each other.

We could spend our entire time today haggling over whether “inequality” is best understood as unequal *opportunity*, or unequal *outcomes*.

Or indeed, if the latter, we could argue for hours about whether and how much it is even a problem, given that almost every facet of modern life – from air conditioning to airplanes – can be counted among the blessings of the intentionally *unequal* benefits of free enterprise.

Inequality is such a large concept that it is impossible to tackle in a single hearing. That is why I commend the Vice-Chair for organizing today’s hearing on “*measuring*” inequality. And for inviting an excellent panel of witnesses who can help us navigate the issue.

The subject of data measurement techniques is at once narrow enough to keep our discussion focused, and – hopefully – technical enough that *even Congress* can set aside political temptations and simply drill down on some important questions.

For instance:

- How should we define “income” for purposes of measuring inequality between rich, poor, and middle class?
- How should we count government transfers - like the Earned Income Tax Credit – for lower-income workers?
- As the scholarship on inequality measurement has progressed, which technical details have survived peer-review scrutiny, and which remain to be worked out before we can reach academic consensus?

These are not the questions that will lead cable news political talk shows. That’s why they are exactly the kind the Joint Economic Committee should be taking up. Even the best policies involve tradeoffs.

Our economy is growing, and today employs more people than ever before. But it has been a long slog out of the Great Recession, much longer for some than others.

If the data really can afford us a clearer view of how the costs and benefits of economic growth are being experienced up and down the income scale, that is analysis we should all insist on getting... and insist on *getting right*.

Thank you again Madam Vice-Chair, and to the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your testimony and our discussion.

I yield back.