



Moving Beyond Gratitude: Opportunities to Improve Essential Work

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

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Description

Among the many unexpected lessons of 2020 was a recognition of the importance of essential workers. We saw how much we rely on the people who work in our food systems, who care for our children and our loved ones, who deliver packages, and who keep our public spaces clean. We learned to say thank you to so many of them, and in this season of thanks, we reflect on how we can do more than say thank you by improving the quality of essential jobs. As the year draws to a close, we discuss the important role of essential workers in our economy and society and a variety of approaches for improving essential work.

Speakers

Angelina Del Rio Drake

Chief Operating Officer, PHI; Job Quality Fellow, The Aspen Institute; Former Home Care Worker

Angelina Del Rio Drake is the chief operating officer at PHI, a national nonprofit dedicated to improving job quality for direct care workers and quality of care for those they serve. Drawing from her own experience as a home care worker, Angelina has launched several projects to improve job quality in long-term care and provided technical assistance to upskilling, advanced role, and care integration demonstrations across the country. In 2020, Angelina started The Direct Care Worker Story Project to raise the visibility of the direct care workforce by collecting images and interviews from home care, nursing home, and residential care aides across the United States. She authored "Direct Care Work Is Real Work: Elevating the Role of the Direct Care Worker" as part of PHI's "Caring for the Future" policy report series, and her writing on care has been published by *Health Affairs*, the American Society on Aging, and *The Hill*. In 2018, Angelina was named a Job Quality Fellow at the Aspen Institute.

Angelina has held various titles since joining PHI in 2011, including chief of staff and director of development. Prior to PHI, she led grant writing projects to secure public funding for health services technology. Angelina's creative writing has been featured in national memoir, food, and arts publications. She completed the Developing Leaders Program for Nonprofit Professionals at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business and holds a Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Science and Bachelor of Arts in Health Studies from the University of Toronto.

Terrill Haigler/Ya Fav Trash Man

Philadelphia Sanitation Worker

As a sanitation worker, Philly community servant Terrill Haigler—a.k.a. “Ya Fav Trashman”—has experienced what happens when we forget to support those who take care of our communities. Now, it has become his mission to bring back a collective sense of accountability for what happens in our neighborhoods. While the pandemic revealed our vulnerabilities, some of these issues we’re facing already existed. Ya Fav Trashman is here to bring attention to the work that maintains life around our homes. As long as we are around, you know that someone is there to push you, your neighbors and community further into a future we can all take pride in. As we know, when it comes to finding a sustainable way of keeping our communities safe, it takes all of us.

Linda Nguyen

Chief of Staff, UFCW 770 @UFCW770; Job Quality Fellow, The Aspen Institute

Linda Nguyen is chief of staff at UFCW 770, which represents over 30,000 frontline workers in grocery, meatpacking, retail pharmacy, healthcare, and other industries. Since the beginning of the pandemic, she has been working with the UFCW leadership team, staff, and worker leaders to demand and win essential worker rights and COVID-19 protections. She has over a decade of experience building and leading local and national teams that drive campaigns to improve the lives of working-class people, advocating for economic, social, racial and environmental justice through policy advocacy, coalition building, and strategic communications. Prior to joining UFCW 770, Linda cofounded Jobs to Move America and was the driving force behind the expansion of the organization's work nationally to Chicago and New York. Her work led to the passing of good jobs policies on over \$5.9 billion of public projects and the creation of thousands of new union manufacturing jobs and pipelines for low-income communities of color. She is an Aspen Institute Job Quality Fellow and holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of California, Irvine. She lives in Los Angeles with her partner, their son, and pup.

Zeynep Ton

Professor of the Practice, MIT Sloan School of Management

Zeynep Ton is a professor of the practice at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

Zeynep's research focuses on how organizations can design and manage their operations in a way that satisfies employees, customers, and investors simultaneously. Her work has been published in a variety of journals, including *Organization Science*, *Production and Operations Management*, and the *Harvard Business Review*.

In 2014, Zeynep published her findings in a book, *The Good Jobs Strategy: How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits*. The book draws on 15 years of research to show that the key to offering good jobs to employees, great service to customers, and superior returns to investors is combining investment in employees with specific operational choices that increase employees' productivity, contribution, and motivation.

After her book was released, company executives started reaching out to Zeynep to understand how to implement the Good Jobs Strategy in their organizations, or to describe how they were already

adopting the strategy. Zeynep cofounded the nonprofit Good Jobs Institute to help them transform through assessments, workshops, and longer term partnerships.

Prior to MIT Sloan, Zeynep spent seven years at Harvard Business School. She has received several awards for teaching excellence, both at Harvard Business School and MIT Sloan.

Zeynep lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband and four children. A native of Turkey, she first came to the US on a volleyball scholarship from the Pennsylvania State University. She received her Bachelor of Science in Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering there and her Doctor of Business Administration from Harvard Business School.

Moderator

E.J. Dionne

Columnist, *The Washington Post*; Member, EOP Advisory Council

E.J. Dionne Jr. is a university professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University, a visiting professor at Harvard University, a syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Dionne, a regular political commentator on television and radio, received his DPhil from the University of Oxford in sociology in 1982. He is the author of eight books, including the National Book Award nominee, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, and two *New York Times* bestsellers, *Why the Right Went Wrong: Conservatism—From Goldwater to Trump and Beyond* and *One Nation After Trump: A Guide for the Perplexed, the Disillusioned, the Desperate, and the Not-Yet Deported*, coauthored with Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann. His most recent is *Code Red: How Progressives and Moderates Can Unite to Save Our Country*, published in 2020 by St. Martin's Press.

About

The Economic Opportunities Program's Opportunity in America discussion series has moved to an all-virtual format as we all do what we can to slow the spread of COVID-19. But the conversations about the changing landscape of economic opportunity in the US and implications for individuals, families, and communities across the country remain vitally important. We hope you will participate as we bring our discussions to you in virtual formats, and we look forward to your feedback.

We are grateful to the Ford Foundation, Prudential Financial, Walmart.org, the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, and the Surdna Foundation for their support of this series. Learn more at as.pn/opportunityinamerica.

The Economic Opportunities Program (as.pn/eop) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. Follow us on social media (as.pn/eopsocial) and join our mailing list (as.pn/eopmail) to stay up-to-date on publications, blog posts, events, and other announcements.

Transcript

Maureen Conway (00:00:00)

Good afternoon. I'm Maureen Conway, a vice president at the Aspen Institute, and executive director of the Institute's Economic Opportunities Program. It's my pleasure to welcome you to today's conversation, Moving Beyond Gratitude: Opportunities to Improve Essential Work.

This conversation is part of the Economic Opportunities Program ongoing Opportunity in America discussion series, in which we explore the changing landscape of economic opportunity in the United States, the implications for individuals, families, and communities across the country, and ideas for change. I want to thank Prudential Financial, the Walmart Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of our Opportunity in America discussion series.

And I am super excited for today's conversation. As we approach the end of 2020, and reflect on the year, one of the lessons we've learned in 2020 is how much we rely on a wide range of frontline workers who make our lives possible. We've come to appreciate the grocery store workers, and the frontline health workers, the sanitation workers, and the delivery drivers. The food processing workers, and so many more. These workers, who became known as essential workers, even won Time magazine's reader poll for the Person of the Year. But the truth is that these workers are not just the person of the year for 2020, but they have been the person of the year for every year.

They have long been the workers who make our lives possible, and I'm so delighted today to have people on the panel who really understand that. Who understand how long we've been undervaluing and under appreciating the work that essential workers do, and who have been innovating and advocating and demonstrating a variety of approaches that can improve the jobs and lives of these workers. So I am excited for them all to share their ideas today about how we can, and why we must, do more than just thank essential workers.

But first, before we begin, a quick review of our technology. All attendees are muted, we welcome your questions. Please use the chat function today for questions and comments. We're thrilled with the participation in today's event, and thank you to the many of you who submitted questions in advance, we'll try to bring in as many of your questions as we can, so please do continue to send us questions.

