

Hard Work Should Pay Off



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We know how to provide opportunities for hard-working Americans to enter and thrive in a prosperous and growing middle class. What happens inside the home, for example, is a critical factor in whether children will be able to someday seize opportunities in our economy to become upwardly mobile. Effective parenting is critically important to giving children a good start on the road to social and economic mobility. At the same time, upward mobility is associated with stable family incomes, which is more common among those with two working parents — increasingly the norm in our society.

Yet the ability of parents to be good workers and effective parents is sharply curtailed by workplaces that haven't adapted to this reality. Parents, especially those in low- and middle-wage jobs, are too often forced to choose between a day's pay and perhaps losing their job if they have to take care of a sick child. These Americans have [little to no flexibility](#) to create schedules that can help address — or at the very least not exacerbate — work-family conflict.

Unfortunately, parents struggle to juggle home and work, and people who go to college end up deep in debt.

Enacting paid sick days and giving workers the ability to better bargain for workplace flexibility are two simple steps that we could take to give their children a good start in life, helping them eventually move up the economic ladder. These are just two ways to foster economic opportunity to boost upward mobility.

There is another, more immediate, impediment to upward mobility. Young men are not attending college at the same rate as women. One could conclude that men don't understand that investing in a college degree pays off handsomely. But there is another interpretation. Many college-educated men are finding they have been sold a bill of goods, because [one in five](#) earns less than the typical high-school graduate.

America's future productivity will be hampered if young men invest in their human capital yet end up with a historically high pile of student debt and are no better off than those that entered the labor market right out of high school. Improving our higher education system is yet another way to close the distance between the rungs on the economic ladder. Providing opportunity is imperative for our economic future.

Opportunity itself should be a national priority. If it is not, our nation will experience reduced economic productivity and become less competitive. America must once again become the place where if you work hard and play by the rules, you can live the American dream.