

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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4

Features

Charting the Course toward an Equitable Economy



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Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO, PolicyLink

Drawing on the emerging consensus that inequality hurts growth, PolicyLink and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) held a spirited half day forum in Washington D.C. last week. Angela Glover Blackwell, PolicyLink founder and CEO, boldly stated the nation's challenge: "Growing inequality is the most pressing issue of our time. And equity is the antidote to inequality".

As the nation becomes increasingly diverse, the country cannot address inequality without confronting its racial and ethnic divides. "Racial inequality has a dragging effect on growth," stated economist Manuel Pastor, who also spoke at the convening.

Embracing the nation's changing demographics and making investments that allow everyone to apply their creativity and talent to building the next economy is the path to sustained

In Brief

Union Members of Color on the Rise

Asian, African American, and Latino union membership all rose last year, even as membership among whites fell, reports [the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Some labor leaders [credit](#) progressive new alliances in states such as California, where campaigns to organize car-wash workers, truck drivers, and home care aides have added hundreds of thousands of largely workers of color to union ranks.

Healthy Food Access Strengthens Local Economies

It's not just about healthier eating. From farmer's markets to federal food assistance, increasing access to healthy foods in low-income neighborhoods can also stimulate local economies. A new [report](#) by PolicyLink explains how equitable food programs and policies are creating jobs, supporting new business opportunities, and keeping dollars circulating locally.

Planning for Equitable Economic

economic growth. A federal policy [agenda](#) released by PolicyLink charts the course for equity-driven growth: grow good jobs, build capabilities from cradle to career, erase barriers, and expand opportunities.

One of the policy priorities highlighted at the forum is maximizing the equity and growth returns from public spending and investment. Speakers described how local and federal agencies were making progress by shifting from project-by-project community benefits and project labor agreements to broader, more inclusive policies governing public investments. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, for example, adopted a [community benefits](#) policy to ensure low-income communities benefit from its hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in business contracts. At the federal level, the Department of Labor is promoting the adoption of project labor agreements that will create career-ladder job opportunities while lowering project costs.

Multiracial coalitions based on the values of human dignity will be essential to advance this agenda. "We must re-knit white working class and people of color interests," said Mary Kay Henry, SEIU President.

Watch the event, [Equity and the Future of the American Economy](#).

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Reinventing Home Care: Making America's Fastest Growing Jobs Good Jobs

Growth

Equity and growth are tied together in a new [plan](#) guiding the economic future of Detroit. The [economic growth element](#) of the plan created by Detroit Works emphasizes minority entrepreneurship, education and skills development, and place-based strategies for job growth. This plan, and the robust two-year community process that created it, can be a model for other regions to learn from.



Workers, consumers, and organizers gathered at a Care Congress in Washington, D.C.

They labor in the shadows, caring for our grandparents, our disabled veterans, and others who require help with daily activities. Now, as the need for home care soars, a national campaign is working to reshape the industry to create millions of good jobs, reverse longstanding inequities for workers, and deliver high-quality services.

Personal care and home health aides are among the nation's most marginalized, underpaid occupations — and the fastest growing. In that tension, [Caring Across Generations](#) sees a golden moment to organize and advocate for equity-focused changes in a sector vital to job creation and economic growth, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.

"It is a huge opportunity for us to address inequality, if we make sure we create quality jobs," said Ai-jen Poo, the campaign's co-director.

The campaign is bringing together people across divides of race, age, class, and disability to push for reforms that benefit everyone: the rapidly aging, largely white population driving up demand for care; the workforce made up largely of women of color; and the nation as a whole, struggling to grow the economy.

The high road to high growth

Two million people work as personal attendants and home health aides for seniors and people with disabilities. The jobs are exempt from the federal minimum wage and overtime rules (though covered by labor standards in some states).

