



2026 GLOBAL CONFERENCE

LEADING IN A NEW ERA



PART 1: CHARTING NEW PATHWAYS TO CAPITAL – CAPITAL ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Rachel Reilly 00:57

Hi, everyone. How's it going? Thank you, front row. Appreciate it. Well, welcome everyone to this session. I am Rachel Reilly. I'm our senior director at the Milken Institute. I lead our Pathways to Capital program and I am joined today by the trailblazing senator from Maryland, Senator Angela Alsobrooks, as well as actress, author, comedian, and founder of Diaspora Groceries, Tiffany Haddish.

Tiffany Haddish 01:29

Yes, thank you. You missed a few credits, but okay, I get it. Please keep going. We don't got a lot of time.

Rachel Reilly 01:38

This is a short session. So today, we really want to talk about the American Dream and, right now, what upward mobility looks like in an era of shifting economic realities. Oftentimes, when we hear the concepts of the American Dream, economic mobility, and shared prosperity, they seem really lofty, right? They're impersonal. They're conversations meant for the history books—these grand concepts that aren't necessarily meant for kitchen tables. They seem distant. They seem like they are for everyone, but no one at the same time. And so, the truth of the matter is that it couldn't be further from the truth. When we think about the American Dream, it is the most personal concept, absolutely. And so, the American Dream, when you strip the jargon away, is really about the life you're able to build for yourself, and for your family,

and for your community. It's the opportunity that you're able to provide for your children. It is the mark you leave in your community. It is the quality of your day-to-day life, and it's also the legacy you leave behind for others to follow. It's truly about pursuing your Dream. And so, I guess I'm going to kick it over to Tiffany here. Many say that you are the embodiment of the American Dream.

Tiffany Haddish 02:53

For real?

Rachel Reilly 02:54

I think so.

Angela Alsobrooks 02:54

You are.

Rachel Reilly 02:56

Yeah, in a great way. And so, what I really admire about you is that you've been able to leverage your success to ensure that others have the opportunity to pursue the American Dream themselves. So, can you talk a little bit more about the work you do there?

Tiffany Haddish 03:10

Yeah. So, I started several foundations, the She Ready Foundation, which works with foster youth, and I started Diaspora Grocery Cares, which works in the food industry. I've been collecting BIPOC businesses, food brands, and farmers to create generational wealth. That's kind of what this country was built off of, right? Built off this land, built off of what we can grow, what we create, and I want to get back to that. I want to create generational wealth in my communities. So, I've been actively—I make money. I'm a movie star. I don't know if you know this, but I'm famous. And I still live in South Central LA, right off of Crenshaw and King, and I invest my money in my community. So, I'm building a grocery store, and I want to create opportunities for people. Also in my production company, we tell stories, and I create jobs. I make sure there's people that look like me on that set. I make sure that there's other foster youth. I grew up in foster care, so I work with foster youth, and I want to give them an opportunity and allow them to feel like they mean something. Because I know what it feels like to feel like you don't mean anything, to feel like garbage. But you get that one person or that group of people that are like, "Hey, I see you. I

believe in you," and then it's like, boom, you can go, right? So, I just put my money where my mouth is. I talk about it, and I be about it.

Rachel Reilly 04:39

I love that. That's awesome. So, Senator, for many Marylanders, the cost of childcare and transportation can really be a barrier to job access and being able to secure jobs over time. So how can the federal government be better addressing some of these hidden barriers that prevent families from moving up the economic ladder? Well, first of all I am not sure whether we can all hear the senator.

Tiffany Haddish 05:08

You know I used to do sound. You want me to do this? I've had like 1,500 jobs. Before I was a movie star, I was a sound assistant—a boom operator.

Angela Alsobrooks 05:19

Listen, I love my sister. This is why she is so super bad. You see she's helping even here. Well, you started out by talking about the American Dream, Rachel, and I'm the product of the American Dream. I think about my grandmother, whose name was Sarah Daisy, who was a housekeeper, cleaned hotel rooms around Washington, DC. She raised my father, his two siblings, and one other family member in a one-bedroom apartment, but it was her great dream to work in the federal government. Now, back then, you had to take a civil service exam. Some may remember that we had to take a typing test, and it was the case that my grandmother could not afford a typewriter and didn't know how to type. So, my father told me that she went into the kitchen of the family's apartment, put a white piece of paper on the refrigerator, drew a keyboard on that refrigerator, and stood each evening in front of it until she taught herself the keystrokes to pass her exam. Well, she did in fact pass her exam. She got herself a job in the federal government. And everything that we must do right now inside of government, and combined with the private sector, should be to create opportunities for people like Sarah Daisy. How do we do that? We do it in the way that it was done for me.

