



Healthy Worker, Healthy Economy

A white paper by Anita Malik, Democrat candidate for U.S. House in Arizona's 6th district

An Unhealthy Economy

A healthy workforce creates a healthy economy and a healthy economy leads to a healthy workforce, creating a prosperous cycle where everyone benefits. The inverse is also true.

America's economy only became the largest and wealthiest in the world because we had the world's largest and wealthiest middle-class. While the American economy hasn't had a recession in almost a decade, our economy is no longer benefiting the majority of [American workers](#).

American Workers Are Not Earning Their Fair Share:

- Corporate profits are at an all-time high¹, while median wages remain stagnant for the majority of American workers².
- The federal minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation and is lower today than in 1968³.
- CEOs continue to retire with "golden parachutes"⁴ while more than 40% of Americans have little to no retirement savings⁵.
- 40% of Americans report that they couldn't cover a \$400 emergency expense.⁶

Current American Health and Wellness

The loss in income experienced by the American middle class results in a decrease in overall health and wellness, which in turn hurts the small businesses that power our economy.

¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/corporate-profits-are-at-an-all-time-high>

² <https://www.brookings.edu/research/thirteen-facts-about-wage-growth/>

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/thirteen-facts-about-wage-growth/>

⁴ <https://hbr.org/2016/10/a-short-history-of-golden-parachutes>

⁵ <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/06/42-percent-of-americans-are-at-risk-of-retiring-broke.html>

⁶ <http://money.cnn.com/2018/05/22/pf/emergency-expenses-household-finances/index.html>



Wages and productivity growth used to rise together, benefiting both American workers and American businesses. But [The Economic Policy Institute](#) reports productivity growth has significantly outpaced wage increases since the early 1980s, leaving millions of workers behind.

Many Americans can no longer afford to support their family's well-being — childcare, healthcare, home and rental prices continue to outpace wage growth.

According to the most recent [United Nations report](#) about poverty and human rights, "Americans can expect to live shorter and sicker lives, compared to people living in any other rich democracy, and the "health gap" between the U.S. and its peer countries continues to grow."

These reports provide overwhelming evidence of an unhealthy economy, of unequal growth and of harsh inequality. This is an economy where the benefits go to the privileged few while the majority of workers struggle to keep up. There are policies that can provide remedies.

A Social Safety Net to Protect Every Worker

The nature of work in America is changing. Many Americans do not work for major corporations or organizations. An estimated 54 to 68 million Americans are independent contractors with little job security and few to no benefits.

This transition in the workforce has also led to stagnating incomes. American workers have received an increasingly smaller share of the total national income for decades. Workers need to make up this lost income through both higher wages and new benefits. It's time for all Americans to be able to attain the American Dream.

That's why I support a federally-funded and state-managed social safety net to protect every American worker. **To regain the average worker's quality of life, I propose institutional reforms that will improve the well-being of every American. These include:**

Paid Parental Leave

Every American worker has earned the right to maternity/paternity leave to bond with their child during the crucial first few months of their child's life. Currently, access to paid family leave is unequally offered throughout our economy.

A majority of Americans do not spend time with their newborn children. Unfortunately, they cannot afford the lost wages so they must return to work right away. Every American should have access to paid maternity and paternity leave at their place of employment.



- **Paid parental leave benefits American children, the future of the American workforce.**
 - It reduces infant mortality⁷.
 - It increases the chances of infants receiving routine baby care visits⁸.
 - It increases the chances of infants receiving vaccinations⁹.
 - It increases the child's cognitive outcomes in early years¹⁰.
 - It increases the rate and duration of breastfeeding

- **Paid parental leave benefits American mothers and fathers.**
 - It reduces the incidence of mental illness for mothers after birth and over the long-term¹¹.
 - It benefits mothers economically because mothers are more committed to their job after parental leave¹².
 - It increases the likelihood that mothers will be working one year after a child's birth¹³.
 - It increases the time that fathers spend child-rearing¹⁴.
 - Worker income becomes more stable.

- **Paid parental leave benefits American businesses.**
 - 91% of employers said paid parental leave either increased profits or had no effect¹⁵.
 - Employers with paid parental leave report higher productivity, higher morale and lower turnover¹⁶.

⁷ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0167629600000473>

⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/health/paid-leave-benefits-to-children-research/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/scientific-proof-paid-parental-leave-is-good-for-everyone>

¹⁰

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227650967_Maternal_Employment_and_Child_Cognitive_Outcomes_in_the_First_Three_Years_of_Life_The_NICHD_Study_of_Early_Child_Care

¹¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/health/paid-leave-benefits-to-children-research/index.html>

¹² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/susan-wojcicki-paid-maternity-leave-is-good-for-business-1418773756>

¹³

<https://news.rutgers.edu/news-release/rutgers-study-finds-paid-family-leave-leads-positive-economic-outcomes/20120119#.Ww9yZEgvzft>

¹⁴

<https://iwpr.org/publications/paid-parental-leave-in-the-united-states-what-the-data-tell-us-about-access-usage-and-economic-and-health-benefits/>

¹⁵ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/susan-wojcicki-paid-maternity-leave-is-good-for-business-1418773756>

¹⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/susan-wojcicki-paid-maternity-leave-is-good-for-business-1418773756>



Paid Sick Leave

At some point, every person becomes ill and needs time to recover. Absent employees cost American employers more than \$225 billion every year. Work-related injuries and illnesses cost tens of billions of dollars every year. America is the only industrialized country that does not guarantee paid sick leave for workers.

