

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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Features

America Needs a Raise: A Statement by Angela Glover Blackwell



Angela Glover Blackwell, PolicyLink founder and CEO, comments on the President's address on PBS NewsHour.

President Obama's State of the Union address pushed past politics and spoke directly to the needs of the people — all people. He called on Congress to "give America a raise," which we need in more ways than one. We must raise the minimum wage so that all workers can support their families and save for the future. And we must lift up our struggling communities and give a boost to those hit first and worst by economic downturns.

The President's vision for economic security not only strengthens the existing middle class, but also builds ladders of opportunity to the middle class for those being left behind. This [all-in approach](#) speeds economic growth. As I said on [PBS NewsHour](#) last night, when you invest in those who are

In Brief

Leaders Call for an Inclusive Economy

From D.C. to Davos, world leaders are making the case that equity and inclusion are essential to building a more sustainable economy and addressing inequality:

"Our opportunity agenda won't be complete... unless we do more to make sure our economy honors the dignity of work, and hard work pays off for every single American." — [President Obama, 2014 State of the Union](#)

"We need more inclusiveness. If we continue to have un-inclusive growth and we continue with the unemployment situation, particularly youth unemployment, our global society is not sustainable." — [Klaus Schwab, founder of the Davos World Economic Forum](#)

"The growth of equality demands something more than economic growth... It also calls for... a better distribution of wealth, the creation of sources of employment, and an integral promotion of the poor which goes

left behind — boys and men of color, women, immigrants — you do well for America as a whole. In other words, equity — just and fair inclusion for all — is the superior growth model for our nation.

Targeted investments in underserved communities and high-poverty neighborhoods are essential to achieving equity. We know that a child's zip code is a likely determinant of his or her chances of success. President Obama's pledge to work with local governments to raise the minimum wage, improve access to quality education and job training, and help people save for retirement shows a real commitment to building a lasting equitable economy.

Let us now raise our voices and work with our President and each other to ensure America's tomorrow is one in which all people can participate and prosper.

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Eco-investments Spur Equitable Growth in Buffalo and Portland



Residents of Buffalo's Green Development Zone.

This is a tale of two cities.

It's about how grassroots movements in Buffalo, New York, and Portland, Oregon, are helping create more equitable cities by building urgently needed neighborhood resources like parks

beyond a simple welfare mentality." — [Pope Francis](#)

"The face of Rhode Island is changing... We cannot afford to have disparity in Rhode Island where there are areas of opportunity and others where poverty and lack of education self-perpetuate and hold back our economy as a whole... Regions that embrace equity and diversity experience greater economic success." — [Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee](#)

Building a Woman's Nation

How are women — and women of color in particular — faring in an economy increasingly marked by rising inequality and low economic mobility? Here's one statistic: For every dollar earned by an average white man, the average woman earns only 77 cents, an African American woman earns 70 cents, and a Latina earns 55 cents. Read more eye-opening facts and compelling solutions, including a chapter by Angela Glover Blackwell, in the new book, [The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Pushes Back from the Brink](#), available for download.

and affordable housing, and connecting residents to the jobs and business opportunities that these investments create.

The Green Development Zone, on Buffalo's West Side, and Living Cully, in northeast Portland, have each developed strategies to modernize their neighborhood infrastructure and maximize the economic and environmental benefits for the people who live there.

"True sustainability can be reinterpreted as an antipoverty strategy," said Alan Hipólito, executive director of Verde, a social enterprise nonprofit in Portland and a Living Cully partner.

Both efforts seek to empower residents, build wealth and income, and transform a struggling community into a stable, healthy, livable one. In the process, they hope to create a replicable model for equitable, sustainable growth that can work across metropolitan regions.

PUSH organizes Buffalo's Green Development Zone

Inside the Green Development Zone, a 25-square block area of Buffalo's West Side, resident and mason Eddie Jones is helping to build affordable energy-efficient homes and teach his trade to a small group of formerly incarcerated trainees. Jones has worked in construction for years, but never on projects like the ones organized by PUSH — People United for Sustainable Housing.

"They use the skills that are within the community," he said. "They hire professional, competent folks who live here, so the work and the money stay right there. And we do a lot of training. We help each other out."

The [West Side](#) is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city, with long-time African American and Puerto Rican residents living alongside many recent immigrants from Somalia, Sudan, and Burma. The area has also struggled from decades of neglect and disinvestment. The Green Development Zone is the centerpiece of efforts by PUSH. The group has successfully campaigned for green investments in the region, and leverages those investments to build affordable rental units, community gardens, and other assets on the West Side.

The idea is to create jobs — 52 to date — that improve the physical environment and quality of life of the neighborhood

and that develop workforce skills for residents long after these projects are completed.

Community organizing and resident empowerment are central to the approach. Hundreds of residents participated in the community planning process that mapped the zone. They drew the boundaries around an area they considered to be insulated from the city's slow-moving wave of gentrification, so they would not find themselves priced out once they turned their neighborhood around.

Since then, PUSH has acquired 50 parcels of property ranging from overgrown lots to dilapidated multiunit buildings. The group works with "high-road" contractors that agree to hire locally, pay family-sustaining wages, and provide training. PUSH uses its community networks — and old-fashioned shoe leather — to link residents to opportunities and raise awareness of the possibilities.

"We canvas the neighborhood. We knock on doors. It's a lot of one-on-one," said Johnnie Fenderson, PUSH Green workforce organizer.

PUSH has recently expanded its efforts beyond the West Side. Through a partnership with New York State energy authorities, PUSH dispatches teams to encourage homeowners countywide to make their homes more energy efficient. PUSH then connects underrepresented business owners and workers to the jobs and business opportunities. By building both a market and labor pool for residential retrofits, PUSH saves homeowners money, secures economic opportunity for people who need it, and helps the planet. That's a win-win-win.

Community partners create Portland's Living Cully



Cully residents participate in environmental sampling at Cully Park.

Living Cully puts equitable economic development at the center of the "ecodistrict" concept — an idea gaining ground in Portland to engage residents in making their neighborhoods more sustainable. In a city with a history of redevelopment that has displaced low-income people and people of color, Living Cully is writing a new story: it delivers investments that improve the lives, surroundings, and economic prospects of the people who live there and will hopefully redefine how investments in infrastructure are made throughout the region.

Twenty-six percent of Cully residents live in poverty — significantly more than the city average of 17 percent. Fifty-one percent are people of color, including a large Latino population. The neighborhood lacks access to parks and open spaces, and many streets don't have sidewalks.

Living Cully is a coordinated effort to reduce these disparities — and to do it in a way that engages residents, empowers them, and creates pathways to success. Residents play a central role in the design and governance of projects. Jobs, contracts, and training opportunities are targeted to the community. In addition to Verde, a nonprofit that has created social enterprises in landscaping, a native plant nursery, and weatherization, Living Cully community partners include Portland Habitat for Humanity Metro East, Hacienda Community Development Corporation, and the Native American Youth and Family Center.

One of Living Cully's signature projects is a \$4 million investment to build the 25-acre Cully Park. Last year, 75

percent of design contracts and 60 percent of construction contracts went to minority- and women-owned businesses. Other projects getting underway: a \$25 million investment to rehabilitate 133 affordable housing units, and \$50 million to build a biogas facility in the neighborhood to convert organic matter to fuel. The energy company and Living Cully have already negotiated hiring and contracting goals.

"We view every investment as a way to educate youth, create jobs, support businesses, and help the environment at the same time," Verde's Alan Hipólito said. More than 2,000 miles away, residents in Buffalo's Green Development Zone would agree.

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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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