



A Job Quality Agenda to Build Back Better – An Action Platform for 2021 and Beyond

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

Friday, January 22, 2021

Description

Our economy doesn't just need more jobs, it needs better jobs. The problem of eroding job quality long precedes, and now greatly exacerbates, our current extraordinary challenges of job and business losses, a rapidly spreading pandemic, racial injustice, and societal division. There is an urgent need for action and renewed opportunities for the new administration and Congress. How should policymakers and practitioners define job quality and make improved job quality their guiding principle? What ideas can help restore the ideal of work as the pathway to the American Dream?

In a [shared statement](#), the Aspen Institute's [Job Quality Fellows](#) drew on their diverse experiences and perspectives to develop a shared set of policy principles to improve job quality for working people across the US. This interactive event features [Betsy Biemann](#) (Chief Executive Officer, Coastal Enterprises Inc., Brunswick, Maine), [Jose Corona](#) (Vice President, Programs & Partnerships, Eat.Play.Learn Foundation, Oakland, California), [Caryn York](#) (Chief Executive Officer, Job Opportunities Task Force, Baltimore, Maryland), and moderator [Maureen Conway](#) (Vice President, The Aspen Institute; Executive Director, Economic Opportunities Program).

Learn more about this event: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/a-job-quality-agenda-to-build-back-better/>

Speakers

Betsy Biemann

Chief Executive Officer, Coastal Enterprises Inc.

Betsy Biemann joined Coastal Enterprises Inc. in 2016 as its second chief executive officer. Prior to her appointment, Betsy led the Maine Food Cluster Project of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard University and advised businesses, nonprofit organizations, and social enterprises in Maine and nationally. From 2005 to 2012 she was president of the Maine Technology Institute, investing in Maine companies and initiatives seeking to grow high-potential sectors of Maine's economy. Before her move to Maine, Betsy served as associate director at The Rockefeller Foundation in New York City, where she managed a national grant and investment program aiming to increase

employment in low-income communities. She joined Rockefeller's staff in 1996 after working in international development, principally in Africa. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in biology and the history of science at Harvard University and her Master of Public Administration at Princeton University's School of Public & International Affairs. Betsy serves on the board of the Opportunity Finance Network and as board member and treasurer of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation. In May 2020, she was appointed by Governor Janet Mills to Maine's Economic Recovery Committee, tasked with recommending strategies to stabilize and grow the Maine economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jose Corona

Vice President, Programs and Partnerships, Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation

José is a social entrepreneur who has built a reputation as a visionary leader, strong manager, innovator, and relationship-builder. He has been recognized for building mindful and creative organizational cultures and convening public, private, and community people and resources to solve complex community, business, and public sector problems.

Currently, Jose heads Programs & Partnerships for Stephen and Ayesha Curry's Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation – a new foundation the Currys launched that is becoming one of the country's most innovative and impactful philanthropic organizations through its commitment to creating equal opportunities and bright futures for every child. In 2020, Eat. Learn. Play. was able to play a major role in the fight against rising hunger, helping to provide more than 14 million meals to children and families in the foundation's hometown of Oakland. This strategy included engaging over 130 local restaurants who were able to rehire 850 of their employees in order to prepare and deliver over 2.5 million meals to those who needed meals during the pandemic.

Prior to joining the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, José served as the director of equity and strategic partnerships under Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. In this role, José served as senior advisor to the Mayor, with the responsibility of creating, coordinating, and facilitating public, private, and philanthropic partnerships that foster equitable opportunities and benefits for the people of Oakland.

José also served as chief executive officer of ICA/FundGoodJobs from 2004 to 2015. He led ICA to become a nationally recognized, award-winning organization for its work on scaling small businesses and entrepreneurs as a way to create good jobs, especially for people with the highest need. In the ten years with ICA, he oversaw a portfolio of companies that created over 5,000 jobs, creating over \$150 million in wealth for local residents and collectively generating over \$300 million in revenue. He also created a platform for hundreds of professionals to participate by contributing over \$25 million of total pro bono investments into the ICA mission. His innovative thinking led ICA to launch Fund Good Jobs – an investment fund focused on using capital to influence the creation and retention of quality jobs – and the Talent Management Group – an innovative approach that is reshaping the workforce development sector.

He is currently co-chair of the Oakland Economic Recovery Advisory Council, charged to safely open businesses in Oakland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Caryn York

Chief Executive Officer, Job Opportunities Task Force

Caryn York is chief executive officer of the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF), an independent, statewide nonprofit organization that promotes policies and programs to help low-wage workers advance to high-wage jobs. Caryn is JOTF's youngest CEO and the first African American female to lead the 24-year organization.

Caryn is dedicated to improving conditions and outcomes for Maryland's low-wage workers and jobseekers. As CEO, Caryn leads a team of passionate advocates, experts, and practitioners focused on policies and programs to eliminate educational and employment barriers and facilitate the successful entry, or re-entry, of low-skill, low-income workers into the labor market.

Caryn is well-known and widely respected for her leadership in numerous state and local policy reform efforts that include increasing access and affordability to postsecondary education options, expanding access to paid sick days, reform of punitive child support reform policies and practices, decriminalizing poverty and race, and reducing the impact of incarceration on working families. Notable policy achievements include successful passage of legislation to "Ban the Box" on college and job applications, the development, passage, and implementation of the Maryland Justice Reinvestment Act, landmark reforms to Maryland's pretrial system regarding the use of cash bail, and efforts to decriminalize poverty and race.

Caryn received a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from Washington College and has worked within state and local politics for over 10 years.

Moderator

Maureen Conway

Vice President, The Aspen Institute; Executive Director, Economic Opportunities Program

Maureen Conway serves as vice president at the Aspen Institute and as executive director of the Institute's Economic Opportunities Program (EOP). EOP works to expand individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity.

About

This webinar is the ninth in our [Job Quality in Practice webinar series](#). The Job Quality in Practice series is designed to support practitioners across fields – including workforce development, economic development, investing and lending, policy, worker advocacy, and business – to address job quality in their work. Webinars share updates on current conditions and priorities as well as actionable tools and approaches. We also seek to highlight leading practitioners' work and create connections across disciplines. We are grateful to Prudential Financial for its support of our Job Quality in Practice webinar series and our ongoing efforts to advance a job quality field of practice.

The [Economic Opportunities Program](#) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. [Follow us on social media](#) and [join our mailing list](#) to stay connected to our work, including events, publications, blog posts, and more.

