

Remarks of Ai-jen Poo, director of the National Domestic Worker Alliance, at US Department of Labor press briefing on December 15, 2011.

Good afternoon. And on behalf of domestic workers around the country and the millions of families who count on care workers to meet their basic needs, we thank you.

We applaud President Obama, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, and the US Department of Labor for proposing today to extend minimum wage and overtime protections to our vital caregiving workforce.

Care workers go to work in millions of American homes everyday, supporting the aging and people with disabilities to live at home and in their communities.

They make it possible for millions of families to go to work knowing their loved ones are safe and cared for. Caregivers administer medication, check vitals, and bring mobility and dignity to people's lives.

As the domestic workers alliance, we know first hand how much pride care workers take in what they do. Marlene Champion, a caregiver in New York, took care of Dr. Steiner in his home for 6 years, allowing him to be present for family weddings and his grandchildren's bar mitzvahs.. . .

Despite how vital the work is, many work for poverty wages, and without overtime. . . Thelma Reza, a caregiver from Los Angeles, earns a mere \$35 per day for around the clock care for an older couple. She was at the White House as the proposed regulation was announced today, and overcome with emotion, she said - "Today is historic, our work is finally being recognized."

We are part of an initiative called Caring Across Generations, which brings together millions of care workers, employers, people with disabilities, older adults and their families under the simple notion that we should be a nation that takes care of one another, across generations.

We have been talking to families around the country about care – and in all of the stories it's clear -- American families understand that the health, well-being and economic security of this workforce **touches all of us.**

Robin Shaffert, a working mom juggling care for two generations, had to hire caregivers to help her take care of her parents when they became ill. Her mother passed away from breast cancer and her father is currently battling Parkinsons Disease. She said, "I'm not sure what we would have done without care workers. They are essential to the fabric of today's families. And it's clear the quality of care that workers can provide is directly connected to the quality of their jobs."

Sascha Bittner, who has a physical disability, counts on personal assistance every day to get out of bed and prepare for work. This morning at the White House, she said, "We need this change because the proposed regulation will result in less attrition and more reliable, professional care for people with disabilities."

2011 is the first year of the age wave; every 8 seconds someone in America turns 65. That has enormous implications for the care and support services we will need in the future. Care jobs will be defining jobs in the 21st Century. Given where we are heading, it is extremely important that we lift this workforce, and include it in these fundamental protections.

Care workers can't wait, families can't wait; America wants to be a nation where all workers can take pride in the work they do, where hard work is valued, and we take care of one another across generations.

Thank you to Secretary Solis for your leadership in supporting the dignity of all workers and for helping to bring the workforce into the 21st Century.