We also encourage you to tweet about this conversation. Our hashtag is #talkopportunity. If you have any technical issues during this webinar, you can chat with the Economic Opportunities Program, or email us at eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. This webinar is being recorded, and will be shared via email and posted on our website. This webinar also includes closed captions if you'd like to use that option.

And now, let me briefly introduce our panelists. There is bio information on our website so I encourage you to take a look at that, but I won't go into detail now, just take my word for it, it's an amazing group. So with us today, we have Angelina Del Rio Drake, Chief Operating Officer at PHI. Angelina's also a job quality fellow with the Aspen Institute, and a former home care worker.

Terrill Haigler, ya fav trashman, a Philadelphia sanitation worker. Linda Nguyen is Chief of Staff at UFCW 770, and also a job quality fellow with the Institute, and Zeynep Ton, Professor of Practice at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Our moderator for today's conversation is E.J. Dionne. E.J. is a university professor and syndicated columnist for the Washington Post, as well as a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He's the author of eight books, most recently Code Red: How Progressives and Moderates Can Unite to Save Our Country, let's hope so. And he is a member of the Economic Opportunities

Program Advisor Council, and a very long time friend of our work. So E.J., we're so glad to have you with us to moderate the important conversation today, and now I turn it over to you.

E.J. Dionne (00:04:06)

Well thank you, and thanks to everybody who's joining us today, and I basically try to do anything Maureen asks me, because the work that she and her colleagues over at Aspen are doing is both extraordinary and necessary. So bless you for that, and I asked Maureen to stay on the call... The conversation, because I'm hoping she will join us as well.

I recently wrote a column where a friend of mine I thought perfectly captured in the most succinct possible way, the sense of gratitude we should feel. Those of us who've been able to work in front of a little machines like the ones we are all staring at right now. She said, "I am working from home." And as she pointed out, there are two things embodied in that, it meant she had a job and could do work, and she had a roof over her head.

And it also meant that unlike so many of the essential workers, she could work as I can work, as many of us out there can work, without risking getting COVID, without putting ourselves in the kind of risk so many essential workers are. And I honor what Maureen is doing, and what everybody in this call is doing because the real question... Essential workers who are essentially forgotten workers until we discovered they were essential. And I think one of the questions before our country is whether they will simply be forgotten again after we go through... After they've done for us as a country, both individually and collectively? If we'll just forget about that, when God willing, this scourge passes, or if we will remember them?

One last point before I go to the panel. I was struck when I was talking to Linda of the UFCW that one of my favorite people who unfortunately died young some years ago was a vice president of the United Food and Commercial Workers called Beth Shulman. Who wrote a book called The Betrayal of Work.

The book was published 17 years ago, and it struck me that there is something wrong that we are still struggling with the issues that Beth put before us in her great book. She noted that the... The essentially mistreatment of, as she counted them at the time, "30 million underpaid American workers, denies them the essentials of a decent life," I'm quoting her now, "subjects their children to such deprivations that they have little chance of success. It hurts our economy, it hurts our democracy, and it hurts our health as a nation, if we ignore those who are working hard but getting short-changed, it prevents these American workers from becoming real stakeholders in their communities, and to tolerate this injustice demeans us as a people."

If one good thing might come out of this awful period we've been through in which so many people have suffered, perhaps we cannot make that... Keep making that mistake. So I'd like, I'm going to just start asking each of our panelists to talk about, briefly, just so you get to know them and can know about what kind of questions you might want to ask them, to talk about what they've been up to, and their perspective on this? Angelina Del Rio who has worked with an extraordinary group of... Where are you? There you are, Angelina, of home healthcare workers. Please, why don't you start us off, and thanks for being here today.

Angelina Del Rio Drake (00:07:49)

Sure, thanks E.J. So I'm Angelina Drake, I'm the Chief Operating Officer of PHI, we're a national organization that seeks to improve the quality of jobs held by direct care workers. These are nursing

assistants and nursing homes, but predominantly home care workers, who provide support for older adults and people with disabilities in private homes, as well as residential care settings.

I'm a former home care worker myself, and I think what's been particularly important in my work over the pandemic is to better convey the complexity of direct care work. This is not a simple task, this is not unskilled or low-skilled labor, it's physically demanding, emotionally taxing, even more so under pandemic circumstances, and requires technical and health and behavioral knowledge. And yet the systems that are set up to try and support this work for us do not see it as such.

So we've launched projects at PHI, like the Direct Care Workers Story Project, to provide more authentic photos and interviews of this workforce during this time, so we actually see direct care workers who aren't even visible, in some conversations around essential workers, or so-called "healthcare heroes" right now.

We have also released the five pillars of direct care job qualities, speaking to the nuances of this industry, and how to create quality jobs, and we're also trying to fund and run studies that demonstrate the value of this workforce. They are worth more than their median wage of \$12 an hour, and provide tremendous value for our society, so we need more data to support that. And we're also positioning direct care work as both the present and the future of work.

E.J. Dionne (00:09:24)

Bless you, and I hope by the way, I'm sorry, I forgot your last name here because I put Drake underneath on the second line, so Angela Del Rio Drake. And I hope at some point... We talk a lot about entrepreneurs in our country and I think some of the work you've been involved in, we forget that cooperatives are part of that creative process, and some of the cooperatives, that the folks you've been working with have formed have really created a new... It's an old form in some ways, but it's brought to life and old form in a new way, that's really I think something we should think about more in our economy.

Terrill, "ya fave trash man!" You can follow him on Instagram or on Twitter, and I just did today. He is a Philadelphia sanitation worker, who decided that it would be useful to the citizens of Philadelphia to understand the kind of work he and his colleagues do. So tell us about how you've done this, and what's come out of your work? He has already persuaded one member of our group to give a Christmas present to their sanitation worker. So if nothing else comes out of this discussion, maybe sanitation workers all over America will get Christmas gifts, holiday gifts that they did not expect to get. Please, Terrill, thanks for joining us.

Terrill Haigler (00:10:50)

Yeah, nice to be here, such an honor to be on this panel with such wonderful advocates for their respected industries. Yeah, so my name is Terrill Haigler or "ya fave trash man" and back in June, here in the city of Philadelphia, the pandemic hit us so hard that we had over 250 sanitation workers who had tested positive or were quarantining because of COVID-19. And a couple of news articles came out saying that it was our fault that we had trash delayed.

We were delayed up to four, almost five days. Mountains of trash, on every single block, people couldn't go outside and just sit on their steps, so I decided to actually start the Instagram and give an inside scoop, an inside look to what it is to be a sanitation worker here in Philadelphia. And hopes of shifting the narrative, and shifting the perspective of what people think it is to be a sanitation worker.

Like Angela said, there's a technical aspect, there's an emotional tax, there's a physical tax. I know on my pacer, I average about 40,000 steps a day, on my regular route. So when I started the Instagram I just wanted to use it to try to be a liaison between the public and the sanitation department to bridge a gap, and actually give people something to look at and something to see, so that they could better understand why the trash delays were so bad, why sanitation is essential.

And I think that I'm starting to shift that narrative here in Philadelphia, and I started... The big thing I did was I started a t-shirt campaign, I designed a t-shirt and I raised over \$32,000 in four weeks selling over 2,000 t-shirts to buy PPE and cleaning supplies for the whole department to try to take on COVID head on. And from there, news, Good Morning America, Worldwide News with David Muir, I got on Kelly Clarkson, and I'm just pushing the needle forward for sanitation to be a national issue. It's a national problem across the country that sanitation workers are underpaid, and we are not paid hazardous pay, and it is the most hazardous job in America.

