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Unlikely Allies Unite Behind Economic Mobility Blueprint

Stakeholders from IBM, National Employment Law Project, The Aspen Institute, Hoover Institution, Microsoft, and National Urban League back framework for expanding opportunity, especially for low-income Americans

WASHINGTON – Individual stakeholders from a unique coalition of corporate giants, worker advocates, community organizations, and think tanks today released a [sweeping economic mobility framework](#) centered around work. The group boldly calls for greater public and private collaboration to raise skills, broaden access to jobs, improve job quality, and create financial stability and opportunities for lower income workers.

The rare cross-sector consensus includes innovative proposals to expand childcare access and rebuild career pathways for people experiencing long-term unemployment or returning from incarceration. Other ideas include providing paid national sick leave, creating regional employer networks to support worker training, education, and career advancement, as well as efforts to stabilize work schedules and smooth income for those with volatile, insecure, and part-time jobs.

“Sustained employability is critical to individual financial security and wellbeing as well as institutional and organizational economic viability” said Karen Kocher of Microsoft. “The Working Up initiative’s focus on practical aspects of achieving economic mobility offers opportunities to deal with barriers and create a new more prosperous normal for millions.”

The report offers solutions to an alarming generational decline in economic mobility. In 1980, four out of five 30-year-olds earned more than their parents did at the same age. By 2010, the number sharply declined to 50 percent. The group of unlikely allies came together to identify solutions for reversing the trend rooted in the ideas and actions of diverse groups.

“This report does not just focus on one idea, but on a package of ideas that work and interact with each other,” said Maureen Conway from the Aspen Institute. “Imagine the possibilities if we conduct this sort of thinking in policymaking on a variety of levels.”

The 28 members of the Working Up project, brought together by Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, all share the objective of creating multiple career pathways and greater economic stability for lower income Americans. In coming together, the group was able to break down silos and identify ways that traditional anti-poverty work and efforts to build a skilled workforce to drive our economy can operate in tandem.

“Meeting the challenge of economic mobility often sends people straight to their partisan corners,” said Robert J. Fersh, Convergence President and Founder. “The Working Up stakeholders proved once again that when people who need to talk to each other actually listen to

each other, they can build trust, generate creative thinking, and find real solutions to critical and complex challenges.

After two years of research, dialogue and collaboration, and listening sessions with Americans facing barriers to opportunity, the group [identified four key actions](#) to renew economic mobility:

- 1. Build On-Ramps to the Workforce and Reduce Barriers to Employment** – Strengthen systems for skill building, career exposure and advancement, beginning as minors and into adulthood.
- 2. Improve Job Quality for Lower Wage Workers** – Employers should provide paid leave and flexible, predictable schedules. Government at all levels should work to increase the availability of affordable, quality childcare.
- 3. Increase Financial Stability and Security for Lower Wage Workers** – Reduce financial volatility through children’s savings accounts, expanded access to financial tools and the Earned Income Tax Credit, and employer- and community-supported emergency funds.
- 4. Remove Barriers to Work for Key Populations** – Remove barriers for people facing long-term unemployment, who have criminal records, or disabilities.

The group also agreed on six principles to guide public and private action on work as an engine of economic mobility:

- 1. Working with Dignity for a Decent Income** is central to a good life in our society. Work is also a primary way to meet our personal, social and economic responsibilities. Therefore, all Americans should have the opportunity to work to their full potential.
- 2. Participation in the Workforce** should provide all workers with substantial opportunities and supports for increasing their skills, capacities, income and assets over time to facilitate upward mobility.
- 3. Work, Supplemented by Supports and Benefits**, should provide sufficient income, economic security and stability for workers and their families to live in dignity.
- 4. Public Policies, Private Practices and Social Norms** should remove barriers to work created by place, race, class, gender, disability, age and other circumstances.
- 5. Responsibilities Related to Work and Returns from Work** should be shared appropriately among workers, employers, government, and society.
- 6. Employers Are Critical Partners** in creating work opportunities, promoting economic mobility, and building workforce capabilities.

Tackling this complex issue requires strong engagement from the private sector, lower wage workers, government and communities. The stakeholders agreed that we can innovate and invest to create effective public policy and private practices that meet employer needs for a skilled workforce and provide quality jobs and work supports for Americans.

The group is now acting to implement and promote these recommendations while calling on others to join in taking concrete steps across sectors. We need more collaborative problem solving where stakeholders build trust and deeper mutual understanding to increase access to opportunity in America, especially for those struggling the most.

The group's final report was made possible by support from a range of funders, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Other Key Quotes from Working Up Stakeholders:

“Economic mobility is a big problem, but something remarkable has happened—a group of people from different places have agreed on guiding principles. This isn't simply a menu of what we've put together. We've really worked to find common ground.”

JOHN CARR, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

"It's amazing the consensus that can result between people with dramatically different views when trust is built and ideas are sincerely shared. The Working Up project, facilitated by Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, did just this. It enabled a remarkably diverse group of stakeholders to reach agreement on important principles and specific ideas to increase economic mobility in America."

LANHEE CHEN, HOOVER INSTITUTION

“Sadly, compromise has become somewhat of a shameful concept in today's political climate when in reality, principled compromise, where all parties hold fast to their core values but build agreement where possible, is precisely how our government is designed to function. We made remarkable progress on so many key issues through Convergence's facilitation and I look forward to seeing many of our recommendations come to fruition.”

JUDY CONTI, NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT LAW PROJECT

“I've absolutely enjoyed participating in this group. My greatest surprise has been conversations with business leaders, and their willingness to be partners in this. I'm really looking forward to that and moving these ideas forward together.”

ELIZABETH CLAY ROY, PHIPPS NEIGHBORHOODS

The full list of participants includes:

Julian Alssid, Community College of Rhode Island
Ellie Bertani, Walmart
Michael Billet, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Shelley Waters Boots, Annie E. Casey Foundation
Melissa Boteach, Center for American Progress

Stuart Butler, Brookings Institution
John Carr, Georgetown University
Lanhee Chen, Hoover Institution
Judith Conti, National Employment Law Project
Maureen Conway, The Aspen Institute
Marie F. Downey, Boston Education, Skills & Training
Joel Frater, Monroe Community College
Kate Griffin, Prosperity Now (formerly Corporation for Enterprise Development)
Romanita Hairston-Overstreet, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust
Will Heaton, Center for Employment Opportunities
Kimo Kippen, Aloha Learning Advisors, LLC and formerly Hilton
Karen Kocher, Microsoft
Janice Loux & John Valinch, UNITE HERE
Corey Matthews, LeadersUp
Samantha Vargas Poppe, UnidosUS (formerly National Council of La Raza)
Elizabeth Clay Roy, Phipps Neighborhoods
Lisa Schumacher, McDonald's Corporation
Abby Snay, Jewish Vocational Services – San Francisco
Grace Suh, IBM
T.J. Sutcliffe, The Arc of the United States
Russell Sykes, APHSA
Jason Tyszko, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Kyle Williams, National Urban League

Stakeholders support the report as individuals; organizations have not formally endorsed the report and affiliations are listed for informational purposes. While there are differences among us on how best to pursue each recommended action, we strongly support the framework and principles as we commit to taking action to move these ideas forward in our own spheres of influence.

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