

Poverty & policy: A woman lawmaker's perspective

Featuring Pilar Schiavo



IN THIS EPISODE

This time on **Code WACK!** Longtime nurse advocate, single mother, and now California **Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo** was the only Democrat to unseat a Republican incumbent in the California assembly last November.

What inspired her to get into politics? What are her priorities when it comes to health care, homelessness, and housing?

We're highlighting Schiavo's impressive story today in honor of **Women's History Month**. Find out what she thinks would be a major game-changer in the fight against poverty. This is the first of a two-part series with the assemblywoman.

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

What drove you to work on improving your community?

"I really wanted to help at-risk youth and kids. And so I felt like if I really wanted to help kids, I needed to change the economics of their family. And growing up in a working class family that had struggled when I was younger and knowing how stressful that is, it really resonated with me.

"And so I found my way to the labor movement and that's where I worked for 20 years and ... my work in the labor movement was a lot of political organizing, fighting for legislation for health care, for equal pay, for living wages, fighting for contracts that guaranteed retirement security and healthcare benefits.

"... I saw in my own family, my dad finally got a union job when I was in college and it made a huge difference in our family, and ... for the first time we had comprehensive healthcare benefits." – **Pilar Schiavo**

Why focus on health care, housing and homelessness?

"So health care became a big issue for me, obviously because of my work with ... California Nurses Association, where I really learned so much about how broken our healthcare system is, that medical bankruptcy is the number one cause of bankruptcy and what kind of profound impact it has on people.

"When I was, you know, working on my campaign, I talked to ... folks who are paying more for health insurance than they are for their mortgage. And you

know, it's just insane how unaffordable health care is and everybody needs it...

And, you know, housing and homelessness really became a huge issue because like everyone else, I really saw our increase in homelessness and just how heartbreaking it is to see people struggling really at the, you know, the most extreme form of poverty is when you have to live on the street. –

Pilar Schiavo

From your perspective as an elected lawmaker, what's the biggest challenge to substantive healthcare reform?

“There's a few things ... One of them is obviously the very deep pockets of insurance and pharma, and they're not afraid to pull millions of dollars out of those pockets and use it often against politicians. It was certainly used against me and my race...we have a really broken political system, unfortunately, when it comes to campaign finance.

“ And so I know a lot of people focus on, you know, how much insurance or pharma is donating to politicians, but really I think the thing that gets in the way is how much are they going to spend against you in your campaign, because that is unlimited.

“It's not just limited to a \$5,500 campaign donation. They can spend half a million dollars, a million dollars against you in a campaign.” – ***Pilar Schiavo***

Helpful Links

[Women's History Month](#), *Women's History Month.gov*

[Women in State Legislatures, 2023](#), Rutgers: Eagleton Institute of Politics

[California Legislative Women's Caucus](#), *California State Legislature*

[Event celebrates historic number of women serving in California legislature](#), *CBS Sacramento*

[Homelessness & Health: What's the Connection?](#), *National Health Care for the Homeless Council*

[Study finds unions reduce risk of poverty](#), *American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees*

[How Medicare for All Could Help End Homelessness](#), *Code WACK! Podcast with Amy Turk, CEO of Downtown Women's Center*

Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

Biography: Pilar Schiavo

Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo was elected to the California State Assembly in November of 2022 to represent the 40th Assembly District, representing the Northwest San Fernando Valley and the Santa Clarita Valley.

Upon her election, she was appointed as **Assistant Majority Whip** by Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon.

Prior to her election, Assemblywoman Schiavo was a Small Business Owner and Nurse Advocate who worked in the labor movement for more than 20 years on issues that deeply impact people's lives, including expanding healthcare access and affordability, winning real solutions to homelessness, advocating for housing people can afford, and delivering on good jobs that allow families to thrive.

Throughout her career, Assemblywoman Schiavo helped deliver healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, to more than one million people.

In the Northwest San Fernando Valley, she co-founded an organization that helped secure housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness, has delivered more than 50,000 meals to people in need, and increased resources to help keep our communities safe.

Assemblywoman Schiavo is the daughter of small business owners. Her father was a logger who became an electrician after two battles with cancer after exposure to Agent Orange while serving in the military, and her mom was a bookkeeper and managed the family electrical business. When her dad got a union job, she saw the life-changing impacts it had on her family – it is that formative experience, along with her desire to help children and families, that led her to the labor movement where she fought to lift up families just like hers.

Assemblywoman Schiavo lives in Chatsworth with her daughter Sofia where they love to hike in the Santa Susana Mountains. She has been involved in the PTA of her daughter's neighborhood public school. Her stepdaughter Germany graduated from Granada Hills Charter High School and is now a senior in college studying business administration.

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