

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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Features

Next Up: A Policy Agenda for America's Tomorrow

The re-election of President Obama was a wake-up call about the power of America's new demographics. But while the media conversation has focused on how to win the votes of the emerging people-of-color majority, the real issue is what the right policies are to lead the nation toward a prosperous and equitable future.

Over the coming months, PolicyLink will continue to press for policies that create opportunities for everyone to participate in and co-create a robust, resilient 21st century economy. But right now, we all must focus on preventing the spending cuts that will take place in January if Congress does not come to an agreement about the budget. These cuts would devastate the communities of color. Read [The Top 10 Reasons Why People of Color Should Care About the Fiscal Showdown](#) from our friends at the Center for American Progress to understand the implications.

Sincerely,

Angela Glover Blackwell
Founder and CEO, PolicyLink

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Capitol Gains: Equity Advocates in Congress

In Brief

Race, Ethnicity, and the New "Swing" State

No political party in America will ever succeed again without appealing to people of color, who are quickly becoming the majority in a growing number of states.

In the [Huffington Post](#), PolicyLink CEO and Founder Angela Glover Blackwell and USC Professor Manuel Pastor explain how both major parties can engage the nation's new demographics.

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A South Bronx Success Story

Hundreds of graduates of a union-backed training initiative have overcome employment barriers to land jobs, mostly in the living-wage green sector, such as energy efficiency and sustainable manufacturing and landscaping, the [New York Times reports](#).

The Center for Environmental Workforce Training program demonstrates how smart investments can connect low-wage workers to careers in the green economy.

The face of Congress is changing. With the most diverse group of incoming lawmakers in history, Capitol Hill is becoming more representative of America. The 113th Congress will have more Latino, women, Asian American, and openly gay and bisexual members. It will be younger. It will include our first Hindu representative and our first Buddhist senator. In no small part because of this greater diversity, Congress will have more voices promoting equity as an economic imperative.

See this ["Congress of Firsts"](#) infographic from *ThinkProgress*.

The new Congress includes dynamic leaders who grew up in hardship and reached incredible heights because America provided them with opportunities to participate and achieve. These leaders have been fighting for years to make sure everyone in America has those same chances to learn, work, and succeed, including the nation's fast-growing communities of color.

Congress has a long way to go before it truly reflects the rich diversity of America—not a single senator is African American. Still, many of the newcomers are arriving with a deep commitment to fairness and a policy agenda to advance it. Here are six freshmen we expect to accomplish great things.

Joaquin Castro, 38
House of Representatives, 20th District of Texas



Strong voice on: Education, Health Care, Juvenile Justice, Immigration Reform

In his words: *"My family has experienced America's promise firsthand, and I want to help build what I have called the Infrastructure of Opportunity so that future generations will have the same*

chance to pursue their American Dream."

Born and raised in San Antonio, Castro is a Harvard-trained attorney, second-generation immigrant whose grandparents came from Mexico, and rising star in the Democratic Party. He built his campaign on the idea that great public schools, well-paying jobs, and a sound health-care system create an

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Free Webinar: Solving the Global Youth Employment Challenge

On **December 10, from 9 – 10:30 a.m. Eastern**, McKinsey & Company is holding a free webinar on how education systems across the globe can best connect youth to employment.

Seventy-five million youth worldwide are currently unemployed, and in the United States, youth of color are disproportionately likely to be jobless or disconnected entirely from work or school. The webinar will follow a study of the issue in nine countries that will be released on December 5. Register for the webinar [here](#).

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Not Your Usual Equity Voices

The world's top bond traders are not exactly the usual suspects to call for policies aimed at reducing inequality. But Mohamed El-Erian and Bill Gross do just that in this *TIME* magazine [story](#).

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"infrastructure of opportunity." Just as our nation built a transportation infrastructure to get us where we need to go, he explains, America must invest in the opportunity infrastructure to move all of us forward.

As a five-term state representative, Castro worked to increase college completion rates for students of color, to ease employment barriers for former juvenile offenders, and—in a tough political climate—to restore millions of dollars in education and health-care funding. He helped to bring a sensibility of compassionate pragmatism to the immigration debate in his state, which has rejected a hard-line Arizona-style approach and recognizes the economic and cultural benefits that immigrants bring. He supports comprehensive immigration reform, saying the nation cannot afford 50 different policies.

Castro was not the only member of his family celebrating victory on election night. His twin brother, Julián, won his second term as mayor of San Antonio.

Robert "Beto" O'Rourke, 40
House of Representatives, 16th District of Texas



Strong voice on: DREAM Act, Immigration Reform

In his words: *"We are a nation that needs our young, enterprising Americans to feel welcome and to stay to contribute to our society."*

A fourth-generation El Pasoan, O'Rourke campaigned hard on the promise to fix immigration laws, which he calls "broken and drastically out of sync with our values and the current and future needs of our economy." He pledges to fight for policies that empower people to come to the United States legally, encourage employers to hire documented workers, and increase America's presence in the global market.