So that's my fight right now, is to get it as a national issue, to get our salaries raised, and to get hazardous pay for every single sanitation worker. And to just keep being an advocate, and educating. Anybody who follows my Instagram on how to put your trash out correctly, how to take care of your sanitation crew, and how to just, as I say, I want the public to help us help them help us. And that's it.

E.J. Dionne (00:13:52)

Thank you, if you could put up in the chat a link where people can get the t-shirts or somebody can?

Terrill Haigler (00:13:57)

Oh, for sure.

E.J. Dionne (00:13:58)

Yeah, unless you've run out of t-shirts?

Terrill Haigler (00:14:01)

No, I am not going to run out.

E.J. Dionne (00:14:02)

By the way, I just think it's... Oh, go ahead?

Terrill Haigler (00:14:05)

No, go ahead, you go.

E.J. Dionne (00:14:08)

Yeah, no I was just going to say, I think it is always worth remembering that Martin Luther King Jr. was shot the day after he spoke to a strike of sanitation workers in Memphis. And it is worth... I revisited this, the speech he gave with a class I teach, and it's still an extraordinary speech to read, and it is still incredibly relevant to our current circumstances. So thank you.

Linda. Linda, like Angelina by the way, is an Aspen Job Quality Fellow. Linda, you're with the UFCW 770, you organize... There you are! You organize among other people, folks who work in supermarkets and elsewhere. Please talk about the kind of work you do and how you got there also, which I think is an interesting story for our audience?

Linda Nguyen (00:15:01)

Yeah, thank you so much E.J., and thank you to the Aspen Institute for the opportunity and to be on this panel with you all today.

So the UFCW Local 770, we represent 31,000 essential workers, predominantly in the food chain. So who are food chain workers? They are low wage workers, predominantly people of color, immigrant and women. And these are communities that we know that bear disproportionate health and economic impacts of COVID, right? These are workers that have inadequate healthcare while working on the frontlines of the third wave, right? So working through the pandemic to keep food on America's tables while these very same workers are struggling to put food on their own tables, to keep a roof over their heads. Grocery, meat-packing food workers are having to make the very difficult decision between paying for rent and buying groceries for themselves, as others in their households have gotten sick or lost jobs, many of our members at the UFCW have become sole bread-winners, and are increasingly reliant upon food banks, and are at elevated risk of becoming unhoused and having to move into homes shared by multiple other families, increasing risk to their own health.

So during this period, when grocery, meat-packing companies are making record profits, have billions of dollars of cash on hand, and are prioritizing billions dividend payouts, instead of providing hazard pay. Instead of providing PPE, and in this moment it requires for grocery workers, and for meat-packing workers. And in some instances, face shields depending on the interaction with the public. These are companies that are also failing to make investments necessary to comply with local and safety mandates. Workers are reporting to us that they feel like their employers are waiting for them to die.

That there are new workers in the wing, waiting to replace them, because employers are waiting for them to get sick and die. So what are we doing? So we are working with our 31,000 members to organize and to run actions up and down Southern California, from Los Angeles to Hearst Castle, that's our jurisdiction and the workers that... The area where we represent workers.

We're fighting really hard to bring light to the issues, to share the stories of our workers and what day to day life looks like, and to fight for policies. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've been fighting for really basic things that I think many of us take for granted, now that are sort of... Have become commonplace. Things like the ability to wear a mask, which we had to fight for. Because there was a fear that shoppers, that interface with grocery workers, would be afraid when they saw masks, and wouldn't want to shop, and would feel unsafe.

We were fighting for things like Plexiglass, for workers to be able to stop every 30 minutes to wash their hands. To have the proper supplies to sanitize their workstation, so this is a little bit of the kind of work that we've been working really hard over the last eight plus months to win, and then to maintain enforcement around.

E.J. Dionne (00:18:01)

Thank you so much. I want to turn to Zeynep, I just want to put two questions in the minds of a couple of our panelists for later. One is already up from the chat, from Lewis McMarran? I hope I've pronounced your name right. And this would be to Angelina, "Would cobots or other assistive tech help home care workers, and should we be looking to home care as a new entry level job with appropriate training and the like?" I just wanted to throw that, have that in your head Angelina as we go forward.

Linda, before we go I really would love you to comment on what OSHA has not been doing... Well, I was going to say, "What OSHA has been doing," but I think in this period it's really, "What OSHA has not been doing?" If you could bring that up at some point.

But I want to go to Zeynep. I don't want to sound like a phony populist or anything, but I did not expect that somebody at MIT Sloane School would be interested in the work of essential workers, so God bless you for that. No knock on the Sloan School I just thought it's a traditional business school, a good one. Talk about your work and how you were drawn to this work?

Zeynep Ton (00:19:18)

Thank you, E.J., and thank you for inviting me, like you I say yes to everything Maureen asks me to do. And I'm delighted to be with Linda, with Terrill, and Angelina here. And MLK Junior's speech, All Labor Has Dignity is one of my favorite speeches too, that I share in my class with students, even at MIT Sloan. And our school has a tradition in the Ivory group especially in... Study labor and work-related issues.

But I have been studying those forgotten workers that you talked about. Especially in the retail space, for almost 20 years. And I'm an operations management professor, so I focus not just on the workers, but on the work that they do, and as Maureen said when she opened the session, what I found in my research is that their work is very important. Not just to the functioning of our economy, but also for the success of companies.

So what I have found in my research is that creating good jobs for the workers in essential... Essential workers, is not just the right thing to do from a society perspective, but is also the smart thing to do from the company's perspective. Because those companies that tend to offer the jobs that we have not heard about. Angelina said \$12 for health aides. Linda talked about the low wages and Terrill as well, when companies offer low wages, very few benefits, under investing their workers, then there are lots of problems in their stores and their operating units. And then when there are operational problems then their sales and their performance suffers, and when their performance suffers, they don't invest in the workers, and there's a vicious cycle that these companies operate in. And what I found in my research is that there's a way out of this vicious cycle.

In fact, there are some companies out there that have always treated these essential workers as essential to win with their customers. Costco is a great example, the average wage of the Costco worker is over \$24 an hour, compared to the median wage of a retail worker, which stands to be around \$12 an hour. So a huge difference, so what do these companies do?

They create an operating system that increases the productivity and motivation and contribution of these workers. So what I found in my research is that offering good jobs for essential workers is a choice. Is a profit-maximizing choice, but so few companies do it. So my mission in life is through my teaching and through my research, help companies thrive by creating good jobs, and through a non-profit that I founded a few years ago called Good Jobs Institute, where we work hand in hand with companies, low wage employers, to help them improve their employee experience and customer experience and performance at the same time.

E.J. Dionne (00:22:09)

Well, would you put up a link to your not-for-profit, if there is one in the chat so that people-

Zeynep Ton (00:22:17)

Yes, yes. We have a website with... We offer lots of tools and resources for free, for example for companies that want to do a pay analysis of their frontline workers, which we encourage every single company to do, we offer them a way to do pay analysis to see what percentage of their workers are making a living wage.

We help them quantify the costs of mediocrity. So if you're offering bad jobs, how much are you losing in employee turnover, in shrink, in lots of other things? So we create lots of tools and resources, and it's goodjobsinstitute.org is where you can find us.

E.J. Dionne (00:22:51)

... Thank you. I want to go to Angelina in a second, let me... Because there are a couple other questions that have come up in the chat, you might take a look, Angelina, on your local government subsidizing home care workers' wages and the other question I posed. Take a look at those, I'll come back to you.

I wanted to go Terrill. Have you noticed a change in people's attitudes in this period, and do you think that change will have any long term effect? What kind of sense do you get from the work you've been doing about whether this period actually will change us, if there's a chance we'll remember two years from now some of the things that a lot of people are saying now?