Transcript

Maureen Conway (00:00:00)

Good afternoon and welcome. I'm Maureen Conway, vice president at the Aspen Institute and executive director of the Economic Opportunities Program. It's my pleasure to welcome you to today's conversation, "A Job Quality Agenda for Building Back Better: An Action Platform for 2021 and Beyond." This conversation is part of the Economic Opportunities Program's ongoing Job Quality in Practice discussion series, in which we explore practical ideas for improving the livelihoods and lives of working people all across the United States.

I want to thank Prudential Financial for their support of this series of webinars. I also want to thank Prudential Financial and the Ford Foundation for their support of our Job Quality Fellowship. In the Fellowship, we brought together two cohorts of Fellows and intentionally brought together innovators from diverse lines of work, from private business and public agencies, from labor unions and education institutions, from workforce development and economic development organizations, from community development finance institutions and more, and from diverse communities from all across the country; and we brought these Fellows together to discuss the challenges of job quality and practical strategies that they're involved in and that others can be involved in for improving jobs.

This group shares a belief in the central importance of job quality and a perspective that a variety of institutions and organizations can play a role to improve the quality of jobs. We don't need to accept jobs just as they are. They can be better, and we can all play a role in making them better. Today's event draws on conversations among these Fellows last fall about the role of federal policy in shaping labor markets and opportunities for jobs. The Fellows developed a shared statement on how policy can help, and I hope many in the audience had a chance to see that statement when we publicized it earlier this year, but my colleagues will share it in the chat for your review as well.

I'll note that we began this work on a policy agenda when we did not know who the next president would be. But two days ago, in his America United inaugural address, President Biden noted the common objects we as Americans love that define us as Americans, and he noted they were opportunity, security, liberty, dignity, respect, honor, and the truth. And I think we all do share those and they're very relevant to the work we've been doing in the Job Quality Fellowship.

For a truth that we have been grappling with in the Job Quality Fellowship is that too many jobs in the United States quite simply are not good jobs. They don't offer enough to live on with dignity, they don't provide people with security, and they don't provide people the freedom that they want to control their own lives and live lives they value. They leave too many people living in fear; fear of being fired or let go for events well beyond their control, fear of not being able to pay their bills, fear of being unable to care for their family. Building better jobs is a critical component of addressing the country's cascading crises that President Biden discussed and of building resilience so that we can withstand future crises.

So today I'm very excited that we have three of our Job Quality Fellows with us to talk about opportunities for a new administration and a new Congress to push forward a new set of policies to make work work for everyone. Now more than ever is a time to push for and invest in quality jobs. But before we start, I just want to do a very quick review of our technology. All attendees are muted. We very much welcome your questions. Please do use the Q&A box on the bottom of the Zoom window for questions. We're thrilled with the participation in today's event and we also will try to get to as many questions as possible, as well as the questions you sent us in advance in the registration.

I also encourage you to use the chat function to share comments and to share resources. We'll be sharing resources in the chat function. Please share your resources on job quality with us and with your

fellow attendees as well. We encourage you to tweet about this event. Our hashtag is #JobQuality. And 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 caption.

And I'm now going to turn to our speakers. There's bio information on our website, so I won't go into great detail. Please do take a look at their bios, they're terrific. Joining us today, we have Betsy Biemann, CEO of Coastal Enterprises, Inc, and she's from the 2017/2018 cohort of Fellows; Jose Corona, vice president, programs and partnerships at Stephen and Ayesha Curry's Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, he'll correct my pronunciation, also of the first Job Quality Fellows cohort; and Caryn York, CEO, Job Opportunities Task Force in Baltimore and in the 2018/2019 Job Quality Fellows cohort. Welcome to all three of you. Delighted you can join us today.

As mentioned, there's difference in perspectives, priorities and approaches held by the individual Fellows. But there was a strong consensus on the urgent need for action at the federal policy level to address job quality, and I think you'll see that reflected in the statement. And I just wanted to note that the agenda includes lots of different actions. There were lots of actions that we couldn't get to agreement on and they weren't included. So please do take a look at the statement.

But Caryn, let's just jump into our conversation and let's start with you. In Baltimore, Baltimore is a great city, I love Baltimore, but it has long suffered from high levels of income inequality and a concentration of women and people of color struggling with poverty or near poverty. And that was before the cascading crises of 2020 and the fallout for our economy. So, what do you see as a focus for action that would really make progress that matters for the communities that you work with? And also just if you could tell us a little bit about job opportunities, task force and how your work relates to job quality, that'd be great.

Caryn York (00:07:16)

Sure. Thank you Maureen for the question and of course for the opportunity to participate in this amazing discussion and to join my esteemed panelists, my fellow panelists and Fellows. Job Opportunities Task Force, JOTF is our acronym, our focus or our mission is to help low wage workers advance to high wage jobs, simply put. We focus on supporting programs and policies that increase access to skills, job opportunities, and higher wages. We do that using a three-pronged approach program development. We run a pre-apprenticeship construction training program that focuses very heavily on skill training in electrical, carpentry, and plumbing, but also focuses heavy on intensive case management. We administer and run the community bail fund for Baltimore City to ensure that individuals who are impoverished are not incarcerated due to their poverty.

Our programs then inform our second strategy, which is public policy advocacy, where we have success and a track record of advocating on behalf of a number of things that speak to job quality, particularly worker supports and benefits. So have been in the forefront of efforts to most recently pass the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act which allows for paid sick and safe leave for Maryland workers. We round our mission out with research in public education where we are providing research and statistical information and educating the public that includes policymakers but also business leaders and the general public. And so in our 25 years, in our past 25 years, our focus has always been job quality. Quick shout out to JOTF. This is our 25th anniversary. So always have to get it in when I can.

But back to the original question, Maureen, and it's a really good question. Of course a \$15 minimum wage is key, right? States have been pushing for this for years. But we're now at a point where we've realized that that's a great first step, but so much more is needed and what's needed really is access to quality jobs, good quality jobs, and quite honestly, a focus on barrier elimination. Again, as over our 25

year history, and especially now, JOTF, we are reminded that so much work remains in this space in terms of access to good quality jobs, regardless of race or place.

And in order to get to this idea of meaningful economic security and mobility, we have to take a holistic approach. We've seen the pandemic has devastated businesses, but especially workers, and particularly black workers and particularly black women. And as such, we've found a need for a greater focus on access to things like paid leave. Even though we may have existing laws, we're finding that they're woefully insufficient given that we've navigated a pandemic and many workers were shut out from being able to benefit from our existing leave laws.

