

ASSET BUILDING PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

In today's economy, economic security and mobility depends not just on one's job and income, but increasingly on one's ability to accumulate a wide range of assets—especially buying a home, pursuing a post-secondary education, starting a business, building up savings, and securing a nest-egg for retirement. Yet, fully half of all Americans currently have few or no assets, in part because our nation's public policies to encourage savings and wealth accumulation primarily and significantly benefit the upper half of earners. The purpose of New America's Asset Building Program, established in 2002, is to significantly broaden savings and assets ownership in America, thereby providing all Americans both with the means to get ahead and with a direct stake in the overall success of our economy. This major, new direction in public policy promises to be as successful in the 21st century as the Homestead Act and GI Bill were in previous centuries. The Program also established a Global Assets Project to promote asset-building policies worldwide.

The primary components of New America's Asset Building Program are:

INNOVATIVE POLICIES TO EXPAND ASSET OWNERSHIP IN THE U.S.

New America's Asset Building Program develops and advances detailed, market-oriented proposals to enable all Americans to meet their savings and asset needs throughout life. These policies include: establishing and funding life-long asset accounts for all citizens, beginning at birth; matching the savings of low- income working families; connecting the EITC to popular savings products such as IRAs; reforming and expanding "529" college savings plans; revising or eliminating asset limits in public assistance programs; reforming public and private retirement policies to reach more low-income workers; and expanding access to wealth-building financial services, products, and education. New America disseminates these proposals through high-profile public events and conferences, publications in the mainstream press, issue briefs, congressional testimony, and constituency briefings.

SAVINGS ACCOUNTS AT BIRTH

New America's Asset Building Program is widely credited with forging ideologically broad coalitions in both the House and the Senate to introduce the ASPIRE Act, Baby Bonds, PLUS Accounts, and other bold policies that would establish and progressively fund savings and investment accounts at birth for all newborns. These proposals, which are typically restricted after age 18 for post-secondary education and training, buying a first home, and building up a nest-egg for retirement, would help create a savings and ownership culture in America, promote financial know-how, and broaden economic opportunity—especially for children from low-income, low-wealth households. For more information on proposals that would establish savings accounts at birth for all U.S. newborns, please visit www.KidsAccounts.org and www.AspireAct.org.

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION PROJECT

The Financial Services and Education Project, established in 2006 in response to the growing complexity of financial services in the U.S., aims to provide national leadership on policy issues related to (1) promoting effective financial education; (2) expanding access to wealth-building financial services; (3) forging a new responsibility framework for consumer financial services in the 21st century; and (4) enabling low- and moderate-income Americans to better manage their debt.

GLOBAL ASSETS PROJECT

The Global Assets Project, also launched in 2006, is a joint effort of the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis and the Asset Building Program of New America. The Project aims to advance public policies that build savings and assets for poor, low- and moderate-income individuals around the world. Through research, publications, roundtables, and conferences, the Project hopes to serve as a bridge across the key elements of microfinance, financial education, social policy, and commercial financial services, as these diverse areas begin to come together. See www.GlobalAssetsProject.org.

ASSET BUILDING IN CALIFORNIA

New America's Asset Building Program is firmly established in California with the aim of advancing policies that build savings and assets for all Californians. The California office, established in 2004, is widely credited with securing legislative changes allowing Californians to "split" their refunds on their tax returns, as well as enabling TANF recipients in California to save for college and retirement without losing key public benefits. The California office also succeeded in securing bipartisan legislation to create savings accounts at birth for each newborn in California.

ASSETBUILDING.ORG

New America launched and manages AssetBuilding.org—the nation's premier on-line clearinghouse of asset-building ideas, policies, and programs. See www.AssetBuilding.org

CONGRESSIONAL SAVINGS AND OWNERSHIP CAUCUS

To educate policymakers around the goal of broadening asset ownership in the U.S., New America's Asset Building Program proposed and facilitated the establishment of a bipartisan, bicameral Congressional Savings and Ownership Caucus in February 2005. This forum brings together key Members of Congress, their staffs, and leading outside experts to discuss—in an honest, non-partisan manner—recent research findings, policy options, and potential legislative opportunities to advance asset policies in the U.S.

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