Terrill Haigler (00:23:42)

Yes, I do believe, I see changes on the horizon. A few weeks ago, I posted, "Change is here, change is now." And I think because of my Instagram people have shifted their perspective on something simple with how they put their trash out. You really don't realize how important it is to put your trash out in a nice, respectable, neat manner until you're five days behind and you have about 45 piles of trash in front of your house. And I use this example all the time, when it comes to sanitation workers, say someone is having a medical emergency in your house. If you had 50 bags of trash in front of your house, how long do you think it's going to take the first responders to get inside your house, if that trash pile is all over the place, crazy, wood everywhere, bags untied, versus if it was neat and just compiled right?

So to answer the question, I believe that here in Philadelphia at the start, the narrative is changing on how people care about how they put their trash out. On my Instagram I have a game every Tuesday, I played this morning where we do Grade that Trash Pile. And it's a way for me to educate the public on saying things on what do to and what not to do when you put your trash pile out? So you have bags that are open, wood everywhere, and people don't know... You can put your mattress out, but it just has to be in plastic.

So there's a lot of things that I've found out that the public does not know about correct disposal of their waste. So I play these games and I have these information segments on my Instagram just to let people know, "You cannot throw away a water tank. A hot water tank, that is not something you can put in the trash. But we can take TVs sometimes." So it's just things like that that people don't know that I use my Instagram and Twitter to educate them on, and then my saying is, "If you know better, you do better."

So now I'm giving the public a responsibility to take responsibility, and put your trash out in an easier, more neat way, so that when I come to collect it as your waste crew, it's not taking me 45 minutes at one house, because there's 40 more houses or 40 more blocks that I have to get to, and the longer that I spend on your block, the less time I have to get my whole route up. So it all comes to one circle that, in order for me to pick my whole route up, I need everybody to take responsibility, put their trash out in a neat fashion, in a correct way, separate the recyclables from the trash... I mean, literally as a trash man, I think I've seen everything. Just recently, I had a guy put out his transmission. And just put a trash bag over his transmission, and was like, "Are you guys taking it?"

So it's just things like that that the public wants to know. I get so many DMs on, "What is this? What is that?" Maybe this is breaking news for everybody here, but styrofoam is not recyclable. Styrofoam is trash. But people throw away their TV boxes with the styrofoam in it, and then wonder why the trash man doesn't take it? But then wonder why the recycle guys don't take it? Well when a trash man sees the box, he automatically thinks recyclables. But when the recyclable guy opens up the box and sees the styrofoam, he automatically thinks trash.

So it's just a back and forth that I'm trying to eliminate for future references, so that, maybe two years from now, Philadelphia has the best trash put out in the country. And we are just killing it in the disposable waste game, so that is my goal, is to just keep educating, making it fun, making it interactive, and having people really ask questions, and having people really get involved. Because as a sanitation worker, it's my job to pick up the trash. But as a resident, it's their job to dispose of it. And if they dispose of it in a great manner, in a way that is going to take me two seconds to get? Now I'm picking up the whole route with time left to spare.

E.J. Dionne (00:28:09)

That's fantastic, and two things about that. One, is I can't tell you the value of knowing where to go to ask, "Can we put this thing out?" But I love the idea of everybody or... I don't know what, what would become of our country if we all become very competitive about our trash? To try to get good grades from you?

But let me go to Angelina because there are so many things about home healthcare workers that are so important to our country going forward, particularly with an aging population that will keep aging for quite some time. There was the question from Lewis McMarran about, "Are there tech ways to help home care workers, is it a good entry level work?" I'd like to ask also about Pres-elect Biden has talked a lot about upping our game in terms of compensation for care workers of various kinds.

And then there was the other question about, "What kind of subsidies are there that either state, federal or local governments might do?" So you have a whole lot of policy questions, and knowing where you come from, I know you know all the answers, so go ahead.

Angelina Del Rio Drake (00:29:28)

Thanks, let me try to knock those out. All right. So technology and the direct care workforce, the future of direct care work is people. It's not robots, there are a number of articles and demos of different robots that have been used in long term care settings, but they are in the dozens or fewer. And this is a workforce that's the largest job sector in our economy, it's 4.5 million workers, and that's not counting people who are employed in the gray market, who we don't have the data to track.

They're often also operating in environments where our clients may not want to have certain types of technology in their home, we run into these problems a lot. WiFi access, data plans... These are often in

home care agencies, nursing home agencies and also private homes, low-resource environments. And the type of solutions that have disrupted other industries tend not to stick here, and the nature of direct care work is intentionally, interpersonal, complex work, with infinite number of variables that you need to understand in terms of someone's relationship with their family, cultural needs, physical needs, behavioral needs.

And I think there is assistive technology that will become more prevalent in all of our homes, but that's going to start at a high income level, and take time to reach lower income households, and care settings. So I think that's often a shiny object to think about in terms of long term care, but not actually where the real experience of workers is rooted.

In terms of this being an entry level job that could be, I think the question was about young adults doing this work before they move onto other sectors? That does happen, I was a young adult as a home care worker. But, we have to raise the floor for these jobs, and make sure that the entry level jobs are sustainable in this field, and provide a living and family supporting wage. And this is work that we will all need at some times, as I've mentioned it's not going away. If we want a strong direct care workforce to care for ourselves and our loved ones, we can't just see this as a job that will be perpetually low paying and unsustainable.

We will all bear that cost in the emotional and financial burden of providing care for our loved ones, when the time comes if it has not already. But I do think that we need to bring more people into this sector, and that starts by making a better quality job. Secondly, I think that to do that we can bring in more men into this sector, it's traditionally been female-dominated. We can bring in more older adults and people from immigrant communities who may not have been working into this field, so it's not just young adults who could help us build the pipeline, but most importantly we need to create a better quality job to bring people there.

In terms of government subsidizing the wages of these workers, they already do. Almost half of the direct care workforce receives public benefits, because their wages are so low. And 60% of home care services and a good proportion of nursing home services are driven by Medicaid reimbursement rates. These reimbursement rates are not sufficient to provide a living wage to many workers, but they are a key policy solution that we have to try to improve long term care here.

Unlike other industries that employ low wage workers, long term care is particularly complex, because of the outsized role of public policy. Of Medicaid spending, of long term services and supports and Medicaid has helped set the wage floor in this field, but it's also building on a history of discrimination that's based on our policy decisions over time, to let this work go unpaid by women, who are 86% of the workforce today. By women of color, as work that was done by black women during slavery and for over a century after Reconstruction, was specifically domestic workers were left out of fair labor standards protections, and other federal acts that would have afforded higher wages to this workforce over time. And today it's also work that more than a quarter of the workforce are immigrants to the United States, and their labor is traditionally exploited and undervalued.

So we need to reckon with those factors that have shaped low job equality in this field, as we look to policy solutions. The Biden and Harris administration does have a plan for a caring economy, they include both childcare and long term care workers in this plan. It's the most comprehensive that I've seen at a federal level because it does acknowledge the need to raise workers' wages to match state money with federal funding for long term care. And to focus on skills and knowledge improvement for this workforce, and the abysmal training standards that we already have.

So I think if the administration wants to follow through on that plan, they need to make sure that they are centering workers in the solutions for this workforce, and also helping build a sense of value around this workforce. I really love what the Good Jobs Institute does, because it makes the economic and

business argument for investing in low wage workers, and making better jobs. We've been making the moral argument to improve long term care jobs for decades, and we've had some improvement, but those improvements have been long fought and incremental. They are now insufficient, and if we really want to mobilize solutions here, we have to make the business case for investing in long term care workers.

E.J. Dionne (00:34:38)

Amen, and thank you on the Biden plan. A lot of times campaigns put out plans and then they disappear later on, and I'm hoping that that proposal does not disappear, because it struck me as an innovative approach to the issue of both upward mobility and decent wages.

Ruth Schimmel, I pray I pronounced your name right... This would go to Linda and it piggybacks on the question that I asked about OSHA, "What protections do these workforces get, what should they get regarding the dangers of COVID?" What has this been like? Because from the reporting I've see, OSHA has basically written, "It would be nice if you did certain things." And really not had much enforcement in this area? Now you can correct me if I'm wrong, but could you talk about that, and what we ought to do over the next year, and what we might learn from this also?