We found a greater need to focus on higher wages. I know we're all familiar with when there was a need to really rely on unemployment insurance. There was this narrative around, "Oh, nobody wants to work because they make more on unemployment." We need to talk about the fact that folks weren't making enough in the first place. So the fact that unemployment is even a better option than regular wages, that's a completely different discussion that needs to be held.

And then of course there was a greater need and focus for elimination of those policies that are effectively criminalizing and penalizing many of our poor communities of color. And so, the real change that is required, it requires real work and it requires a holistic approach. I'm so happy that you raised Baltimore, my hometown town, town that I love. Baltimore stays in the news and it usually stays in the news because of all of the horrible metrics that is not particularly unique to Baltimore city but it's more so pronounced in Baltimore city.

I love Baltimore, born and raised and made it a choice to stay here. We're a beautiful city, vibrant, resilient, but the majority of our work force in this predominantly black city is struggling, whether they are unemployed or underemployed, and many of their challenges or opportunities are complicated by the fact that they have criminal records, and it's been this way for decades. And so, we've always known that there were structural inequities that existed, but the pandemic has exacerbated that making it very difficult to even ensure that folks get access to jobs, but especially good quality jobs.

And so, that's why there's such this urgent need for a conversation and real action around better jobs and more of them. It's not enough just to say we need more jobs to get folks into the workforce because we're finding, at least from my constituencies, they're not staying in the jobs. They're not able to sustain their employment because of all of the different barriers that they must navigate. But also we have to think about how many of these constituencies, how many of these workers are struggling with things that lead to stress, and stress that results from lack of finances, stress that results from health disparities, stress that results from lack of affordable housing and the like, all of which has been exacerbated by this pandemic. And so, the only way that we're really going to re-imagine what this whole thing called workforce looks like for the future is for us to make sure that we are prioritizing with fervor this idea of good quality jobs.

Maureen Conway (00:12:56)

Thank you, Caryn. That was amazing and that sort of just lays the foundation for I'm sure what we'll be talking about in the ways in which good quality jobs intersect with so many issues people care about from criminal justice reform to good health. And so, a lot there that we'll be coming back to. Betsy, let me come to you next. You're a state and national leader in the community development finance world, you have a vantage point from a state with a rural economy. How do you think about what's going on in Maine and the prospects for recovery? What are the key things you would emphasize from the job quality agenda relative to the kinds of work that you do every day?

Betsy Biemann (00:13:46)

Sure. Thank you. It's great to be part of this conversation today Maureen and Jose and Caryn. Just for a little context, Maine has lost more jobs on a percentage basis than it has in any recession in the last 50 years. Our economy, its structure is very much oriented to not only largely small business economy, but small businesses that require person to person contact like tourism and restaurants and small scale manufacturing. So as we've seen the pandemic and the economic downturn progress, some of our industries have fully bounced back but a number of those that I mentioned, plus sort of retail and services, workers have been displaced in significant numbers.

To give you a sense of scale, more than 100,000 non-farm jobs were lost early in the pandemic. And that was one in six jobs in the Maine economy, and employment is still 8% lower at the end of this past year than last February. And I think in addition, it's clear that the pandemic and the economic downturn are having the greatest impact on low wage workers and disproportionately on people of color and women. So to build back better, you need to build up quality and equity into the strategies pretty specifically.

And as you noted, Maureen, we sort of look at these issues from a rural and a small business perspective. We work with and finance micro and small businesses and sole proprietors and advocate for policies really to generate more broadly shared prosperity. And many of these small businesses are led by women, immigrants and refugees and rural entrepreneurs. Business owners who are often low income themselves, or certainly in those sort of low to moderate income range, in our work with them, we integrate a good jobs framework, which is not only including a living wage but basic benefits and a fair and engaging workplace with opportunities for scale building.

To give just a sense of scale, last year we worked with 120 companies representing a little over 1,700 workers. Over half of them paid a living wage to all frontline workers. Almost three quarters provided paid time off, just under half provided health insurance or benefits, and 90% provided access to skills training. And we find out with our teams how we can help these small businesses boost the quality of their jobs in ways that also decreases employee turnover, increases worker productivity, and ultimately sort of contributes to those businesses being profitable and sustainable.

So for those of you on the call who work with much or think about or partner with or regulate much larger companies, these numbers may be very unimpressive. You may be concerned as we are that not more of them provide a living wage. But when you think about who they are, they're a baker, a woman who has started a home-based childcare program, an immigrant who started a painting and carpentry business. They often don't have the expertise to know how to improve the quality of their jobs on their own or even evaluate whether a fintech lender, their interest rate is reasonable or not. And they are also, as I said, often low and moderate income themselves. So we work with them to help them raise the quality of the job for their one or two employees or their 10 employees. And I've actually found that those improvements can help their enterprise be more sustainable.

When I looked at the job quality agenda that the Fellows all came up with, certainly job quality standards are I think... A number of them listed there are really important, whether it's access to health insurance through a plan or a stipend or access to savings and retirement plans, the public procurement standards. Those I think are all very important steps to take. I think our perspective brings to it that it's not enough to set the standards but we need to be helping small businesses meet the standards because in a state like Maine and many states across the country, more than half of people actually work in small businesses.

The last thing I would just say is that there may be some great lessons from state policies around job quality that have been bubbling up over the last five years or so. Maine has increased our minimum wage progressively over the last four or five years from \$7.50 to \$12.15 an hour, and it's now going up

linked to inflation, and we just enacted a paid leave law where all workers and businesses, I think, with over 10 employees will earn an hour of paid leave for every 40 hours worked. And that doesn't have to be for medical. It's really, it's for the purpose of that employee needs. And I think all of us understand the importance today of if you think you might be sick or that someone in your family might be sick, having that paid leave would be critical.

Last thing I would just say is, two things not on the agenda that I'd say from our perspective are important is that with the dislocations in the economy, a greater number of people will need to probably change jobs or even change employment from one industry to another and they're going to need access to skills training and credentials that are valued in the workplace. So increasing investment in apprenticeships and job training. But also I think with the wrenching changes in the economy, employers will need to access capital and business change expertise and entrepreneurial people who see new market opportunities as restaurants change, as we need more technology of different kinds, et cetera, will need capital and business advice to start new companies that will be able to employ people who have lost their job in the downturn. I'll stop there. I've probably gone on too long.

