

A flash of righteous presidential anger on women and work

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

January 29, 2014

In general, I agree with Kevin Drum's take on [last night's State of the Union address](#): it was [pretty effective for what it was, which wasn't all that much](#), and it was [not at all what the White House sold it as](#), newspaper headlines and pundit roundtables notwithstanding. Drum also offers [this](#):

The most amusing part of the evening was watching Obama goad John Boehner into clapping for things he didn't want to clap for. When Obama said, "No one who works full time should ever have to raise a family in poverty," Boehner could hardly *not* clap, even though he knew what was coming next: a proposal to raise the minimum wage that he opposes. Ditto for "Citizenship means standing up for everyone's right to vote" and several others.

Yup. Obama even put Boehner on the spot and got a thumbs up from him! For using the Speaker as an example of the importance of economic mobility—not just opportunity, but actual *outcomes*. Pretty sneaky.

But in a speech in which the president generally came off as playful and lightly detached, I was pleasantly surprised by the intensity of his paragraph on women, family and work:

Today, women make up about half our workforce. But they still make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. That is wrong, and in 2014, it's an embarrassment. A woman deserves equal pay for equal work. She deserves to have a baby without sacrificing her job. A mother deserves a day off to care for a sick child or sick parent without running into hardship – and you know what, a father does, too. It's time to do away with workplace policies that belong in a "Mad Men" episode. This year, let's all come together – Congress, the White House, and businesses from Wall Street to Main Street – to give every woman the opportunity she deserves. Because I firmly believe when women succeed, America succeeds.

An embarrassment! He's right, of course. And kudos for acknowledging that the family leave issue isn't just about women. For what it's worth, the policies represented in this paragraph would do a great deal of good, even if Obama's much-ballyhooed executive orders are pretty small-time stuff.