

NEW GOSPEL OF WEALTH / THE FUTURE OF PHILANTHROPY

## Bringing hidden labor to light featuring Ai-Jen Poo

Ai-jen Poo, co-founder and executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, tells us why and how we need to value “the work that makes all other work possible.”

This video is part of a collection of conversations with leaders, thinkers, and activists from philanthropy, business, the arts, tech, and beyond outlining bold visions for the future of philanthropy.

### **Transcript begins.**

[Bringing hidden labor to light. Ai-Jen Poo, executive director, National Domestic Workers Alliance. Trustee, Ford Foundation. An Asian woman with dark hair tucked behind her ears, wearing a black satin wrap dress.]

**ANNOUNCER:** Please welcome Ai-Jen Poo.

[applause]

**AI-JEN POO:** Good morning. Oftentimes, when we’re looking for answers about the future, we go to centers of power and influence. Wall Street, Washington DC, Silicon Valley. One powerful thing I’ve learned through my work with domestic workers is that sometimes the answers about the future actually lie in the margins. In the margins and shadows of society, we can often find both the signals of what’s to come, for all of us, and the solutions for the future. I work with the nannies who take care of our children, the house cleaners who maintain order in our chaotic homes, the home care workers who care for our aging loved ones and support our loved ones with disabilities. They’re there when we come into the world, they walk alongside us as we grow and come into our own, and they’re there as we prepare to leave this world. They do the work in our homes that makes everything else possible in the world. It powers everything, and yet, it is some of the most invisible and undervalued work in our entire economy. The millions of women, mostly women of color, who do this work, work incredibly hard and still struggle to make ends meet. The average wage of a home care worker, for example, is \$15,000 per year.

When I first started organizing with domestic workers in 1998, they were very much seen as on the margins and fringes of our economy. But today, when I think about the conditions that define domestic work—unpredictable hours, piecing together work from lots of different gigs, no benefits, no career pathways, no access to a safety net or job security—these conditions define reality for more and more American workers every single day. That’s why we call domestic workers the original gig economy workers. And these are some of the fastest-growing occupations in our entire workforce today. As the older population grows, and people live longer, and millennials start having children, we need more caregivers than ever before. And unlike other segments of our workforce, these are jobs that can’t be outsourced, and they’re not going

to be automated, at least anytime soon. They've been trying to build a robot to fold a towel in a lab in LA for 11 years and still have not been successful!

[laughter]

These are, without question, going to be a large share of the jobs of the future. And the thing about justice-based philanthropy is it not only knows to look to the margins to see the future, it listens to the people at the margins for solutions. Domestic workers have been organizing for decades. They have broken out of the isolation and invisibility of working hidden behind closed doors and neighborhoods around the country to come together. We have developed a new vision for rights. Domestic workers' bills of rights that have been passed in nine states since 2010. To not only challenge the generations of exclusion from basic labor laws that have been subjected to this workforce, but to create a pathway to good jobs for the 21st century for this workforce. We've even created a technology-based benefits platform, called Alia, to give domestic workers access to benefits for the very first time. In the margins of our economy, domestic workers have been making a way out of no way.

And this way, powered by justice-based philanthropy, has the potential to solve for the future of work not just for domestic workers, but for all of us. Justice-based philanthropy knows to look everywhere for solutions, including the margins. Especially the margins. In a charity model, I feel generous towards you and so I give. Charity still implies a separation between you and me. A justice model draws a circle around us both, and it creates a "We." "We" who are equally deserving of dignity, opportunity, and fairness. In a justice model, there are no victims or saviors, only survivors and leaders. We are all protagonists in the story—a road map for philanthropy that seeks justice everywhere, including at the margins, and invests in the people and the solutions it finds until the margins disappear.

[applause]

[New gospel of wealth. What does #GenerosityToJustice look like to you? Ford Foundation dot org forward slash new gospel.]

**End of transcript.**