Maureen Conway (00:20:29)

No, that was great. That was great. I really appreciate you sort of bringing all of that, and particularly sort of the perspective of small businesses, because I think there's a lot of complexity in sort of bringing a job quality agenda with small businesses, particularly in this time when small businesses are struggling, but it's sort of... I appreciate your sort of saying it's not sort of a zero sum kind of conversation, that there's ways that it can be done that strengthen the business, but there's a lot of complexity to that and we really need to kind of think that through. So I really appreciate that.

Jose, let's come to you next. Again, a very different kind of place that you hail from coming from the Bay Area, which is a different kind of a city, certainly not rural. So just it would be great for you to sort of share with us a little bit kind of both what you see as the... You have been sort of a key advisor to Oakland's mayor and now you have a different kind of a work that you're doing at the foundation, and sort of from the perspectives that you bring to this conversation, what you see as one of the key parts of the agenda, and just in general how you see job quality kind of playing out right now where you are.

Jose Corona (00:21:49)

Yeah. Thank you, Maureen. Thank you to the Aspen Institute for having me participate today. I've been following a little bit of the chat and I see a lot of old and new friends from the past. And so it's good to see you all everywhere from Brooklyn, my hometown, to all over the country. So welcome and glad you chose to spend your time with us today.

You're right, I've primarily been on a path of working with small business economic opportunity workforce development in my past. And now being with Stephen and Ayesha Curry's Foundation, Eat Learn Play, that's really focused on the three pillars that we believe create a healthy, wholesome child, which is access to nutrition and education, pursued quality education, and access to safe, healthy places for young people to be healthy and active and leveling the playing field around access to sports.

So even though my current role may seem very different than my past, I am still the same Jose with the same values, and I always try to bring my perspective and my path in life, which has always been focused on bringing and creating and opening up opportunities for people that don't have them, and I'm doing so in this capacity. And even though when I focused on job quality or workforce, we're finding out ways to really integrate, that we have to start from very young ages, young people, to shape their minds and passions around how they want to proceed in life, and especially in a region like the Bay

Area, which is historically traditionally known as a tech hub that produces tech talent and produces a lot of wealth in those industries, we know that not everybody benefits from that wealth.

Even in my home in town from Oakland, California, where you might be living in Oakland and there are some great tech companies that are living in Oakland, you might be living blocks away from that company but you're thousands of miles away from that opportunity of accessing a job there. And I think it starts by how we help prepare young people to access those jobs.

I think there's also, the barrier is really known for just the wealth creation and innovation that comes out of here. But when you look at it and you look at certain industries, not all industries are thriving. As Betsy was describing, if you're a small business, if you're a childcare owner or a childcare provider, you've seen through this pandemic that your work as a childcare center or as a childcare owner is hugely valuable. And even all those people that work in these tech centers, now that they're finding themselves working from home, finding themselves be their own childcare for their sons or daughters, they've seen firsthand the importance of that work.

And I think right now we're ripe to ask that question, what do we value in work? What do we value in the industries? Historically, childcare providers have not been well compensated. And this is just one example, one industry that I'm talking about, but it extends to grocery workers, to restaurant workers, to so many of the small business owners that actually more people, as Betsy probably knows and can cite the stats better than I can, more people work at small businesses than large businesses in this country. But those are the ones that are more adversely affected.

So for me, the way I look at it is figuring out, what does it mean to have a quality job? It goes beyond a living wage. It goes beyond the benefits. It goes beyond the safety environment. It really goes to the issue of agency, can I bring my whole self to this job and do I feel empowered to be in this job? A dignity, which is, am I respected in my job? Do people value my work and my contributions to the work?

I know these are kind of idealistic, but you can't just be... As Caryn said, it's a good start with wage and if we're going to improve the minimum wage to \$15, that's great, but not sufficient. We've got to go beyond that and really look at the issue of wealth creation. How are we helping individuals build wealth? So as you look at how we see this as an opportunity to foundation business, small businesses have been really effective and the great thing that I've been seeing in the city of Oakland that... I also co-chair the Mayor's Economic Recovery Advisory Council and one of the things that came up is that a lot of these small businesses have seen the value that they add and the value that their employees add to their own business, so that I'm seeing them thinking and talking about how they transition to ESOP models, employee stock ownership, to co-ops so that in the future not only the business owner benefits from the business, but actually the employees too.

So we have to really look at downstream of how everybody benefits from the economic opportunity that's created. So whether you're in tech or you're working at a retail industry, we have to really look, and as a society I think we have to look at the value of the work. What do we value and is there equity in that value? Just because someone is a retail worker and working in the grocery store doesn't mean that their work or contributions to society and the economy are less than a tech worker that's bringing out innovations like a Zoom, for example. So I think we need to be very mindful now about how do we value work and the quality of that work comes with it.

Maureen Conway (00:28:00)

Yeah. Thank you, Jose. That's terrific. Our audience is already giving us great and amazing question, so I'm going to follow up with you actually on one of them because I appreciate sort of how you laid out what job quality is in that it goes beyond wages and benefits, and to bring in some of these values and

sort of agency and people sort of being respected for their work and feeling that they have control and are able to contribute. One of the questions from our audience was about sort of is job quality in some sense at odds with capitalism. We've talked about sort of how it can work to support business success as well as be good for the worker, but is that right or is there something at odds? How would you address that question? I'm going to Jose first, but Betsy and Caryn, you can of course chime in.

Jose Corona (00:29:05)

Yeah. I think it kind of goes with what I was saying earlier, which is... Well, first of all, the short answer is I don't think it's at odds with capitalism. I think that if business wants to build wealth for everybody, for all to benefit; when the lowest paid worker benefits from that economic opportunity, everybody benefits. Whether CEOs or executives want to see that or not, that's on them. So if they want to see the value of how they're creating a better workplace and better opportunities for all of their employees up and down the chain of their organizational structure, then it's really on them. If they don't see the benefits of why a low wage worker and improving their health or the quality of their job is important, then shame on them actually.

And I think that when you look at capitalism, the extreme of it is that they want to keep wages low because the executives or the shareholders, if it's a public company, they just want to accumulate more wealth for themselves and for their own, and that's why we have these huge disparities because I don't think we're seeing everybody benefiting. And I think it's a huge values misalignment and I think it's an opportunity for not only young people but just for workers in general to speak up and to really, in their own way, express the value that they bring to this organization or company.

