



Fair Shot Versus “You’re-on-Your-Own” Economics

Should we have an economy that only looks out for the wealthiest and leaves everyone else on their own? Or should the middle class be the engine of economic growth and give everyone a fair shot at the American Dream?

This will be the defining debate of 2012—two competing theories on how our economy should work.

Two economic visions

Republicans really believe the wealthiest built our country. And they’ve worked for decades to turn their trickle-down theory of economics into conventional wisdom. They are now doubling down on policies that hollowed out the middle class and left America with the greatest wealth gap since the Great Depression.

This is in direct opposition to a progressive vision about the economy working for everyone. It’s also in direct opposition to what the American people believe.

It is critical that all policy ideas aim at building *an economy that works for all of us, not just the 1 percent*.

How Americans believe our economy should work

Over the past year the Center for American Progress undertook a large-scale research project to determine how people believe the economy works and how it should work. Now we must engage in a daily effort to define and promote these economic policies that make our country work for all Americans, not simply the wealthiest.

The following statements on how our economy should work received overwhelming support in a nationwide survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and the Center for American Progress from October 15-18, 2011.

Key points: A fair shot economy that works for everyone

- America’s middle class didn’t happen by accident. It was built brick by brick by investing in people and investing in our country. That’s what we need to do.
- America isn’t supposed to only work for the top 1 percent. It needs to work for all Americans.
- If America’s economy isn’t working for the 99 percent, it’s not working.
- The promise of the American dream is for all Americans, not just the wealthy few.

If America's economy isn't working for the 99 percent, it's not working

Our economy is upside down. The majority of America is in a recession, but Wall Street is doing better than ever. Regular people work harder and harder for less and less while Wall Street CEOs enjoy bigger bonuses than ever. If American's economy isn't working for the 99 percent, it's not working. [GQRR/CAP Poll: 81 percent support¹]

We need an economy that works for all of us—not just the 1 percent

The big banks got bailed out but the middle class got left behind. Our economy works for Wall Street CEOs but not for the middle class. America isn't supposed to only work for the top 1 percent. [GQRR/CAP Poll: 75 percent support]

People who work hard and play by the rules are getting crushed

The promise of the American Dream is that if you work hard and play by the rules you can make a good life for yourself and your family. But right now, 99 percent of Americans only see the rich getting richer and everyone else getting crushed. And they're right. [GQRR/CAP Poll: 72 percent support]

How to talk to an economy that works for ALL Americans

Be clear: OUR ECONOMY IS NOT WORKING FOR MOST AMERICANS.

Contrast: Republicans believe the 1 percent built our country. Us? We believe the middle class is the engine of our economy.

Define core progressive theory values: The true measure of America's economic success is the well-being of all families—not just the stock market and corporate profits.

Expose republicans' lack of interest in the middle class. The GOP is not interested unless it's a tax cut for a millionaire, a billionaire, or more special perks and loopholes for corporations. The GOP has NO plan to make the economy work for anyone other than the top 1 percent.

In short it's a choice between fair shot vs. "you're-on-your-own" economics. The promise of America is for all Americans, not just the wealthy few.

Endnotes

¹ GQRR/CAP nationwide poll; 1,000 likely voters fielded October 15-18, 2011

Fast Facts

America is only working for the top 1%

- The top 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of our country's wealth while the bottom 80 percent owns only 7 percent.
- The richest 1 percent earned \$1 out of every \$4 in 2007. Thirty years earlier the richest only made \$1 out of every \$11.
- A typical CEO used to earn 30 times more than his or her workers but now earns 110 times more.
- Millionaires are making more money and paying fewer taxes. Their income taxes declined from about 31 percent in 1995 to about 22 percent in 2009.
- One in four millionaires pays a lower tax rate than 10 million middle-class Americans.
- Nearly 1,500 millionaires paid NO income taxes in 2009.

Fast Facts

America isn't working for the 99%

- Fourteen million Americans are unemployed.
- Nearly one in two young adults is not employed. This is the highest rate of youth unemployment since the end of World War II.
- Corporations are sitting on \$2 trillion in cash—more cash than at any time in nearly half a century—instead of hiring more employees.
- While the richest 1 percent saw their incomes triple between 1974 and 2007, most Americans' incomes didn't grow at all.
- The bottom 90 percent are responsible for paying 73 percent of all credit card and mortgage debt.
- One in four homeowners is underwater, meaning they owe more on their mortgage than their house is worth.
- Almost one in four American children grows up in poverty.