



MESSAGING ON INCOME INEQUALITY, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TAX FAIRNESS

Fighting *against* income inequality means fighting *for* economic fairness and *for* economic opportunity – where everyone has a chance to succeed. And tax fairness is central to creating economic fairness and economic opportunity for all. There are various ways to address income inequality and to promote economic opportunity – raise workers’ wages, give workers more bargaining power through unions, and create a full employment economy that gives workers more leverage to demand higher pay from employers. Another way is to create a fairer tax system that raises resources to fund vital services, provide benefits and make new investments in jobs and the economy, and that reduces the wealth gap between the 1 percent and the rest of us.

Below is a set of talking points we suggest using when addressing the related issues of income inequality, economic opportunity and tax fairness. These message suggestions are based in part on extensive polling that has been done by Hart Research Associates over the last two years for Americans for Tax Fairness and more recently for the Center for American Progress.

1) We need an economy that works for everyone, not just the wealthy few.

- People are working harder and harder – and falling farther and farther behind. They can’t make ends meet. They work two jobs or more to barely keep their head above water. They can’t save enough to go to college, buy a home or retire with peace of mind.
- Our economy works for the wealthy and big corporations, but it’s not working for the rest of us. Everyone deserves a fair shot. Everyone in America should have a real chance to succeed. But instead, the deck is stacked against working people and the middle class is shrinking.

2) You can’t get a fair shot when the deck is stacked against working Americans, in favor of the wealthy and big corporations.

- The richest 1 percent of Americans own 35 percent of America’s wealth.
- CEOs make nearly three *hundred* times as much as the average worker gets paid.
- Some big corporations – Verizon, General Electric and Wells Fargo bank – pay ZERO in federal income taxes some years. That’s less than what most American families pay.
- Many big and profitable corporations spend more for lobbyists in Washington to protect tax loopholes than they pay in income taxes to the government.
- Too many politicians have stacked the deck in favor of their wealthy campaign contributors and corporate interests while the middle class gets stuck with tab.

3) Tax breaks for the rich and corporate tax loopholes for Wall Street are a drain on the economy and hurt the rest of us.

- Ordinary families and small businesses have to pay more for public services like roads, schools, and health care when corporations and the wealthy use tax loopholes to avoid paying their fair share.
- We won't have the resources to invest in America again if we don't close giant loopholes that encourage companies to ship jobs and profits offshore.
- Our tax system should help level the playing field and expand opportunity; instead it tilts the playing field further in favor of the rich and big corporations.

4) We can't create an economy that works for everyone unless we create a tax system that works for everyone. But that's not what we have today.

- Congress gives corporations billions of dollars in tax breaks each year for shipping American jobs offshore. But it refuses to make corporations pay their fair share of taxes so that we can rebuild our roads and bridges and put Americans back to work at home.
- Republicans in Congress refuse to provide emergency unemployment benefits to the long-term unemployed because of the cost – but at the same time they give away billions in huge tax breaks to the rich and corporations.
- Many people who get up and go to work every day pay a higher tax rate than wealthy people living off their investments.
- We have a tax system that lets Wall Street hedge fund managers pay a lower tax rate than their kids' teachers.
- Corporations get a special tax break for paying their CEOs bonuses even as they stash billions in profits offshore to avoid paying U.S. taxes.

5) We can address inequality and create economic opportunity for all Americans if corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes:

- We can protect our families by ensuring that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are fully funded so they will be there for everyone when we need them.
- We can make sure that returning veterans get health care, families that are hungry get food stamps, and people with disabilities have job training.
- We can create jobs and economic opportunity by investing in our schools, making college more affordable, investing in finding new medical cures, and researching new clean forms of energy.
- We can help give everyone in America a real chance to succeed.
- And when the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, we can reduce the wealth gap between the rich and everyone else.