My parents sacrificed everything they had, literally, for me to have an education, to be able to be in all of these spaces. And so now in the Senate, I am keenly focused on growing economic opportunity. I feel that it really is the number one—it should be on the minds of every person in our bodies to create wealth. We have been talking too long about how to get by. "Oh, we want you living on the margins. We want to create a middle class." But I am here to say that we need even more than that. Creating wealth, generational wealth, has to be on the tongue and on the agenda of every person, which is why I've been in these rooms on the banking committee, working to expand opportunity and this whole digital revolution that we have going on. We must not be left behind, but I think key to that is the word 'wealth.' What do we do to create more opportunities? And that includes childcare, transportation, homeownership. All of these are ways that we create wealth, and it has to be at the top of all of our agendas.

Rachel Reilly 07:24

Yeah, so wealth, ownership, opportunity. A question to you both: As we're thinking about the American Dream for a young person today, what is the one thing that each of you would want them to know about those concepts, about wealth, ownership?

Tiffany Haddish 07:40

I would want them to do whatever it takes to understand money. Financial literacy, I think, is so important. If you're going to create any kind of generational wealth, having at least a basic understanding of money and how to invest it, how to save it, how to grow it, how it changes in rates and all that stuff every year, those things are so important. And then I would tell them also to understand how to make at least three basic meals. I feel like once I understood how food worked and how money worked, I became a happier and more productive human being. I might not have been the richest, but I knew I would never be homeless again, right? So, understanding how money works is so important. I think that money confusion and all of that is what causes mental illness, stress, low self-esteem, depression—all of that—because they don't understand it. And it's like, "Why does it keep going away?" Because you didn't take the time to research it, and y'all not trying to teach that in schools. Ain't nobody like, "Okay, here's financial literacy 101." It's just math, calculus, all this. No, teach me how to count money and make money grow. That's where I'm at in my mind.

Rachel Reilly 08:45

Just a real quick follow-up question on that, because financial literacy is something that you're working on with your foundation, right? In Diaspora Groceries. So, what do you think, is there a mental hurdle? Is there a lack of access to knowledge? What is the issue around financial literacy where more folks aren't up to speed where they need to be?

Tiffany Haddish 09:03

Well, I think it's about—for me, for a long time, I think I was financially illiterate because I was surrounded by other people that were financially illiterate, right? And so, I was doing what was around me. I thought that's what was normal. And not until I started literally hanging out in the comedy club, telling jokes, and then listening to these guys talk about investments they were making, talk about, "Oh, I'm going to open up this type of account," and "Well, no, that interest rate over there"—I'm like, "Wait, what are you guys talking about?" Because it was about association for me. And then it started opening my mind up, especially—I don't know, you sleeping in a Geo Metro for a few nights, you're going to start talking to people about, "How do I make my money grow? I got \$45. How do I make this grow?" Right? So, I started having conversations. I was kind of desperate though, right? But if you're comfortable in mediocrity, then you will kind of sit there and be in that. But if you start teaching the kids—and I think that's so important—to teach them, even just the basics of opening up a bank account and why it's important to have one.

Rachel Reilly 10:09

Yep. I also hear that people are afraid to make the wrong choice. As soon as they have money, all of a sudden there's a mental barrier around, "Well, I can't invest here because I might make the wrong choice, and for the first time I have money and I'm going to lose it because I made the wrong choice."

Tiffany Haddish 10:22

Yeah, but if people learn that money is kind of like water—it flows, right? It goes. Sometimes it dries up. Sometimes you got a whole lot of it. Sometimes you're drowning in money. I feel like I am, but I'm like, "All the money is all around me." What do I do? Especially here at this event, I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to learn so much today." But if you teach them that it's not scarcity—it's going to be plenty—people be operating out of that, "Money is the root of all evil," or "Money is so bad." It depend on who got the money, how bad it is.