But it really takes a big culture shift in capitalism to have everybody benefit, and that change admittedly is going to be really, really hard, but I'm optimistic that it can happen. It's going to take a long time and it may become expensive, and everybody from government to philanthropy, to the private sector, to the nonprofit sector, they all have to do their part. So it's a collaborative effort that gets to the idealistic world of how everybody benefits and how we're all equal and how we benefit equal and how all of our work is valued equally. But it takes a concerted effort and it'll be a feat in and of itself, but I think it can be done. But again, if you think that improving job quality and capitalism as at odds, I think you really need to look in the mirror and really think about what values you want to live in your life.

Maureen Conway (00:31:54)

Yeah. And Jose, I really appreciate how you sort of talked about this issue of amassing wealth versus allowing more workers the opportunities to build wealth. It just reminded me of a conversation we had with Nick Hanauer when he basically said the problem is like in monopoly, when one person has all the money, the game is over. So if we want to keep things going, that can't be the end that we get to. Caryn, I see you've unmuted yourself, so I'm guessing you have something to say to this. I also wanted to say that I wanted to throw another question your way so you can say something to this, but also there's been a question about the benefits cliff and whether there are strategies to avoid the benefits cliff when you're addressing job quality, sort of in that as you push wages up, do people fall up for benefits cliff, then what do we do about that? And I thought you might have perspective on that as well. So, now you have two questions.

Caryn York (00:32:53)

Sure. Thank you. One answer to both questions that I'll start off with is when it comes to access to benefits, when it comes to good quality jobs, when it comes to whether or not someone shouldn't have

to risk their paycheck or their job because they got sick, we only really have this conversation and feel like the sky is going to fall when we're talking about poor folks. Let's just keep it all the way real because that's what it comes down to. And just segueing into the benefits cliff conversation, what we're navigating right now is having to constantly prove how poor someone is in order for them to get basic level rights and services.

And so, just to piggyback off of Jose's comment around this idea that when it comes to the shareholders and just kind of focusing on their needs, when it comes to the shareholders and the CEOs and all of those folks, we're not having conversations about good quality jobs because they already have them. They don't have to worry about whether or not we just will be lost if they get sick. They don't have to worry about challenges if they lose their job and being able to navigate an unemployment insurance system and all of that. Like that's not a thing for them.

Yet but when it comes to the folks who need it most and who are going to be the least likely to be able to navigate and overcome even one month's loss of wages, or even before one month's loss of wages, just like a week's worth of wages, then it's like, "We have to pay them? You mean to tell me that they can earn sick leave and they get sick and they don't have to come into work? What world is this?" Socialism, that's literally what's happening here. And it's extremely frustrating because these are the individuals who, they're not asking for a handout, even when it comes to the benefits cliff.

When we even talk about access to benefits and being able to allow folks to stack benefits, we're not talking about folks being able to roll in the dough, like they're just going to be making it rain on everyone with temporary cash assistance and all that. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about folks who need these benefits in order to live. And let's be clear, many of the individuals don't even want the government support. They want to be able to have that step up so that they can be self-sufficient. And so this idea that, "Oh my goodness, we can't give them too many benefits." What? How is that even a thing?

It's actually very frustrating and borderline offensive to even have to engage in conversations that all of us are going to experience, but we experience it at different levels. And so I refuse to even accept this idea that job quality goes against capitalism. I mean, first of all, just the idea around capitalism in 2021 and beyond, I mean, that's a totally different conversation. But we're not even there yet in terms of grasping the idea of job quality. I mean, there are so many folks that even when we talk about workforce development, they don't really know what workforce development is. They'll say things like we need more money for workforce development. Our workforce agencies should be doing more.

And then you realize that your workforce agencies are actually woefully underfunded. You realize that you're woefully underfunding your department of human services and the like outside of what is already being provided by the federal government. And so, what is required now is a reframing and a re-imagining of our expectations of each other, of our expectations of our systems. And really start to push the needle on this fact that outside of a pandemic, folks could barely get by. We've seen what a pandemic has done to folks in terms of jobs, in terms of food access. Come on now, it wasn't just folks who were on the bottom of the bare horrible, an example. We saw many who would qualify as middle-class workers and families that were having to stand in these long lines for boxes of food.

Childcare, that's a whole other webinar that we're going to have to talk about. We're going to have to just do that one solely dedicated to that one. Affordable housing. Evictions, really? Do we really need to have a conversation about evicting folks in a pandemic when they've lost their jobs? I mean, or you had folks that were like, "Well, if we're not going to evict them, maybe we'll just raise the rent." What? Then that means they're going to be evicted. And so all of these things tie into this idea of good quality jobs and how can we ensure that folks are able to support themselves and their families safely. But in a way that also contributes to what we like to give lip service to but in no way, shape or form have we

ensured that is realized to every resident in the United States of America, and that's that thing called the American Dream.

Maureen Conway (00:38:05)

Yeah. Thank you. That was great. I love that you're sort of talking about really job quality is fundamentally how we choose to treat each other. And yeah, I couldn't agree more. And also I have to say that just matches my experience in having done many, many focus groups with people who are trying to go to various training programs and think to get to work. They really do want to earn their living and sort of the idea that they don't just is-

Caryn York (00:38:35)

Offensive.

Maureen Conway (00:38:37)

... is not doing them justice for sure. Betsy, I want to come to you with a question that's been upvoted many times, so good job audience using the Q&A upvote. What would you say to critics, especially policymakers, who argue that businesses can't afford to improve job quality right now but should only seek to preserve jobs. And of course, others can comment on this claim as well, but I'll let you start Betsy.

Betsy Biemann (00:39:04)

One response is, and this would be both before the pandemic as well as during the pandemic is that we have found in working with small business owners that there frequently are steps that they can take that improves both the quality of the jobs that they are offering or growing as well as the profitability and success of the company. That one doesn't need to look at these as separate issues. And we are, now that we started a couple years ago to track data on the businesses that we work with and that we invest in, and interestingly, for example, with our venture fund investments we've seen that if you, and it's correlative, it's not necessarily causation but having the data is the start, it shows that those companies in our portfolio that either were providing higher wage jobs or improving the quality of their jobs actually had higher growth in revenues than those companies that did not.

So we're starting to sort of look to build a foundation of data and evidence that investing in your employees and having good quality jobs can improve the prospects for your business and increase revenues and profits. That to do that in a way that proves causation, as folks know, it takes time and data and analysis, but we're being very careful and methodical in collecting that data and showing that.

