



The Daily Dish

# Signs of Life for Bipartisan Policymaking

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | FEBRUARY 8, 2019

## Eakinomics: Signs of Life for Bipartisan Policymaking

It is easy to get depressed by the bitter partisanship that seemingly pervades the entirety of public discourse. It is easy to get depressed about tales of labor-market woes and the perceived hopelessness of those who feel left behind as the labor market evolves in the 21st century. But don't give up — there is progress on both fronts. Under the auspices of the Aspen Institute, Henry Paulson and Erskine Bowles have launched the Economic Strategy Group (ESG) to “foster an open exchange of new and out-of-the-box economic policy ideas, and socializes viable, bipartisan solutions to pressing economic challenges.” (Full disclosure, I am a member of the ESG.) In short, bipartisan efforts are not really dead.

Even better, the ESG is beginning to fulfill its mission with the launch of *Expanding Economic Opportunity for More Americans*, a volume of policy analyses and proposals focused on three policy goals: (1) adding skills to America's workforce, (2) increasing prime-age labor force participation, and (3) expanding private-sector wage growth. On each topic, discussion papers written by working groups of ESG members identify problems and discuss solutions and are accompanied by policy proposals written by leading experts from outside of the group.

One of the key ideas that emerged is investment in community colleges, because America has a college dropout problem. Nearly half of college students fail to complete their degree within six years, and the fraction is even lower among community college students, but it would be possible to noticeably move the needle if new investment dollars were made contingent on progress to a degree. Similarly, it is possible to raise participation in the labor market with a variety of policy initiatives, and to improve wage growth through reforms to the Earned Income Tax Credit and other policy tools.

The bottom line? “This policy volume is the result of bipartisan debate and discussion over the past year,” said Aspen Economic Strategy Group director Melissa Kearney. “We sought out concrete, evidence-based proposals that had bipartisan appeal and targeted specific barriers to economic opportunity. The resulting policy ideas range from reforming land use regulations and reforming community colleges to interventions in rural labor markets and incarceration reform. All together, these policies would move the needle.”

It is a refreshing sign of bipartisan life at a very partisan time.