Rachel Reilly 10:59

Sometimes it's about opening up access to capital, like pathways to capital through venues that they recognize, right? But I would love to hear more from you about what you think. What would you tell a young person? Not that you have a 20-year-old daughter, right?

Angela Alsobrooks 11:15

I do. You know what? I think I'll say what she told me. How about that? I'll tell you some advice that my daughter gave to me, and I agree with everything Tiffany said about teaching our kids about the value of money, teaching them to protect their bodies. But I can also think about what my daughter taught me about going into the Senate, for example. And this will go into the scarcity mentality—I'm going to talk about that in a second. But she gave me great advice on my first day heading to orientation. She called me, and she said, "You have been used to operating around people who largely see the world the way that you do." And she said, "And you are preparing to go to a place now where they don't all see it the same." And she said, "This is going to be good for you." And then she went on to say, "You're really lucky because you get to hear why they don't see it the same way." And then she said, "My advice to you is to go down there and take up some space. Find yourself at tables with people who don't see the world the way that you do, and see whether you can come up with some solutions." The whole idea around scarcity—this is something Tiffany mentioned a moment ago—part of what we ought to teach our kids, or we have to have them unlearn what America has taught them. And that is that they are—how you see something depends on where you sit. But I think it's going to be really important to develop the concept of neighbor again in our country. In other words, there was a person who spoke at the March on Washington before Dr. King—Rabbi Prince—who said that we were created as each other's neighbors. But neighbor is not a geographic term, it's a moral term. The idea that in order to be successful means we have to tear each other down is, first of all, false, and it, I believe, impedes our progress as a country. We're going to be successful as a

country when everyone is successful—when we start to recognize that your success and my success, together, means that we will continue to be increasingly a successful country. That's the reason that these roads to prosperity can't be cut off. It means that we have to find a way for everyone to participate—those who have decided to go to college, those who didn't decide to go to college. But that's what this whole digital revolution provides for us, is a way to create this on-ramp for people who have not participated before now. The systems that have kept us locked out—whether it's financial systems, educational systems, the healthcare system, whatever it is—the truth is that as neighbors, when we begin to see each other more as neighbors, our country is going to flourish in ways that we have never anticipated before. But it means not living on the margins. Again, everyone wants what you want—to have wealth and prosperity in their families, and for each generation to do better than the one before it.

Rachel Reilly 13:51

That's awesome. And Tiffany, you're investing in your community, you're investing in your neighbors, right? Through Diaspora Groceries. You're investing in grocery stores and local brands, and that creates job creation and, again, financial literacy. So, what is the potential for a grocery store? Because a lot of people think, "I'm going to go to the grocery store," right? In and out, sort of like a task or an errand that they have to do. But what is the potential for a grocery store to become not just a place to buy food, but also an engine for local wealth creation and education?

Tiffany Haddish 14:40

Well, in my mind, my grocery store is going to be the best grocery store in all the United States of America, okay? Because it's going to be an actual grocery store. You will get to grow. Not only will you get foods that have healthy options, but they'll be healthy options that are locally grown. They'll come from farmers. So many farmers don't get the subsidies they're supposed to get from the government—we'll talk about that later—because I've done the research. And to be able to put their food on the shelves. Also, there's local growers all around. I live in South Central. There's local growers in South Central LA. I do food swaps with my neighbors and all that. I grow food too. I got honey on deck—Haddish Honey, best honey in the hood. Anyway, my grocery store will have financial literacy classes and cooking classes. So, there'll be classrooms there where you can also come together as a community and learn. I want people to learn. Also, in cooking classes it'll be fun—like the mommy and me class, the daddy and me class. We might have a baby shower cooking class, stuff like that. It'll be good. But the community will—I feel like for me, I've grown close to people when I've gotten to break bread with them, and when I've learned something with them. And when you learn things together, especially with your neighbors, the community grows and thrives and becomes stronger. And there'll probably be less mental health issues, more happiness, and less need for police having to do brutality stuff. They can just be 'police' police.

Rachel Reilly 16:04

No, it's so important. What you're talking about is like a community hub for people to build those

relationships with their neighbors again, but also get the education they need with financial literacy, learn how to cook a meal. I need to do that too, right? So, it's these issues, these life skills, these opportunities for folks to have these creative collisions, right? And build that community. I think that's wonderful.

Tiffany Haddish 16:25

Yeah, because when you cook a meal, do you remember—did your mom cook for you?