And I guess the other one, and this might get us sort of down to some of the next part of the conversation is that I think especially from a rural and small business state's perspective, a state that has lower than average GDP growth, lower than average wages, that it's really important to situate the conversation about job quality in a broader sort of strategic and sort of equitable approach to economic recovery. That in order to have an economy that can provide higher wages and better quality jobs, we need to be making investments in innovation and entrepreneurship as well as the sort of social infrastructure that needs to support businesses, whether it's investing in access to affordable and good quality childcare, investing in broadband internet access, investing in affordable housing, et cetera. That we shouldn't be forcing all of the "costs" on small businesses when we have a sort of eroding safety net and ecosystem within which these small businesses are operating.

Maureen Conway (00:42:07)

Yeah. Great. I just want to comment on the evidence point because I know a lot of people that worked sort of on this, and we've actually worked on this looking specifically at small manufacturers and did a report showing that in fact the ones that are attentive to job design do better. There are complexities and proving causality is very hard, but we can see how those mechanisms work within organizations. Did you want to say something else on that point?

Betsy Biemann (00:42:40)

Yeah, I'd say one other thing is that a lot of these things don't cost much money or don't cost any money. I mean, Jose said, treating people with dignity is not expensive. Providing people with two weeks of notice for their schedule reduces cost and stress for low-income families and most likely costs a negligible amount or nothing. Having at least a performance review conversation at least once a year doesn't cost much money. But again, they are ways of ensuring that there's a fair and engaging workplace with folks able to work as not in a way that they're considered sort of part of the machinery, but they are humans and family members and community members like everyone in the business.

So that's just another point that there's often a bit of a false dichotomy or a zero sum game kind of framing even around, as we all know, around wage levels. If we raise wages, we're going to go out of business. Well, we've seen, as I mentioned, Maine has significantly increased our minimum wage over the last five years, and yes, it took place during a period of time when the economy was successively doing better overall, obviously not necessarily for all members of the economy. But it is all of the sky is falling, half of our businesses will have to close if we raise our minimum wage, none of that materialized.

Maureen Conway (00:44:27)

Yeah. Great. On the sort of minimum wage and regulatory things, I'm going to go to this question which is, what role do you see for legislative and organizing efforts to improve job quality? Both routes can be effective, but it seems to me that legislating labor standards can potentially reach more workers, but doesn't necessarily build their power in the workplace. So that's one of the questions that got several votes in, and I'm wondering if you all could comment both on sort of legislative advocacy as well as your view on sort of worker organizing. Are those things in opposition to each other, complimentary, and what you see as the role of those.

Caryn York (00:45:11)

I'll start. I believe that they are absolutely necessary and complimentary. I contribute the majority of my success as both a policy advocate prior to me being CEO, but also just the larger success of the organization that I lead, JOTF, to this idea of being intentional with aligning and connecting, or better yet ensuring that our legislative advocacy is both informed and influenced and even led by workers organizing. Because the issues that we're pushing, they are not issues that elicit a ton of sympathy. And quite honestly, these are folks who are not contributing to campaigns. You very quickly hear, well, they don't vote. Well, yeah, they probably don't vote, well, some may not vote because they have a conviction that's preventing them from voting, but that's a whole other thing. But some also probably are not voting because you have not given them a reason to vote.

And so while I'm not discouraging folks from voting, there's some serious voter apathy that we just have to acknowledge. And so when talking to our policymakers, when it comes to really being able to frame this idea around job quality, because it's difficult. I can't be naive or try to mislead and say that it's an easy thing and bridges can just slide on through and get it done. No, it's very, very difficult. It's tricky. It

requires you to inundate your policymakers with real stories, real experiences of how the existing policies are actually impacting folks in real life, real time, and how it's just not working. And then this is what you should be doing to ensure that we're actually doing what you're telling your constituents that you're going to do when you're not in the legislature trying to pass laws that actually don't benefit them.

So it's real experience mixed with research. You got to have numbers, you got to have data, you got to be able to prove trends and be able to show not just the impact on workers, but also the impact on businesses. When JOTF talks about our constituency, when we talk about public education, it's not just about educating and advocating on behalf of workers, we have to educate and advocate on behalf of businesses. Why? Because businesses are going to hire our folks. So if I'm training folks, I want to make sure that I'm training according to what you need, and that we're going to ensure that this is going to be a true partnership that actually works for folks. And so how do you approach research with a different lens that you can attach to your legislative advocacy using those real experiences from workers.

And the third prong, I know we don't want to hear it but it's just a thing that you might want to do or consider, and it's just sometimes you just have to do a little bit of stalking of your legislators, legally, a bunch of shaming of them, and it's going to take awhile. It's going to take all of these things because we're not going to really see any movement on real job quality without investing and educating in our small businesses and businesses for them to even adapt and embrace this idea. But also laws have to change, right? We know that things really happen in our courthouses and our state houses.

And so, the fact that we in Maryland have to go all the way to Annapolis to beg our legislators, "Can we please have sick leave so we don't lose our job if we get sick." In Baltimore City, the majority of our issues are handled at the state level. So we have individuals outside of Baltimore City that get to make decisions regarding what happens in Baltimore City, right? And the residents of Baltimore City many times tend to be struggling the most in terms of residents in the city or in the state. And so I just, I can't imagine, I can't see how you can advance successful legislative advocacy without being creative, innovative, and intentional with your organizing efforts.

Maureen Conway (00:49:18)

Great, thanks Caryn. I see, Jose, you have unmuted yourself, so I'll just go to you.

Jose Corona (00:49:25)

From now on I'm just going to say, ditto to what Caryn said. Amazing. No, no. So everything that she said, and the other thing that I would add to that would be that we can't divorce our organizing and legislative push just on the issue of jobs. You have to marry it with advocacy around issues of housing and healthcare, things like that because I don't know if you've all heard of the book that's out called *The Color of Law*, and how housing decisions were actually made intentionally to segregate communities, and a big part of that was to segregate people from accessing good jobs.

So when at the federal level, state level, or even local level, your policy makers are making city planning decisions that affect access to affordable housing or how it affects you moving further away and spending that money in transportation for a crappy job in the city, it just it's all connected. So when we're thinking about our legislative policies and approaches, it just can't be around the job and the wages. What we think right now is just job quality; housing, healthcare, and other issue areas need to be taken into consideration. And I think it starts with holding your local policymakers accountable on how they make city planning, city bloating, land use planning decisions of where they're going to put their housing, where they're going to put the work centers.

