

One reason is that employee benefits have been steadily shrinking. Only 18% of private-sector workers now have a traditional pension plan—and 40% have no retirement plan of any kind at work. A majority of baby boomers—Americans born between 1946 and 1964—say they expect to continue working after they reach retirement age.

The cost of health care keeps rising faster than wages or inflation. Fewer employers offer health coverage—and fewer employees can afford to buy it. The upshot: Almost 47 million Americans now are uninsured, and most of them are in families with at least one full-time worker. Only 47% of parents in families earning less than \$40,000 a year are offered health insurance at work.

The Rich Get Richer

Many Americans are troubled by the income gap between the nation's highest earners and everyone else—a gap that has grown dramatically in recent decades. In the last five years, inflation-adjusted wages rose less than 1% a year for the vast majority of households. But for the top 5% of earners, they jumped 2.5% a year. And for the top 1% of earners, the gains were much bigger: In 2005, the average CEO made 369 times as much as the average worker, compared with 131 times as much in 1993.

"I'm sorry to say I feel the rich are getting richer, and the rest of us are fighting to survive," says DeAnna Forman, who made \$25,000 as a bartender in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. "I feel like I'm always trying to catch up." Kirk Kuchera, who earned \$8,300 as a behavioral counselor for youth in Austin, Minn., agrees. "It appears to me that the lower middle class continues to work its way down the economic ladder, while those at the top of the corporate ladder move higher and higher at an unbelievable pace," he says.

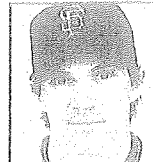
Experts are concerned about wage inequality too. "We're in an economy that provides outsized, almost lottery-style gains to certain people in certain professions," says John Challenger, president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a global outplacement firm. He worries that, with college so expensive, graduates are forced to seek higher-salaried jobs to pay off their debts, avoiding critical lower-paying fields like education and social services.

Income inequality has a negative impact in well-paid fields too: The extremely lucrative business side of medicine has drawn so much interest, for example, that more than 40 medical schools now offer an M.B.A. degree as well as an M.D. for graduates who want to go into health-care management or to Wall Street, where a doctor can

continued

The Hottest Jobs (For College Grads)

- Forensic accountant**
Combines accounting, auditing and investigative skills: \$30,000-\$150,000
- Logistics manager**
Plan, implement and control flow of goods or services: \$35,000-\$118,000
- Corporate librarian**
More companies need specialists to manage information: \$37,000-\$93,000
- Emerging media specialist**
Managers in Web content and online marketing need communication skills and tech savvy: \$26,500-\$100,000
- Physical therapist**
Aging baby boomers will drive the increasing need: \$34,600-\$74,000
- Information security**
Workers plan, implement and support network security: \$47,000-\$122,000



Barry Zito, 28
Baseball player
San Francisco, Calif.
\$18 million



Gina Campbell, 33
Puppeteer
Riverdale, Md.
\$32,300



Eileen Richardson, 48
Life coach
Santa Fe, N.M.
\$25,300



Jake Saylor, 46
Auto parts assembly
Utica, Mich.
\$87,000



David Brunswick, 33
Pathologist's assistant
Houston, Tex.
\$80,000



Angela Bliss, 64
Greeting-card sales
Pittsburgh, Pa.
\$11,900



Bonnie May, 51
Pharmacist
Leicester, Mass.
\$87,000



Nick Wherley, 29
Communication spec.
Tolono, Ill.
\$39,300



Tyra Banks, 33
TV host
Los Angeles, Calif.
\$18 million



William Chapin, 57
Aircraft mechanic
Fayetteville, Ga.
\$58,000



Michelle Guevara, 26
Guidance counselor
Stamford, Conn.
\$54,000



Kenny Chesney, 39
Country singer
Nashville, Tenn.
\$75.9 million



Enola Crayton, 50
Nonprofit director
Clinton, Okla.
\$36,000



Jerry Dunlay, 51
City manager
Osage, Iowa
\$48,100



Michelle Wie, 17
Pro golfer
Honolulu, Hawaii
\$735,000



Gregory Harper, 39
Flight inspector
Wichita, Kan.
\$61,000



Jeff Dahl, 27
Coast Guard recruiter
Arlington, Va.
\$68,000



Lee Anna Golden, 60
Accounting specialist
Palm Harbor, Fla.
\$28,100



Dennis Heine, 60
Medical engineer
Spokane, Wash.
\$85,000



Lauren Reiman-Fodor, 24
Project manager
Cheyenne, Wyo.
\$48,000



Toby Acosta, 28
Registered nurse
Birmingham, Ala.
\$76,000



Brenda Barnes, 53
CEO, Sara Lee
Downers Grove, Ill.
\$4 million



Gary Sredzienski, 45
Accordianist
Kittery, Maine
\$45,000



DeAnna Forman, 43
Bartender
South Lake Tahoe, Calif.
\$25,000