Rachel Reilly 16:30

Is she watching? I—

Tiffany Haddish 16:32

You might not have liked her cooking, but do you remember those days she cooked? Or your grandma?

Rachel Reilly 16:36

Sometimes. She was a working mom, so, you know, we're all struggling.

Tiffany Haddish 16:39

Okay. But from my experience, I remember my grandma cooking meals. And my grandma was a working grandma, right? But those days that she cooked meals, the whole family would come together, and neighbors would come over, and kids would come over. And that brought us closer together. And I think we have this now, with the two-parent household, everybody has to work, and now the kid is by themselves or they're eating fast food. So, their physical health is getting challenged, their emotional health is getting challenged. "Do I have a support system? Do they love me? They just give me money and go away." So, if the family could just have a dinner together once a week, but sometimes a lot of these people—I notice are my age—don't know how to cook a meal. They only know how to make noodles. Like, come on, girl, you got to know how to put some sauce on them noodles. But that will bring the family closer together. The family unit is broke down so bad, I think, these days. And I think food will bring it together.

Rachel Reilly 17:49

Yeah, I love that.

Angela Alsobrooks 17:50

I think it will, but you know what? I think it's fair also to admit that it's not affordable. For so many people now, when we talk about the cost of groceries, it has now become the case that we have an affordability crisis happening right here in our country. It's the truth. It's not something that's theoretical. It's real—that people cannot afford, for the most part, the cost of groceries. We know when we talk about childcare—I have recently proposed, through an amendment, that we should cap the cost of childcare at 7% of your income. That's what all of our federal studies tell us is affordable because the cost of childcare is not affordable either. We think about just how hard it is to make it now, which is why we're going to have to make sure that we are addressing all of these issues. And this is something our country can afford. As it turns out, it can afford it. If we can afford—I'll just say it this one time—close to \$2 billion per day for war, we can afford childcare. We can afford to help families have childcare and afford the cost of groceries, utilities, energy. These are all real issues that really do keep people from the prosperity that we know is possible for more and more families.

Rachel Reilly 18:39

Yeah. So, you just named a number of really, really important issues. So, are you seeing any promising pathways towards the middle class? Are there things that are working? I just feel like everything's kind of shifting beneath our feet so frequently. So are you seeing any promising new policies? And what pathways are no longer viable and need to be disrupted?

Angela Alsobrooks 19:00

I am seeing—well, first of all, there are a lot of pathways that need to be disrupted. The thing is, the American public, I think, have told us now that the systems we've had in place for a very long time have left too many people behind. And this is not something we're imagining. I think when you talk about what's working, I'm on the banking, housing, and urban affairs committee, where we passed out of our committee and out of the Senate, for the first time in a generation, a housing package called Road to Housing. This is critically important. I think about my parents, who married at 21 and 22. My dad was a car salesman, mom was a receptionist, and within five years of marriage, they could afford a modest home. The age of a first-time home buyer in our country right now is closer to 40 years old. And so we need now—the Road to Housing does a few important things. It creates an opportunity to increase the supply of housing. It also creates pathways for people to be able to afford to buy those houses. It does things like work against appraisal bias. So, that's hope. And we did that in a bipartisan way. Can you believe that Tim Scott and Elizabeth Warren got together and passed this out in a unanimous way? So, it is possible. You've mentioned also, I think, about the GENIUS Act—that we have regulated, for the first time in our country,

digital assets. I think this is going to be important for business owners, who now have—we now create a pathway for people to have more quickly and cheaper payments for their businesses. I'm now at the market structure table for clarity. I think this is going to be really important, again, to regulate, for the first time, digital assets in our country, which I think is going to create additional opportunities for businesses. So, some things are working now. I think there's a lot that we have to work—the cost of education in this country is sinful. It is, and it ought to be addressed, but I think we are making some movement.

Rachel Reilly 20:52

Yeah. And one of the big initiatives that my team works on at the Milken Institute is called the Initiative for Inclusive Entrepreneurship. It's all about ensuring that small businesses and entrepreneurs that have historically been overlooked have access to the capital and the education they need to grow and thrive. And so, I know you also mentioned a number of different pieces of legislation—

Angela Alsobrooks 21:11

Tim Scott and I have a bill—to fund hairstylists and barbers—to get them tax credits. So those are the kinds of pieces of legislation I'm working on. And again, to my daughter's point, you got to go some places sometimes with people who may not agree with you on eight issues, but the two they do agree on, let's make something happen for other.