And I think it also brings it to how we bring worker hubs to rural areas. I am a son of farmers. I grew up in a farming community called Watsonville, California, and farmers are another issue that I think we could have another webinar around job quality for farmers and work for farmers. So I think that's another, but my point there is that we have to also think about how we connect rural communities to these job centers by bringing those work hubs to them or making it easier for them to access; whether again it's transportation decisions, infrastructure improvements, and investments. So my point is we have to invest in different efforts around different policies as well.

Maureen Conway (00:51:48)

Yeah. Great. I love that. And I'm going to go to this next question because it's also on a topic that I think is so important. It brings up these issues of narratives and sort of the narratives that we have about different things and why they are, and that have us accept them rather than question those narratives and sort of interrogate the narratives and what does that mean for... If we shift those narratives, how does that create space for us to shift our practices and to shift our expectations for better. Anyway, I love these narrative questions. This one is specifically, are there strategies that combine advocacy and narrative change efforts to lift up Black and Brown workers as valuable assets to businesses? I'll ask all of you to weigh in on this and Betsy, I think I'd ask you to also think about what are the narratives we have about rural areas and rural opportunities in this as well. Caryn, do you want to start?

Caryn York (00:52:47)

Sure. I think it's important to acknowledge and recognize that before can even talk about changing the narrative for Black and Brown workers within the workforce space, we have to acknowledge that there is a very strong negative narrative of these populations that exists just in general. And so being able to even have the conversation about providing quality jobs to workers who identify as Black and Brown, before I even get to that, I have to navigate through these narratives of, do they want to work? If there's any interaction with the criminal justice system, of course there is just a ton of images and narratives that come with that. Not realizing that many of our individuals are being criminalized and penalized because they're poor, whether it's the cash bail system, child support, unaffordable auto insurance.

We have individuals who are finding that even their interactions with the criminal justice system as a result of their race and ethnicity is then leading to complications in their immigration proceedings, which then of course exacerbates any type of workforce opportunities that you're trying to navigate. And so I say all this to say that I just want to make sure that we're really clear about the different narratives that we have to peel away about this particular population before we can even talk about something like job quality.

And so because of that and because we don't have much time and the attention span of many of our policymakers are like, you kind of have to do it all at once. And so for myself who is a Black woman born and raised in Baltimore, many of the challenges that I advocate on behalf of family, friends, my own hood, see it every day. So I can't talk about or I can't try to change the narrative around why this particular population needs special access to job qualities without dismantling or just simply trying to undo the very offensive, disgusting narrative that is framed for this population in and of itself.

So I got to combine it, I got to do it all at once. I got to make sure that I'm saying things like, no one's asking for a handout. We're not telling you to put Black and Brown workers at the front of the line. We're just saying, "Can they get in line? Can they, I mean, at least be able to be competitive with other folks?" I mean, how do we... Just being able to get folks to that point of thinking that, yes, there are differences due to, yes, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation and all of these different things, but we are all the same. We want to work. We want to be able to support our families. We want to be able to play recreationally and all of these things.

We're not so different; and no, if you pay us good wages, no, we're not going to all of a sudden just go out and spend all of our money on whatever you think we shouldn't be spending our money on but we can't question you on what you're spending your money on. When it comes to benefits and trying to determine what someone should be spending their food stamps on or their temporary cash assistance on, thinking about just requiring drug testing and all of these different barriers and work requirements to just be able to get the bare level of service. All of this is specific to this narrative that we have of Black and Brown communities that have existed for decades, actually hundreds of years. And so, just being able to unravel that, you got to kind of do it all together in order to even get to the idea of job quality unfortunately.

Maureen Conway (00:56:47)

Betsy, did you want to come in on the rural side?

Betsy Biemann (00:56:49)

Yeah. I mean, as a CDFI, we see our advocacy work as really being driven I think by our mission and by what we're learning from our practice. So what we're learning from the entrepreneurs we work with and the folks who work in the small businesses we work with, and it enables us to have, I'd say, a powerful and respected voice at the state level.

Maureen Conway (00:57:22)

Can I stop you for just one second because I see in the chat the question of, what is a CDFI?

Betsy Biemann (00:57:28)

Oh, sorry. A community development financial institution. It's a maybe slightly unwieldy acronym. I always say you can't build a movement around an acronym. But really we are mission-driven community development investors and we primarily serve those small businesses and community organizations that are underserved by the sort of traditional financing and support ecosystem. But because in a small business state, the fact that we have 400 small business loans in our loan portfolio and the fact that we coach and advise over around 2,000 entrepreneurs a year sort of directly, that's big in a small state. And so we're often invited into policy networks and conversations to bring that expertise and we bring with it our determination around our mission.

Just as two examples, I was appointed to the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee in May and brought the voice of our mission and from working with many refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs, many women entrepreneurs and obviously rural entrepreneurs, to those conversations. And my colleague, Keith Bisson, is serving on the Permanent Commission of the Status of Racial and Indigenous populations in Maine, which is looking at all of... Not all but investigated or interrogated a long list of bills that were in the most recent legislature that sort of got halted by the pandemic, to identify were they equity building bills or were there aspects of those bills that needed to be changed because they were either sustaining an inequitable system or sustaining barriers that prevent people from moving forward.

So we were able to sort of amplify or play a role in those conversations bringing our mission and bringing the lessons that we're learning from, frankly, four decades of work in these communities. I could say more, but...

Maureen Conway (01:00:19)

Great. I see that we're... Let's see. Okay. I'm going to ask one more question about employers, which is how do you balance meeting employers where they are with their job quality efforts with being able to say no to employers? And I think what this question is getting at a little bit is something that we have not really brought up that much in terms of the work that you all do, which is some of the power dynamics, right? A lot of times employers are sort of the more powerful members of a community. So when you're trying to work with employers to improve job quality, sort of what's your way of sort of setting some standards, I guess, would really be kind of the question.

Betsy Biemann (01:01:17)

I mean, we use the fact that we are an investor to leverage those relationships. I think I mentioned we have stood up about four venture capital funds over the last 20+ years and when we make an investment in a business, they are typically signing what we call an employment training agreement or a social agreement where they are committing to make best efforts to ensure that a certain proportion of the new jobs that our capital is enabling them to create will be filled by people with low and moderate incomes. And so when they first meet us, whether through with venture capital or small business lending, they know that we care about job quality and they know that we care about building wealth and for folks to advance in their careers, so it's not a surprise.