Linda Nguyen (00:35:46)

Yeah, sure. That's a great question. So the problems that we're seeing within essential work and in particular within retail work are issues that have existed prior to the pandemic. But in this moment, those issues have been really magnified.

The curtain has been pulled back, and we can't afford to ignore the gross and deep inequalities that working class communities in essential work endure, we can't continue to put profits over people. So what are some of the policies that can address the issues of essential workers?

Essential workers need to be empowered. They need to have dignity and respect on the job, and have a safe working environment. So policies that establish something like a health and safety council, that mandates that workers be trained and deputized at the work site level, to address health and safety issues in real-time is incredibly important. Workers have reported to us that this is their lives, and this is the lives of their family members, and they cannot wait for OSHA to become in, and to enforce the mandates that we have hard fought.

And so when we have seen OSHA come in, and investigate issues, and to work on reports and to issue citations, it takes somewhere between two and four months for that process to happen and to unfold. These public institutions, regulatory institutions are incredibly underfunded and understaffed, there's not sufficient training to support public health department to do the work that we need to have done.

And so the solution, from my perspective is one, to reinvest in those institutions, but also empower workers at the work site level, to be able to do the work themselves, to ensure that they and their coworkers are protected, and that the public is protected. The other piece is enforcement. We need funding to enforce state and local COVID health and safety mandates. Major grocery chains, meat-packing companies are turning record profits, historic profits. And yet, they don't reinvest that into protecting essential workers that keeps them in business. And they don't invest in the infrastructure needed to ensure that workers are safe.

These policies that workers have fought for and that unions and communities and others are fighting for become useless, and are rendered useless, and are just a piece of paper if there's not the enforcement

piece. The other piece is hazard pay. We need to compensate workers for the increased dangers that they face to keep our nation running, and ensuring that our communities are fed, that the trash is picked up, that our communities are safe and sanitary. We also need renewed quarantine pay.

Our workers, unfortunately have faced often second rounds of COVID. They don't have that quarantine pay to fall back on anymore, and because workers in grocery, in food chain work, make just above minimum wage, they cannot afford to be sick and to shelter in place. And we need universal healthcare because in this moment, healthcare should be a right, not a privilege. It is acutely apparent in this moment, and in the grocery industry it is often six months before a worker becomes eligible for healthcare, and upwards of 18 months before they become eligible for healthcare. And it's also just eligibility for themselves, and not for their families.

And so in this moment as our workers are on the frontlines of this crisis, interacting with the public and at much higher risk of infection because of the volume of interaction that they have with members of the public? It's really important that we really think about healthcare and accessibility.

E.J. Dionne (00:39:44)

Thank you, and just to go back to that, and I want to go to Zeynep. And then Maureen, I want to warn you, I want you to come in after I finish this round.

Just first of all, the enforcement of the safety standards, it seems to me there are two potential pressure points on employers. One is obviously having a union where there is some ability to have worker voice. But it strikes me even on the enforcement by OSHA, if OSHA puts out rules, even if they can't... If the rules are strong, aren't employers likely... Much more likely to say, "We'd better do this because OSHA might eventually get here?" In other words, it's always struck me that the value of regulation is not just that it's eventually enforced, but the existence of strong regulations create incentives for employers to move down that path. Do you disagree with that, or is that a fair way to look at the role of a regulator? That's for Linda.

Linda Nguyen (00:40:53)

I mean I think the various health and safety mandates that we fought for and won pretty early in the pandemic, were important to sort of... Changing the bar. An order for there to be common sense practices put into place. But I think the problem is that although there might be corporate policy at various levels for these various employers, the way it trickles down at the store level, at the shop level, at the factory level, looks very, very different from store to store, plant to plant. And even based on shifts, based on who was managing the particular shift?

So I think it's incredibly important, and the reason why we spend so much of our time and our resources to pass stronger health and safety regulations, to be able to pass strong local policies is because you're right, for this reason. And I think coupled with it, we really have to have some teeth. And so, where does that enforcement happen? How do we create some jobs around enforcement, and publicly fund enforcement, and create jobs for workers, for example in the hospitality industry to be able to come in and to take these jobs and to supplement public institutions? How do we employ others who unfortunately have been left out during the pandemic?

E.J. Dionne (00:42:16)

Thank you. I want to ask Zeynep something because Angelina used what I thought was an important phrase. She spoke of, "Living and family sustaining wage." And so I'm asking Zeynep to indulge me one of my pet peeves that I want to ask her about. Which is, I hate the way the word "family" gets abused in our politics. That if somebody talks about "family values" you are expecting somebody to say something, say, negative about LGBTQ people or something? When in fact, if you care about families and the upbringing of kids, and the work that parents do, what you really ought to be concerned about are things like family sustaining wages, like economic circumstances that help families stay together.

Money is a big source of tension within families and within relationships. Can you talk about the role of family as you think about it in the kind of work you do? Obviously you're oriented towards showing employers that the high road is the best road for them, but I'd be curious if you could talk about that, because I think that phrase "family sustaining wage" is so important in this conversation.

Zeynep Ton (00:43:40)

Yeah, I mean I haven't taken that angle E.J., previously in terms of looking at it from a family perspective. But as I look at what the Good Jobs companies provide their workers. Decent wages and benefits, stable schedules, career paths. These basic needs enable them to have a family life. They enable them to put roof over their heads, food on the table, and take care of their families from a financial perspective. They enable them to not worry if their child is sick, or... Because they have healthcare.

Stable schedules enable them to live their lives with their families as opposed to unpredictability about when you're going to show up at work, how many hours you're going to have? So I think policies that companies have can sustain a much better family life, for Americans, no matter what their family looks like, right? Our families... I have four young children and my family looks very different than some other's family. But regardless of what our families might look like, these companies provide policies. Can I connect something between what Linda said and Angelina said about-

E.J. Dionne (00:44:56)

Yeah, please.

Zeynep Ton (00:44:57)

... Because Linda talked about "empowering workers to have a say in safety", right? We know about the importance of empowering workers, hearing the voice of workers, not just when it comes to safety, but also other policies. Technology decisions, because these are the people who end up doing the work, yet so many companies end up not empowering their workforce, and I think one of the reasons for that is they operate with very high level of turnover.

So if you have a retail chain, and if you operate with 100% employee turnover, you're not conforming to safety policies, you're also not conforming to loss of other policies that the corporate wants you to conform to. That's a part of reality that these companies live in, and the way to get out of this, to be able to empower workers, listen to them, provide them good jobs, is, starts with creating a stable work environment with low employee turnover.

And I think one of the barriers is what Angelina said, about getting to that state because when you look at the forgotten workers from Beth Shul's book, who the workers are, they have always been immigrants, people of color, women. We have forgotten, we have always forgotten these workers. And I think when you dig deep inside executives in their heads unfortunately, a lot of them tend to believe that these workers, maybe it's because of who they are, maybe because the executives are very disconnected from the frontlines, they have a believe that many of them are not going to be able to do the job well, take responsibility, take pride in their work. So I think one of the things that we have to change in our society is the assumptions about workers, and what they do?

And one way we can do that is to encourage the executives to spend a ton of time in the frontlines. Go with Terrill, and see what the work is like. See what the barriers are, see what gets in the way, see all sorts of variability, right? Different customers use different things, so your policies at the corporate may not work on the frontlines. Be it in sanitation or retail, or healthcare. So I think we need to change those norms, and policies and encourage these executives to spend a lot more time in the frontline, and change their assumptions about the work, and the workers.

E.J. Dionne (00:47:26)

Thank you so much for that. By the way, one of the reasons I love doing Maureen events is because issues that don't get into the conversation nearly enough get into the conversation. Stable schedules, God we don't talk about that enough, and everything you said. I'm going to come to you, Maureen, I just want to shout out a few people in the chat who have said some interesting things.