He also supports investments in early education, to level the field for low-income and limited-English students and equip all students with the knowledge and skills that employers want.

O'Rourke comes from a family of power brokers and entrepreneurs in El Paso, a border city with an 80 percent Latino population. He got his nickname, Beto, as a schoolboy

and speaks fluent Spanish. He was a singer and guitarist in the band Foss, in New York City, before returning to his hometown to start a web design firm. As a city council member from 2005 to 2011, O'Rourke supported workforce training, downtown development, neighborhood investments, and a financial rescue and an overhaul of mass transit.

Joyce Beatty, 62

House of Representatives, 3rd District of Ohio



Strong voice on: Financial Literacy, Education, Job Creation

In her words: *"Investing in our children's education and ensuring an affordable college education is available are the most important investments we can make in our future."*

Beatty is the daughter of a bricklayer and a stay-at-home mom who emphasized the importance of civil rights and education—causes that inspired her to go into politics.

In a campaign centered on jobs and education, she promised to bring jobs to central Ohio through tax incentives and other programs aimed to boost hiring and small business development. She also supports policies to make college more affordable and strengthen the community college and workforce development systems. Beatty understands these needs firsthand, since she worked her own way through school.

A management consultant, clothing storeowner, and former vice president of outreach and engagement at Ohio State University, Beatty served five terms in the Ohio Legislature. She fought foreclosures, promoted financial literacy, advocated for economic development, and led the passage of a law that secured cancer screenings for uninsured women. She will join the Congressional Black Caucus and hopes for a seat on the Financial Services Committee.

Mazie K. Hirono, 65

Senator, Hawaii



Strong voice on: Job Creation, Education, Transportation, Renewable Energy, Environment

In her words: *"One of the best ways to create jobs is to finally get to work fixing our aging roads, bridges, harbors, airports and water systems – the stuff Washington likes to call 'infrastructure', but which you and I know as the day-to-day building blocks of [the] economy."*

Let's start with the firsts: first Asian-American woman elected to the Senate; first Asian-born immigrant senator; first Buddhist senator.

Hirono served five years in the House, representing Hawaii's 2nd District, where she emerged as a voice for the rights and cultural heritage of Native Hawaiians and a leader on transportation and infrastructure issues. She sees investments in these basic lifelines of communities as a way to create good jobs while repairing and rebuilding the structures that connect people to opportunity. She has supported the creation of a National Infrastructure Bank to leverage private investment to fund transportation and other projects.

Hirono has pledged to work on "moving from an economy where fossil fuel exploration makes only a few people wealthy" to an economy based on renewal energy production that creates jobs on a large scale and protects natural resources. Her other priority is education—an issue she says she cares deeply about because of her personal background.

It's a classic, compelling, American success story. Born in Japan, she came to the United States at age 8, with a mother fleeing an abusive marriage. Hirono got her first job in elementary school, working as a cafeteria cashier in exchange for hot lunch. She worked her way through college and law school and went into politics as a way to give back to the country that had given her so much. She won her first public office, as a Hawaii state legislator, at age 33.

**Tammy Baldwin, 50
Senator, Wisconsin**



Strong voice on: Civil Rights, Education and Infrastructure Investments, Fair Tax Reform, Immigration Reform

In her words: "Fairness, equality, and opportunity are at the core of who we are as a state and nation."

Although Baldwin will be the first openly gay senator, her sexual orientation rarely came up during the heated campaign. It focused instead on the stark choice between a progressive and a conservative agenda.

During her seven terms in the House of Representatives, Baldwin strongly advocated for policies to level the playing field. She co-founded and co-chaired Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus and worked to advance the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. She was the lead House sponsor of the Buffett Rule to ensure that millionaires and billionaires pay a fairer share of taxes and one of a handful of congress members to oppose deregulating big banks.

Count on Baldwin to support college loan reform and expanded Pell Grants to make higher education and career training more accessible and affordable, government investments to fuel job creation—especially in manufacturing and infrastructure, and immigration reform and pathways to citizenship.

Baldwin was born in the district she represented and raised there by her grandparents. She won her first election at age 24, to a seat on the Dane County Board of Supervisors.

Elizabeth Warren, 63 Senator, Massachusetts



Strong voice on: Financial Reform

In her words: *"People feel like the system is rigged against them. And here's the painful part. They're right."*

Nobody has been a more forceful champion for the homeowners and borrowers hurt by predatory lenders and banks than Elizabeth Warren.

She has already won historic safeguards against the "financial

tricks and traps" often hidden in mortgages, loans credit cards — and she promises to fight for more. She is sure to push for stronger regulation and oversight of the financial sector. Progressive organizations are campaigning to have her appointed to the powerful Senate Banking Committee.