In one [survey](#), average starting wages ranged from \$9 to \$12 an hour, considerably lower than the \$16 average for all U.S. workers. And that does not include innumerable workers hired directly by consumers and families — often for even lower pay. About [45 percent](#) of care workers live in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

At first glance, home care may not seem like a high-potential industry, the way, for instance, biotechnology does. But it should. The ranks of care workers are [projected](#) to swell by 70 percent this decade, mostly due to the graying of America. Every day another 10,000 people turn 65 years old. Many aging Americans want to live at home even when they no longer can bathe, dress, eat, or get around on their own. The support of personal care attendants and home health aides make independent living possible.

Caring Across Generations, a coalition of 70 labor, women's, philanthropic, faith, and health care organizations, is working to build public and political will around four broad policy principles: create good jobs, develop training and career ladders, build a path to citizenship, and maintain safety net supports for seniors and people with disabilities.

The campaign is creating a movement for policy change by building on the interdependence that often characterizes the relationships between care workers and patients. This notion of reciprocity resonates with Marlene Champion, a care worker from Barbados, especially when she thinks about one of her dearest clients, an elderly, frail pediatrician, Morris Steiner. She worked to get him, first, out of bed, then out of his apartment, and finally to family and social events. He influenced her to resume her studies, and she earned a G.E.D. at age 53.

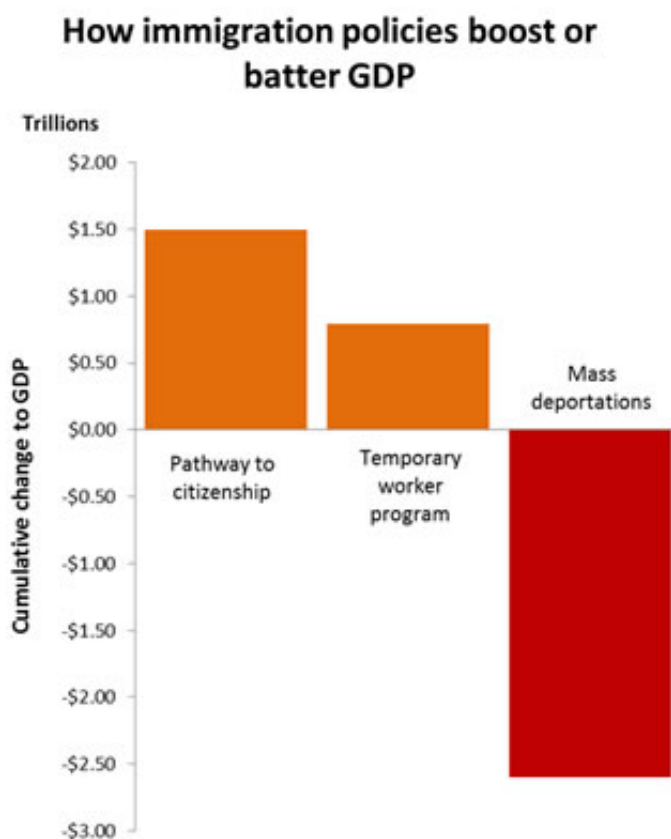
"He felt like a part of my family after a while," she said. "And the same thing went for him."

Launched by Poo, director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and Sarita Gupta, executive director of Jobs with Justice, Caring Across Generations taps into dedication like Champion's and into the capacity and networks of partner organizations. The campaign held Care Congresses throughout the country last year, gathering as many as 500 participants at a time to share perspectives on the care crisis and ideas for solving it.

The campaign now is developing online tools to continue the groundbreaking conversation that spurred care workers, consumers, and families to find common cause, revalue this crucial work, and envision a robust, compassionate infrastructure of care that strengthens our communities, our economy, and our humanity.

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The Dollars and Sense of Comprehensive Immigration Reform



Source: Dr. Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda. "Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform." January 2010.

Keep this in mind as the immigration policy debate heats up in Washington: Comprehensive reform fuels economic growth.

Studies by Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda, founding director of the North American Integration and Development Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, show that creating a pathway to citizenship would add \$1.5 trillion to our economy over 10 years. That's roughly the equivalent of the economic activity for the entire city of Denver, Colorado. And it could

create nearly a million new jobs.

By contrast, mass deportations drain \$2.6 trillion from our economy.

Which approach makes more sense?

You can read the studies published in [the *Cato Journal*](#) and [the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Center](#).

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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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