Andrea Plaza, "Families are also increasingly looking different as households merge for reasons such as COVID and the loss of employment, so now you may have extended family, friends, neighbors, old and young coming together as a new type of household, which is definitely something worth looking at." The name is cut, it was Joanne, "The ALICE data from the United Way of Northern New Jersey," I just looked it up while we were talking, it's about people above the poverty line but just barely. That is [inaudible] thing. And Ruth Schimmel makes the point that, "Another aspect related to family assumptions, 45% of the population is single." Which is something... It's just an important fact, partly because of older folks, but also across the population.

So thank you for those contributions. Maureen, you have sponsored all this work and care passionately, I want you to come in at this point. Because I can't stand... You're just sitting there learnedly without joining in!

Maureen Conway (00:48:59)

Great, sure, well I'll just comment on a couple things and I see my friend Navjeet Singh has commented that, "Gone are the days executives are rising from the frontlines to the top and increasingly those who are disconnected from the frontline worker." And I think that one of the things increasingly, is this issue that we don't listen to workers and we don't value that frontline experience, but we also too much, I would say, turn to, we have some workers at the frontline, and then we look to recruit from college, from management, right?

And there's this just widening disconnect. And I think that we really... I think, as a college-educated, two master's, my mother wondered when I was going to stop going to college-educated person, I will say, I think maybe we overvalue those credentials a little bit and undervalue the experience that frontline workers have. And I've done so many focus groups with working people in a wide variety of occupations, where they're talking about things that are going wrong in their companies, and that are inefficiencies, and Zeynep I'm sure sees this all the time. That are just making their jobs harder and

making the company less successful, and there's nobody there listening to them and responding to their ideas, and actually giving them a way to be empowered to implement them.

And in fact, I'll just mention something Terrill mentioned when we talked to him, he said... And he was talking about it, "I see how people are putting out their trash wrong." But he's not empowered... I mean he's found his own way to empower himself to tell people that they're doing it wrong, but other places could say, you could give a citation, or a warning to somebody. You could actually be empowered to do that, be the person who says, "This isn't the right way to do it." Who better to do that than the people who pick up the trash everyday, and know full well what the rules are and aren't?

But we think, "Oh, we can't give them that kind of power, we need to vest that someplace else." And so I think that there's this way that we really need to start truly valuing and respecting the work that people do, the experience that they have, and the knowledge that they bring to these jobs. Wages are absolutely important and we need to do something to make these jobs pay. Angelina did a great job talking about just the ridiculousness of paying... Which is a policy decision, right? Home care workers are a poverty wage job by policy choice, and it's just ridiculous because we just pay them through food stamps and other kinds of supports. But we need to do... So we absolutely need to do something to make work pay.

But we also need to make work pay because it's worth so much more than we're paying them. And we really should just make the pay commensurate with what they contribute, but also by doing so, we give them the opportunity to contribute even more. Is there anything else you wanted me to comment on E.J.?

Terrill Haigler (00:51:50)

Can I say something?

E.J. Dionne (00:51:50)

Yeah, please. I was just going to have you come in on that! Thank you.

Terrill Haigler (00:51:52)

I just wanted to-

E.J. Dionne (00:51:52)

God bless you for that, Maureen.

Terrill Haigler (00:51:55)

... I just wanted to piggyback on two things. One, you're absolutely right. In Seattle, actually, Seattle sanitation workers are allowed to give citations and tickets their residents. And my opinion, Seattle has the dopest sanitation structure for their workers that I've ever seen, I've been doing a lot of research on different countries, different states on their sanitation department, and Seattle has one of the finest sanitation setups. So if anyone has some time, look up how Seattle does it.

But I also wanted to speak to the fact that I was telling Maureen, I actually got a state representative to throw trash for a day. And since then, he calls me at least once a week. Because he was actually able to see for himself, do the work, and actually experience what it is to be a sanitation worker. And I'm going to be honest, he was in one of the nicer neighborhoods in Philadelphia. And still had a tough time.

So when it comes that, that whole empowerment thing is really big to someone like me, who... I'm educating the public, but then there's kind of like a little gray area when people say, "Well what is the city doing?" I can only control what I can control, and that's my Instagram.

And the second thing, just to give you guys a little insight, as a sanitation worker, my average salary is \$33,000 a year. The average home in Philadelphia costs \$250,000. And the rule is, to be a sanitation worker, we have to live in the city. So you add families to that, I have three kids. Where on a \$33,000 salary am I going to be able to finance and be able to live in a home that cost \$250,000, have three kids and send them to school? And those are questions that I know everyone wants an answer from our elected officials.

E.J. Dionne (00:54:18)

Wow, a campaign to have more elected officials or for that matter, newspaper columnists be sanitation folks for a day, that's an amazing thing. That elected official deserves some ink, because good for her or him for doing that.

First of all, does anyone else want to come in off Maureen? Because there are just so many good thoughts here. Let me just throw one question out, this is a gentleman called Zach Lou from the California Workforce Development Board, "Where do you see as the biggest opportunities for worker training and possibly apprenticeships in your industry?" So that's one question I'll throw out there, if anybody wants to pick it up.

And then I am a big fan of It's A Wonderful Life, so David Wright just grabbed me with this question, when he said, this is for Angelina, "Let's do a Frank Capra to George Bailey thing and what would the life look like in the absence of direct care workers?" So thank you David Wright for being the angel in this story.

But on both questions, anybody want to jump in, why don't you come in Angelina on that one?

Angelina Del Rio Drake (00:55:40)

Sure, so I'll work backwards on that. I think that's a great idea, it's already happening, we don't have to stage these photos, right? We'd be following what is most likely to be a woman who's dropped out of the workforce to take on the caregiving responsibilities for her older or iller or... A family member's living with disabilities in her community. That's what it looks like.

It looks like people taking on these burdens at the expense of their own careers or earning potential, and we see there are also places where people don't get enough care or enough consistent care, and you really see that born out in negative health outcomes, and avoidable costs to our healthcare system. Which is another way that these jobs are subsidized in a way, because we bear the costs for poor quality care at the other end of the system.

In terms of worker training it's actually related. So direct care workers, absolutely provide health related services to their clients, the long term care population is experiencing more chronic and co-morbid

conditions than ever before. The training regulations and compensation for this field has not evolved at the same pace. But we absolutely should be providing more training that acknowledges that this workforce is a part of the healthcare system.

People don't listen to direct care workers. They don't include them onto interdisciplinary care teams, or seen as a member of a client's care team. Workers feel this, workers talk about this all the time. They know more about their client than any other paid caregiver, because they're with them more. And if they have training around observational skills, communication skills, to look out for signs and symptoms of worsening chronic conditions, and there's a way to communicate that? And we've done this through upskilling for entry level direct care roles, but also creating advanced roles, which do not exist in the formalized career rungs for this workforce.

The jump from home health aide to licensed practical nurse is out of reach for many people. And yet, we have workers who are home health aides for 25 years, who have extensive experience that could be better leveraged to drive savings and healthcare and better outcomes for clients. So really focus skill-building around actually integrating the worker into a care team, and infectious disease has been especially important during the pandemic, those types of training skills.

E.J. Dionne (00:57:55)

Thank you. Just in passing, I want to turn to Zeynep who wanted to jump in, and then Linda, just to shout out Alexandra Olens and Debra Pierce for being loyal Seattle fans on this chat, you should get Terrill out there for a speaking tour in Seattle, when this all business ends, and we can travel again. Zeynep, you wanted to come in?

Zeynep Ton (00:58:17)

Yeah, I wanted to come in what Angelina said about, "It's really important to create opportunities for home health aides to move up with upskilling." But we also have to make sure that we provide good jobs to home health aides. We should not forget about that, right? Because right now in our economy, 46 and a half million people, that's almost a third of the workforce, work in occupations where the median wage is less than \$15 an hour. And \$15 an hour makes \$31,200 if you work 40 hours a week every single week.