A longtime Harvard professor and prolific author on banking and finance, Warren rose to national prominence as chief watchdog of T.A.R.P—the \$700 billion taxpayer bailout of the financial system. Her straight talk and advocacy infuriated Congressional Republicans. She was architect of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau but not nominated to run it because of the partisan rancor. Instead, she ran for the Senate, which will be her first elected office.

Warren says that growing up on "the ragged edge of the middle class" taught her about the economic pressures on family. She often speaks of "an America that created opportunities for kids like me."

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Emerald Cities and the Retrofit Revolution



Retrofitting old buildings to make them more energy efficient may not sound sexy. But taking retrofits to scale could create hundreds of thousands of career-path jobs in America for the people who need them most, while addressing climate change and slashing utility bills.

That's why an innovative national collaborative called Emerald

Cities is working to jumpstart investments and engage underserved communities in the retrofit revolution. Last month, Emerald Cities teamed up with community colleges, the nation's primary workforce development system, to forge the crucial link between low-wealth communities and opportunities in this green economy industry.

"We look at sustainability not just as a singular effort on building efficiency or clean-energy generation, although those are absolutely critical," said Kevin Warner, vice president of investments at Emerald Cities. "To us, sustainability is all about economic development, economic and social stability, and quite honestly, security."

Emerald Cities, a nonprofit network of unions, businesses, advocacy organizations, and local partners, is working to stimulate a wave of public and private investment in retrofits—and to make sure that low-income communities and communities of color can reap the economic and environmental benefits.

Announced in October, the community college initiative will retrofit buildings at participating colleges and connect local residents to the jobs created. But that's just the beginning.

The initiative plans to integrate academic and workforce development programs, so students graduate with the skills and knowledge that green employers require. The colleges also pledge to invest resources to incubate green-technology enterprises, opening a much-needed door to entrepreneurship in communities.

"A traditional environmental services company could come and do the work and leave," said Avni Jamdar, director of Emerald Cities San Francisco. "We're promoting something that's much deeper and more far-reaching."

More than a half-million jobs

Retrofits are the fastest, most cost-effective way to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, while putting America back to work. They require less up-front capital than new construction, and the investments ultimately pay for themselves, through lower bills for utility.

The Center for American Progress estimates that retrofitting just 40 percent of the nation's building stock would create [625,000 full-time jobs](#) in the next decade in carpentry,

electrical work, plumbing, and much more.

Who will get those jobs? Will they pay living wages? Will they offer meaningful long-term pathways to careers in solar, weatherization, conservation, energy compliance, and other nascent sectors? Which communities will access resources to fix up their aging, polluting buildings?

Those questions drive the work of Emerald Cities. The goal: ensure that low-income communities and communities of color have a voice in the decisions as well as access to the training and employment opportunities spurred by green investments.

The collaborative works in 10 cities: Atlanta, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland, Portland, Providence, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Building the new-economy pipeline

Emerald Cities found a crucial ally in community colleges. A robust education and training system geared to young people of color, immigrants, unemployed and low-wage workers, and others who face employment barriers is critical to ensure an inclusive retrofit sector. This system must be smart and dogged about teaching the literacy, math, and hands-on skills needed in the green economy.

The initial partners—New Hampshire Community College System, the Oakland-based Peralta Community College District, and the City College of San Francisco—represent 23 campuses.

The initiative builds on Emerald Cities' local successes.

The San Francisco chapter, a lead organizer of the new initiative, spearheaded a project to retrofit an affordable housing development in the city's diverse Mission District. Emerald Cities brought grassroots organizations to negotiations with unions and the property owner, Mission Housing Development Corp.

The process made history. For the first time, a broad cross-section of the community came together on equal footing with leaders of the building trades to decide what fair hiring should look like.

Out of their negotiations emerged a groundbreaking

community workforce agreement. It required union jobs for all the work and included pathways to union apprenticeship programs for residents who have historically been excluded from San Francisco's trade unions, including people of color, immigrants, and low-wage workers.

The legally binding agreement also gave Emerald Cities San Francisco standing to file a grievance if the contractor violated the terms, a critical provision for accountability. The agreement will serve as a template as Emerald Cities launches more projects across the country.

Guo-Hua "Eric" Zhang, a 40-year-old father of two, was the first apprentice hired under a provision of the agreement that committed an apprenticeship slot to a worker from one of the targeted underserved groups. An immigrant from Canton, China, he has lived in San Francisco for two decades and struggled to support his large extended family.

The opportunity provided his first steady employment in years, and it offered more than just a paycheck. "The first thing this apprenticeship did was improve my English," he said. "I have many more skills now after this job. Now I know the right way to do things."

Want to learn more? Watch this [interview](#) with Emerald Cities' President/CEO Denise Fairchild.

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America's Tomorrow highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the [America's Tomorrow webpage](#).

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