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## [Congressman Jim Moran's News Commentary](#)

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By [James Moran](#)

Falls Church and the entire 8th Congressional District of Virginia, which I've been proud to represent since 1990, was recently ranked the 2nd best district to live in out of all 436 congressional districts nationwide. According to the American Human Development Report, published by Columbia University Press and the Social Science Research Council, Northern Virginia's 8th has the longest life expectancy in the U.S. (82.9 years), the 3rd highest median income, and the 3rd most educated populace.

This new biannual publication differs from traditional economic models for measuring well-being such as GDP or consumer spending. Instead, it emphasizes the broader, everyday experience of ordinary people. The report

creates what is called the American Human Development Index—a single measure of well-being for all Americans, disaggregated by state and congressional district, as well as by gender, race, and ethnicity. The three core areas emphasized in the index include: 1) living a long and healthy life 2) having access to knowledge and 3) enjoying a decent standard of living. All data is procured from U.S. government sources.

It wasn't shocking that Virginia's 8th District would fare well in the index, outpacing the national index average of 5.06 by over three points. We have a highly educated, well-informed population that feeds our strong economy, which in turn, produces quality, high paying technology and government-based jobs.

What was disturbing about the report was the way it laid bare the great disparity between the haves and have-nots in America. Today, the greatest income gap between the top 1 percent of households and the bottom 90 percent exists since the Great Depression. 47 million Americans continue to go without health insurance everyday.

To see just how these figures play out, compare one of the lowest ranking districts in the country, Kentucky's 5th Congressional District, to our own. The average Kentuckian in that mountainous part of the state can expect to live 10 years less than a Northern Virginian. Their median income is \$26,000 less (\$46,000 median in NoVa) and only 11.5 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 58 percent in Virginia's 8th.

But you don't even have to leave the state to find a district whose well-being is so far below that of Northern Virginia. The Commonwealth ranks among the top six states for having the greatest economic, health and educational disparities between their highest and lowest ranking congressional districts—the highest being the 8th and lowest Virginia's 9th, located in far Southwestern reaches of the state (also bordering Kentucky's 5th).

As the old saying goes, "We are only as strong as our weakest link." This report is yet another wake-up call to America that our domestic strengths: ensuring everyone has access to a good education, is afforded quality healthcare and can obtain a job that is both meaningful and provides a decent standard of living are receding. Closing the gaps brought to life in this report should be a national priority. The billions we are sending overseas each day to Iraq for war and to oil producing nations for our energy would go a long way towards bringing new job, health and educational opportunities to the long-neglected regions of our country.

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