So Terrill just told us how it's very hard to live with \$33,000 in Philadelphia, so just \$15 an hour seems like a lot of money, but it's not a lot of money. So 46 and a half million Americans are in these jobs, in addition when we look at where the job growth is going to come from, the expectation is that job growth is going to come from these low wage sectors.

It's the health aides, it's the food and cleaning services, labor, so we cannot forget about these jobs and say, "Oh, we're going to focus on upskilling." Oftentimes, I've shared this with Maureen before, I see the US economy as a big ship, like think about a huge ship, and there's a hole in its hull. And all the people who are talking... And the people in the lower decks, they are at risk of drowning.

And all this conversation about upskilling, encourages people to move up from those lower decks to the dry deck, but there is not enough space for everyone. It's 46 and a half million Americans who are there, and the ship is sinking. We have to close that hole, and to close that hole, we need to make these bad jobs good jobs, with decent wages, good benefits, stable schedules, meaning and dignity, and career paths.

Instead of training, let's talk about career paths. We don't need a college education to be a store manager. How about we promote 100% from within, and people who started as a part-timer now can become a full-timer, and then one day a store manager? So I think we need to refocus on making the low wage jobs, those forgotten jobs good jobs, not just upskilling, which is more palatable to business leaders, it's more palatable to foundations, it's just much easier. It doesn't rock the boat, it doesn't require systemic change, and therefore I think it's something that we talk about all the time because it's easier.

E.J. Dionne (01:00:56)

Thank you. By the way, it's Diana Pierce, not Debra in Seattle, my apologies. There were a couple of questions I wanted to put to you Linda, that are really good questions here. And they in a way are in tension with each other, at least that's how I read them.

On the one hand, there's an excellent question about using SNAP and Medicaid and also I would add to the question, this is from Stephanie Hoops, and the EITC, where these are subsidies for low wage work by taxpayers, and on the one hand I'm for anything that's going to boost the pay and benefits of low income people however you do it. On the other hand, we've argued a lot over the years as a country about how much should we be using such programs to subsidize lower wage employment.

At the other end of that continuum, there is a question about Medicare for all, or other ways of nationalizing healthcare, where if you took the burden of healthcare off the employer they would have more room to provide wages. How do you think about these kinds of questions, both programs that subsidize lower income people who work, and moving healthcare off the books of employers all together?

Linda Nguyen (01:02:20)

And I think those are really good and important questions. We've got roughly 10-15 million workers in the United States at any given time, and prior to the pandemic in retail. And we need to make sure that these jobs are good jobs, and so in a period of time where again, these companies, these grocery chains, these meat-packing companies are making record profits, and CEOs are making 20 million in annual compensation. And workers are barely making minimum wage, I think we really need to be talking about how we ensure that workers are paid a fair wage, right?

Because clearly these companies have the resources and the ability to pay much better salaries and much better packages, and to allow workers to have full time hours, and that is not happening. There has been an "Amazonization" if you will, of groceries. So several decades ago, grocery jobs used to be good jobs. They were predominately union jobs, solidly middle class jobs, workers were able to buy a home, send their kids to college, and take vacations.

You used to have to know someone in the industry to get into the industry. And fast forward several decades later, what has changed? Well the industry looks completely different. The grocery companies and chains are now dominated by multinational corporations which is connected to low union density, and it's no surprise that we're seeing what we're seeing, that companies like Kroger, which is one of the largest grocery chains in the world is just raking in profits off the back of workers and doing the minimal, if you can even say that, to support workers.

I don't think grocery companies and these employers who are highly profitable in this period of time, need subsidies from the government, in order to support workers who are getting paid poverty wages. There's plenty of money and plenty of resources. So from my perspective, the solution is to make sure

that these jobs are good jobs as opposed to figuring out various public programs like SNAP and TANF. We shouldn't be subsidizing low road employers. We should be figuring out how to make these jobs good jobs. And I think there was a second part of your question, E.J.?

E.J. Dionne (01:04:46)

I was just scrolling around the... Oh just, if you took the costs of healthcare off employers all together, would that... That could obviously create some room for better pay and other benefits?

Linda Nguyen (01:05:04)

It could. And the smaller grocery stores that we often don't represent would benefit from that, because they have a hard time competing, right? It's an uneven playing field for various employers, and so making sure that all workers had healthcare and the same access to quality healthcare and being able to start from the same playing field in terms of competition amongst these various employers is really important. And most workers in retail don't have a union.

I can't imagine what it's like in this moment to not have a union. We have a staff of roughly 120 people that are working full time. We worked for three or four months, seven days a week, 16+ hour days because we were in crisis when our workers were thrust on the frontlines and doing this work, and figuring out how to support them, and how to make sure they had proper PPE, that they had health and safety protocols in their workplaces, to pass policies to make sure that those things that they needed were quantified and enforceable. And that there were legal mechanisms and remedies to address their issues.

I can't imagine what it would be like to not have a union in this moment, and to not have that backing to support workers? For me, those solutions, there are so many layers to it, but workers need the ability to form a union if they so choose, and to have the ability to voice their issues and to have their basic needs met, healthcare is a human right and a basic need, and especially in this moment. And that shouldn't be up for negotiation on some table with corporate heads in Cincinnati.

E.J. Dionne (01:06:59)

Thank you.

Maureen Conway (01:06:59)

I just wanted to add one thing because I had the great privilege of talking to everyone ahead of time, and one of the things Linda brought up when we were talking ahead of time was how grocery store jobs actually used to be good jobs. They used to be good, middle class jobs, jobs like to Terrill's point, you could actually buy a house, and live near where you worked, and be part of the community.

And I think this policy of having... I find this very strange that we make this choice in our country where government subsidize wages but ask companies to pay for healthcare? It's an incredibly inefficient approach to it, and it's made our healthcare so much more expensive than any other country's healthcare. And so it's just really been a double-whammy for workers I think, where they get expensive and often inadequate healthcare from companies that are struggling to figure out how to pay for this in this system that's opaque and very difficult to deal with? It's in no way a market, so government does need to play a role, and does play a role.

And at the same time, then we have this idea that companies can't afford to pay wages, and so we'll get the government to help with that. It's kind of crazy, but then of course, we don't like this idea of people relying on the government for their income, so government does a pretty inadequate job of subsidizing wages. Roughly about 1 in 5 working people are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, about 1 in 6 actually get it. And it raises maybe 40, 50% of those who get it above the poverty threshold but not everybody.

And above the poverty threshold is not exactly a living wage. Those are very different things. So I just wanted to say I do... On the point, I think if we asked companies to focus more on compensating people for the work that they do, I think that both adds livability to jobs, as well as as dignity to jobs, and I think it's a really important thing to think about both of those elements.

E.J. Dionne (01:09:00)

Wow, yes, thank you so much on that. And the incoherence of our policy is really worth underscoring, both in healthcare and in wages. Thank you for that.

There are so many questions here, I tell you what I'd like to do is... As best I can tell, we have about six minutes, and four panelists who have about two years of good ideas. And so we can't fit two years into six minutes, but let me toss out a few questions that I think are worth dealing with. And you all can pick whatever you want to pick? Also by way of figuring out things you want to leave us with.

Rachel Wick asked the question, "Are there examples from other sectors of where we have successfully lifted the floor for workers?" I think Zeynep might be in a particularly good position to answer that.

"Are workforce development not-profits a way to do this?" I think Angelina, who has experience with that, and I guess the broader question, since there are, I suspect, a number of people on this call from not-for-profits, who care about workers and workforce issues, what can their role be in bridging gaps with employers, or in providing voice for these workers? I'll leave those out there for you to take, why don't I start with Zeynep and then we will... What I'll do, just because it's the order on my little Hollywood squares here, I'll go to Zeynep then Linda, then Angelina, and I'll let Terrill close. And he can grade us all at the end. Go ahead.