Rachel Reilly 21:30

Absolutely. Tiffany, it says in my notes here, and we've seen it today, that you bring humor into conversations about money and opportunity. What have you actually found works to help people feel less intimidated and more empowered when it comes to talking about their money and their future?

Tiffany Haddish 21:50

Well, definitely a smile helps a lot when not intimidating someone. But being willing to listen to them and letting them know that there's no dumb questions. And ask whatever and be willing to share. I know when I talk to my foster youth, if they ask me a question like, "How do you get this and this?" I tell them how I did it. And I let them know, "This is where I made some mistakes, and here are some better ways to go about it." But yeah, just being willing to share and be kind, which can be hard on some days. Some days you be tired I get it. And being able to say, "Hey, I'm tired today. Today might not be the day to ask me, but I know somebody else you could talk to." Being willing to share information I think is a great way. But also humor helps with everything. My best teachers made me laugh. And I remember everything they taught me.

Rachel Reilly 22:47

Yeah. Absolutely.

Tiffany Haddish 22:48

Wait till you see my financial literacy class coming to one of these streaming networks soon. It'll be hilarious. They're going to be like, "Oh, I didn't even know that."

Rachel Reilly 22:58

I'm excited to see that. Which streamer is it coming to?

Tiffany Haddish 23:00

I'm not telling you.

Rachel Reilly 23:01

Okay. Well, I need to buy my subscription so I can watch it.

Tiffany Haddish 23:06

Well, girl, don't worry. I got your number.

Rachel Reilly 23:08

Okay.

Tiffany Haddish 23:09

I'll make sure you—

Rachel Reilly 23:10

Okay. So last question, and you mentioned when you're talking to the kids going through the foster system. When you guys are out talking with people in the community, your constituents, your neighbors, what are you hearing right now is the number one thing that is making it hard for them to get ahead?

Tiffany Haddish 23:25

Hard for them to get a home?

Rachel Reilly 23:26

Get ahead.

Tiffany Haddish 23:27

Oh, get ahead? Yeah. Gas prices. The food is too expensive. That's why I want a co-op situation. But yeah, the food is too expensive and the gas prices. And they don't have nobody to help them fix anything anymore.

Rachel Reilly 23:41

Yeah.

Angela Alsobrooks 23:43

Yeah. It's the cost of living. In so many areas, it is also the cost of healthcare, which by the way, is the number one issue for most families when they consider the cost of living. It is the cost of healthcare that now, unfortunately, meant that millions of people have lost their healthcare. But the grocery, the things that we feel—I go to the grocery store, \$9 grapes, \$12 grapes. It is the cost of gas, utilities. It's all of those. Just the cost of getting by each day—is what I'm hearing. And I hear from young people that they don't feel that they can live as well as their parents. So these are the issues that we continue to work on together. I think we don't want people to lose hope. I think we're going to have to speak hope into people and to tell them that something better is coming. I think that's going to be really important. And maybe I should learn how to do it with some humor, like my sister here—

Tiffany Haddish 24:31

Yeah.

Angela Alsobrooks 24:32

—Who I think does it in a way that keeps us joyful.

Tiffany Haddish 24:33

You can check somebody and make them laugh at the same time. I'm going to teach you. It'll be real good up in that Congress, girl, I tell you.

Angela Alsobrooks 24:40

Yes, it will. So, I'm optimistic. And thank you so much, Rachel. And Tiffany, oh my god, I'm so grateful for what you have done as well. I think the best is still coming. That's the reason we show up at these conferences. And by the way, anyone here who has any ideas for me, I come here to listen. You have a better way of doing it, some ways that we can cut red tape, we can create economic opportunity, I'm all ears. We really want to see some things happen, so thank you.

Rachel Reilly 25:04

All right. Well, we got some ideas coming your way.

Angela Alsobrooks 25:05

Thank you.

Rachel Reilly 25:06

That's great. Thank you. Awesome. Everyone, please join me in thanking Tiffany Haddish and Senator Angela Alsobrooks.

Disclaimer: This transcript was reviewed by individuals for accuracy and serves as a reference. However, it may still contain errors or omissions. Please verify any critical information independently.