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The President's Weekly Address
June 21, 2014

Hi, everybody. As President, my top priority is rebuilding an economy where everybody who works hard has the chance to get ahead.

That's what I'll spend some time talking about on Monday at the White House Summit on Working Families. We're bringing together business leaders and workers to talk about the challenges that working parents face every day and how we can address them together.

Take paid family leave. Many jobs don't offer adequate leave to care for a new baby or an ailing parent, so workers can't afford to be there when their family needs them the most. That's wrong. And it puts us way behind the times. Only three countries in the world report that they don't offer paid maternity leave. Three. And the United States is one of them. It's time to change that. A few States have acted on their own to give workers paid family leave, but this should be available to everyone, because all Americans should be able to afford to care for a family member in need.

Childcare is another challenge. Most working families I know can't afford thousands a year for childcare, but often, that's what it costs. That leaves parents scrambling just to make sure their kids are safe while they're at work. Forget about giving them the high-quality early childhood education that helps the kid succeed in life.

Then there's the issue of flexibility: the ability to take a few hours off for a parent-teacher conference or to work from home when your child is sick. Most workers want it, but not enough of them have it. What's more, it not only makes workers happier; studies show that flexibility can make workers more productive and reduce worker turnover and absenteeism. And that's good for business.

At a time when women make up about half of America's workforce, outdated workplace policies that make it harder for mothers to work hold our entire economy back. But these aren't just problems for women. Men also care about who's watching their kids. They're rearranging their schedules to make it to soccer games and school plays. Lots of sons help care for aging parents. And plenty of fathers would love to be home for their new baby's first weeks in the world.

In fact, in a new study, nearly half of all parents—women and men—report that they've said no to a job, not because they didn't want it, but because it would be too hard on their families. When that many talented, hard-working people are forced to choose between work and family, something's wrong. Other countries are making it easier for people to have both. We should too if we want American businesses to compete and win in the global economy.

Family leave, childcare, flexibility—these aren't frills, they're basic needs. They shouldn't be bonuses, they should be the bottom line.

The good news is, some businesses are embracing family-friendly policies, because they know it's key to attracting and retaining talented employees. And I'm going to keep highlighting the businesses that do. Because I take this personally. I take it personally as the son and grandson of some strong women who worked hard to support my sister and me and as the husband of a brilliant woman who struggled to balance work and has raised our girls when

my job often kept me away and as the father of two beautiful young ladies, whom I want to be there for as much as I can and who I hope will be able to have families and careers of their own one day.

We know from our history that our economy grows best from the middle out, that our country does better when everybody participates, when everyone's talents are put to use, when we all have a fair shot. That's the America I believe in. And that's the America I'll keep fighting for every day.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 2 p.m. on June 20 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on June 21. In the address, the President referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 20, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on June 21. Together with the transcript, the Office of the Press Secretary also released a Council of Economic Advisers report, "The Economics of Paid and Unpaid Leave."

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