Or just me, don't grade them, they're As, automatic As! Go ahead.

Zeynep Ton (01:10:57)

Yeah, thank you for that question, Rachel, it's a great question. And there have been examples of industries where the floor has been lifted. One that comes to my mind is the manufacturing. We talk about manufacturing jobs as good jobs right now, but if you go back 100 years ago, a little bit more than 100 years ago, manufacturing jobs were low paying jobs, very dangerous jobs, done by immigrants and even if you go earlier, even by children.

And Henry Ford, we talk about Henry Ford with the \$5 wage per day, but Henry Ford was very famous saying, "Why do I need to hire a whole person when all I need is a pair of hands?" And those jobs had high employee turnover, lots of safety problems, lots of quality problems, and then what we learned in that industry is that treating people as interchangeable parts was not the best way to make cars.

Toyota, you know about Toyota, came in the United States, taught us that investing in people, investing in processes, that lifted up everyone. Customers, employees, [inaudible]. So we need that type of a revolution in the service industry now.

Service jobs, just like manufacturing jobs, are seen sometimes unsafe, low wages, high turnover. But if you learn from that industry focus on operations, process and people we can create much better outcomes for all stakeholders.

E.J. Dionne (01:12:22)

Thank you. Your commenting on immigrant workers in those jobs, it... Just because I want to make people smile in this difficult period, one of my favorite comments on that was years ago by the legendary journalist David Brinkley, who's no longer with us. And he was doing a big special on immigrants, and he said... And I wish I could do the David Brinkley voice because he had a very particular voice, but, "When immigrants got here, they thought the streets were paved with gold, there were three things they quickly learned. One, the streets weren't paved with gold, two, most of them weren't paved at all, and three, they were expected to do most of the paving."

Anyway, I wanted to move on, who... Linda, picking up on any of the points raised by the questioners or... And just some closing thoughts for us?

Linda Nguyen (01:13:13)

Yeah, I think my comments will be brief. I feel like the issue that our workforce faces in retail and in grocery retail and meat-packing have really demonstrated that we cannot go back to business as usual. Our workers work when there are fires, when there are floods, when there are earthquakes, and now a global pandemic, through civil unrest. And they continue to work. And so I'm really glad that we're having this important conversation today about how we move beyond gratitude, because it's really not enough.

The question here is, "What are the lessons that we can learn in this moment, now that the curtain has been pulled back? How do we invest in and rebuild our public infrastructure and social safety nets to make sure that workers have their most basic of needs met? How do we empower workers, ensure they have a voice on the job, and to be able to have the structures and systems to be able to not only raise issues but a structure to actually address those issues? How do we fund properly all the mandates and the policies that we spend so much time passing and investing research and our members' time in terms of passing?"

We are in the middle of this third wave, and in the back I'm hearing from policymakers begin to talk about, "Once the workforce gets vaccinated, can we go back to business as usual? Will these issues disappear, will they go away, and can we stop talking about them and move onto the next issue?" And for me it's no. These are... Issues that we're seeing right now are ones that are just really... That workers face in terms of healthcare and health and safety and fair wages are ones that have just been exacerbated, but they're not going away. They have been persistent issues and problems, and we really need to roll up our sleeves and continue to address them, and make permanent the things that we've won during the pandemic for these workforce and workers.

E.J. Dionne (01:15:47)

Thank you. Angelina?

Angelina Del Rio Drake (01:15:50)

Briefly on the question about workforce development non-profits, I mean they're absolutely helpful. They uniquely understand the candidate pool, the workers, the workers' needs. They understand employers' needs, and try to align those incentives, and have really been very consequential in pushing forward sector-based employment strategies, because as we've learned today, all these sectors of essential workforces are very nuanced and unique.

Just to leave you with a couple thoughts around direct care, we all need, at an individual level, to talk more about aging, illness, disability, and end of life. We have to destigmatize these topics, and hold our elected officials accountable for talking about these topics as well, and about the unjust treatment of direct care workers or else we're never going to have the political will to be able to necessitate the solutions we need.

We also have to acknowledge how gendered, racialized and ethnicized this work has been, and that we have a moral and societal imperative to have solutions that counteract these forces. We need to see direct care workers, if you participate in individual philanthropy, mutual aid, any kind of volunteer work in your community, look for worker organizations, unions, employers.

Ask them what they need, listen to workers, and be a part of that solution in your community. And if you're part of a business organization or philanthropy that invests in these areas, do not dismiss the entry level direct care job, I absolutely agree with Zeynep on this. This idea that these jobs are too poor quality to be worth investing in is not helpful, and it's not realistic for all of our futures.

Maureen Conway (01:17:24)

E.J., you're muted.

E.J. Dionne (01:17:30)

I was saying, the only good thing about this period is it's the first time in my life where people told me to unmute myself, so thank you for that. Terrill, come on in.

Terrill Haigler (01:17:42)

Yeah, my final thoughts are kind of what Angela was saying is that, as a sanitation worker I hear all the time, "Hazardous pay has to come from the government. Hazardous pay has to come from the government." And I'm realizing that we have some elected official that, essential workers are on the bottom of their list. All industries are not the same to them, and to me that's saying that all human beings aren't human beings.

So when I think about just my industry and what I do everyday, how I put my life on the line, how I don't get a list of houses that have tested positive for COVID on my route, and I'm just out there collecting trash and putting myself in harm's way, I really think if as a sanitation worker, I have to ask the public to take some responsibility, I also have to ask my elected official to take some responsibility. And to just make it an issue.

I think all of us will agree that all of our individual industries need to make it an issue. I think long gone are days where we just accept what everybody's saying, and we just keep going and doing what the boss says. I think now is the time for us to band together, and make this an issue, and make all of our

concerns an issue. PPE, safe work environment, wages, hazardous pay, it needs to be an issue. And I think once we make it an issue, and it's on the top of the totem pole for our elected official, I think we'll see change come soon after. But until it's a problem for our mayors, it's a problem for our governors, it's a problem for our city council, they're going to keep sweeping it under the rug.

And it's unfortunate, but I mean at this point, I think maybe we all should just run for our city council in our respective cities, and start to be the change. I just appreciate and thank you guys for giving your insight, and I hope that this is the start of the conversation of many to hopefully go nationwide, and national. And let's get a panel to talk about essential workers. And Joe Biden owes me one because I did a Joe Biden commercial, so he owes me one!

E.J. Dionne (01:19:55)

What remind him, somebody send this to him and he can campaign for you for city council or mayor, he owes ya. I want to turn to Maureen, I just want to go back to my friend Beth's book, from long ago, because again she raised so many of the questions we are talking about here. And she, by the way, made the point that Zeynep made that so many of today's good jobs in large scale manufacturing were not always good, and it took worker power to transform them.

As she wrote, "The rules of the game governing work and its rewards are up to us. It is our values that we bring to these choices, whether we give basic rights to these workers and give them more power to change their conditions is our choice." And it's our choice if whether we remember that essential workers are essential, not only when we're in crisis but a year, and two years, and five years from now.

And Maureen, thanks for organizing this great panel, and I'll let you close.

Maureen Conway (01:21:05)

Well thank you, E.J., and thank you to Zeynep, Linda, Terrill and Angelina, this has been a fantastic conversation. Thank you to the audience, the audience has really been participating and sharing a lot which has been really great, so really appreciate everybody's comments and engagement.

Many thanks to my colleagues behind the scenes who make all of these things work. It takes a lot of people to get these events together, so I really appreciate my fabulous Aspen Institute colleagues who do such a terrific job organizing these events. Please do just share a couple of comments, you'll get a feedback survey. Please share a couple of comments with us, we always look for your feedback on how we can make these events even better. So we love to hear from you, and we hope you'll join us again. Happy holidays, and see you in 2021. Thank you.

E.J. Dionne (01:21:55)

Thank you.