- **Paid sick leave benefits American workers.**
 - It allows a sick person to seek medical attention and heal.
 - It slows the spread of disease.
 - It allows workers to seek preventive care.
 - It improves an employee's on-the-job performance¹⁷.
 - Workers earn more stable incomes, which increases their economic security.
- **Paid sick leave benefits American employers.**
 - It improves productivity and results in fewer workplace injuries.
 - It reduces the spread of illness on the job, and results in less worker turnover¹⁸.
 - A recent study found that a nationwide paid sick leave policy would cost employers less than 0.3% of payroll¹⁹. This is hardly significant given the billions of resources lost in worker absence and turnover.

A Healthier, More Robust Retirement System

Our current retirement system is failing both workers and retirees. Nearly half of American workers have no retirement savings outside of Social Security, and about 55 million private-sector employees have no access to retirement savings plans through their employer²⁰.

We must:

- Strengthen Social Security by raising the cap on wages.
- Promote policies that encourage employers to match employee retirement contributions.

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/upshot/the-high-costs-of-not-offering-paid-sick-leave.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/upshot/the-high-costs-of-not-offering-paid-sick-leave.html>

¹⁹

<https://iwpr.org/publications/estimating-usage-costs-alternative-policies-provide-paid-sick-days-united-states/>

²⁰

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/get-there/wp/2017/04/03/who-wouldnt-want-millions-of-workers-to-save-for-retirement-turns-out-some-republicans-and-business-groups/>



- Support policies that encourage states to set up retirement plans for employees that don't have access to traditional retirement plans^{21&22}.

A Healthcare System That Covers Every American

More than 27 million of Americans do not have health insurance²³.

When someone loses their job, they shouldn't lose their family's health care. Bankruptcies from [exorbitant medical expenses](#) cost people their home every single year. In a country as wealthy and prosperous as America, these things shouldn't happen. Additionally, out-of-pocket health care costs are skyrocketing for people who receive healthcare through their job²⁴.

- I support transitioning our healthcare system into a single-payer healthcare provider that covers every American.
- I support increasing efficiency and expanding access to quality healthcare.
- I support increasing competition, encouraging generic drug production, and allowing Medicare to negotiate prescription prices.
- I support cutting administrative costs by combining our existing healthcare programs.
- I support a public option as an additional step toward universal coverage.
- I support blockchain technologies and an expansion of electronic EMRs to cut administrative costs and improve access.

Expanding Access to Education

Education provides countless benefits toward a healthy economy, it lowers unemployment, improves life expectancy and productivity, and increases earnings.

State funding of public universities and community colleges has been significantly cut in recent years, substantially increasing tuition costs for students and their families. The federal government should encourage states to increase funding for public universities and community colleges to make higher education more affordable and accessible to everyone.

²¹ <http://money.cnn.com/2016/09/29/retirement/california-retirement-plan/index.html>

²² <http://www.treasurer.ca.gov/scib/>

²³

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/3-2-million-more-americans-were-uninsured-2017-n83798>

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²⁴

<https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/brief/increases-in-cost-sharing-payments-have-far-outpaced-wage-growth/>



I support:

- Merit/commitment-based free community college.
- Refinancing and eliminating student debt.
- Encouraging states to increase funding for community colleges and universities.
- Expanding affirmative action programs to our strengthen our communities.
- Expanding vocational education programs, including apprenticeships, “nano degrees,” and on-the-job training.

Funding for Innovation

By mandating paid parental and sick leave, strengthening our social safety nets and increasing access to higher education, our economy can benefit every American worker, which in turn benefits every American business.

We also must encourage companies to invest in innovation by expanding the R&D tax credit and encouraging companies to train their workers.

Government-funded research has led to enormous breakthroughs in our lives: the Internet, MRIs, satellite communications, genetic therapies, solar and wind technologies, and countless others. These breakthroughs wouldn't have happened, however, without the forward-thinking perspective of leaders in previous generations. Unfortunately, funding for basic research has been slashed in recent years.²⁵ The US government must expand funding for basic research institutions like the National Institutes of Health, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the National Science Foundation, the US Department of Energy national laboratories.

American workers should create the technologies of the future building on the successful models of the past: government funded basic research, public-private partnerships with universities, venture capital and angel investing, and robust public markets, all of which have made America the most innovative economy in history.

Bottom line: To create an equitable and thriving economy, we must support and implement policies that focus on healthy workers and families. This must be our path forward. This is what I will fight for in Congress.

²⁵

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/03/data-check-us-government-share-basic-research-funding-falls-below-50>