

Office of the Vice President

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Op-ed by Vice President Joe Biden in USA Today

'Time to put middle class front and center'

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For years, we had a White House that failed to put the middle class front and center in its economic policies.

President Barack Obama has made it clear that is going to change. And it's why he's asked me to lead a task force on the middle class.

America's middle class is hurting. Trillions of dollars in home equity and retirement savings and college savings are gone. And every day, more and more Americans are losing their jobs.

For the backbone of America, it's insult on top of injury. Over the course of America's last economic expansion, the middle class participated in very few of the benefits. But now in the midst of this historic economic downturn, the

middle class sure is participating in all of the pain. Something is seriously wrong when the economic engine of this nation - the great middle class - is treated this way.

President Obama and I are determined to change this. Quite simply, a strong middle class equals a strong America. We can't have one without the other.

An economy for all Americans

Right now, our most urgent task is to stabilize our economy and put it back on track. That is what our economic recovery package moving through the Congress is all about. We need to make these critical investments to jumpstart our economy.

On top of this urgent task, though, we have an important long-term task as well. Once this economy starts growing again, we need to make sure the benefits of that growth reach the people responsible for it. We can't stand by and watch as that narrow sliver of the top of the income scale wins a bigger piece of the pie - while everyone else gets a smaller and smaller slice.

One of the things that makes this task force distinctive is it brings together - in one place - those agencies that have the most impact on the well-being of the middle class in our country. We'll be looking at everything from access to college and training with the Department of Education, to business development with the Department of Commerce, to child care reform with Health and Human Services, to labor law with the Department of Labor. With this task force, we'll have a single, high-visibility group with one goal: To raise the living standards of middle-class families.

Over the upcoming months, we will focus on answering those concerns that matter most to families. What can we do to make retirement more secure? How can we make child and elder care more affordable? How do we improve workplace safety? How are we going to get the cost of college within reach? What can we do to help weary parents juggle work and family? And, above all else, what are the jobs of the future? Here, we'll be looking at green jobs, better-paying jobs, better-quality jobs.

Open to the public

At the end of the day, it will be our responsibility to offer clear, specific steps we can take to meet these concerns and others.

Unlike some previous government task forces, our taskforce will operate in a fully transparent manner. We will consult openly and publicly with outside groups who have thought long and hard about these issues and can help us bring the most far-reaching and imaginative solutions to these problems. All the materials from our meetings, and any report we produce, will be up on our public website. None of this will happen behind closed doors.

In government, as in life, you need clear goals to succeed. In the Obama/Biden administration, we have set a very clear goal: Our administration will have succeeded if the middle class once again starts to share in the economic success of this nation.

Joe Biden is Vice President of the United States