And having an agreement like that, which we don't have with every company, it needs to be a company that has a significant relationship with us. But if they're not living up to that goal, it's an opportunity to sit down and have a conversation and see, how can we help you be successful at achieving this milestone? So I'd say that's leveraging an investor relationship, or even frankly an advisory relationship where we're bringing information and expertise that they're seeing can have value for their small business certainly is a way of getting cooperation from small businesses, obviously very different than working with large corporations.

Maureen Conway (01:03:13)

Jose?

Jose Corona (01:03:14)

Yeah. I would say the other thing that government is also an employer, and I think one of the things that government has is the choice of purchasing. And I know this is something that we were talking to Mark Popovich when I was at the mayor's office around how we integrate job quality assessments in our purchasing decisions when we're purchasing from different suppliers, whether it's printing or procuring different kinds of services, how we build in job quality standards into those decisions and asking questions in the RFP process around how do they treat employees, what's the pay structure, what's the organizational structure? Things like that that go into supporting the job quality but also build into that a big emphasis on prioritizing businesses and suppliers owned by a woman and people of color.

So we were very intentional and we were right on the cusp of doing it when I left the mayor's office. And I think we worked with health and human services on a contract that we bid it out using that. So Mark, if you're listening, I know you'd be happy to know that that was implemented. More to come to that, governments have the power of the purse on making purchasing decisions on that.

I think the other thing around employers, and I'll cite another local example, Kaiser Permanente, a healthcare company here in the Bay Area that has done a really good job of really looking at and identifying value versus cost. Most employers bid out their procurement based on the cheapest contract or the cheapest service that they can get. And I think what Kaiser has done well and how they're looking at their supply chain is looking at the value, again, prioritizing small businesses in carving out certain contracts that are targeted to minority-owned businesses and women-owned businesses, and within that building in terms of quality standards and job quality standards. I think there's examples out there, and I would cite Kaiser Permanente as one of them that has done that really well.

Those are only some examples, but I think it's really kind of the... Again, it's how do we use examples of big corporations like that; and instead of us, organizers and people that believe in this, advocating to other businesses, is how do we get Greg Adams, the CEO of Kaiser Permanente, advocating for how they're doing things to other CEOs. So it becomes a peer to peer almost pressure because we know it takes that, it takes the organizing, it takes the peer to peer support and it takes legislative action. So how do we triage that effectively and in a coordinated way to actually get that work done.

Maureen Conway (01:06:14)

Great. Thank you, Jose. I love that you brought up so many of the different sort of levers to create change in that. And also the way that institutions, it's not just private companies that are employers or purchasers. But we all have employees and we can think about their job quality and we all interact, have market-based interactions, and we can think about how view them with a job quality lens.

I see we're coming to the end of our time and I wanted to just ask you all basically sort of a future looking question a little bit, which is we started with a conversation about we have a new administration, we're hoping that they will center job quality in their policy agenda in a variety of ways. And I just wanted to ask you each to sort of speak to what's your sort of big hope for a change at the federal level in terms of what you think would have the most impact in improving job quality. And then if you have sort of anything. We have a terrific audience here. If you have any sort of piece of advice you'd want to share with them about what they can do to advance job quality in their communities. So, I will let you... Caryn, you're unmuted, do you want to go first?

Caryn York (01:07:36)

Oh, sure. I didn't realize I was on mute but I'm ready. Hope. I have so many hopes for the future. We have a new administration nationally but also in Baltimore we have a new mayor. He's a young mayor and he's one that gets it. But many times it doesn't matter who the new face is. They're going up against systems and these systems are based on profits. And many times those profits require certain constituencies to go without or certain constituencies to be exploited to the benefit of others.

And so another administration, looking ahead, what's the future going to look like? Whether it's just economic opportunity in general or whether we're talking about something more specific like job quality, there are a number of things to want to hope for and hope to see in our new administration. But for me, both personally and professionally, it is past time, so overdue for any approach to economic development, community development, workforce development, economic justice. It must be led with and it must from the very core reflect and use a racial equity lens. Our essential workers, we found overwhelmingly people of color; underpaid, low wages. This isn't new information. So it's past time for us to keep saying racial equity trainings and start applying a racial equity lens to our policy making.

That should also extend to our procurement laws when it comes for our businesses. Many times when you have companies, especially in construction, and they want to be able to compete for these larger

projects. And in many times especially, employers of color are going to be more likely to hire from the community. They're going to be more likely to hire people of color.

The difficulties that they face in just navigating procurement law and the licensing challenges and all of the different barriers that quite honestly if you're a larger, more established, white-led, white-owned entity, you can navigate those a lot easier. You can kind of eat those costs, whereas for businesses and entities that are owned by Black and Brown individuals, they are less likely to be able to forego loss of credit or lack of access to many of these opportunities. There's no hope in change and feeling good if we are not giving real attention and intention to applying a racial equity lens to everything we do when it comes to economics.

Maureen Conway (01:10:51)

Great. Thank you. Betsy?

Betsy Biemann (01:10:57)

Sure. Well I guess, I mean, my first hope, and it's almost, I mean, it's obvious, is that we get this pandemic behind us because we cannot fully recover our economic vibrancy if people are afraid for their health, if people have to be pulling their kids in and out of schools, if frontline workers are afraid for their health every day when they're going to work. So, I think that is the first one, and it's great to have an administration that is looking at being strategic and leveraging everything the federal government can do to make sure that that happens quickly.

Guess that secondly I would hope that we could build job quality into the many initiatives that we're likely to see in these infrastructure investments that perhaps we will see in the transition to a green economy and that it should not only be job quality but the investment in workers to enable them to be securing a decent livelihood and advancing in their careers. So building that in. And I guess if I didn't say that explicitly, doing that, as Caryn talked about, by applying a racial equity lens will be very important to do it in a way that is successful. So we will need to do that.

Finally, especially for I'd say the rural regions of our country, I think we can only be successful if that is also done within investing in innovation and entrepreneurship and those broader sort of social infrastructure like childcare and broadband internet access. That without making those kinds of investments, we won't see higher wages, we won't see the kind of multiplier effect that you get from those types of investments. And they will be by definition incomplete because if folks don't have access to childcare, they will not be able to fully participate. And so we won't have the benefit of sort of tapping all of the talent in this country and of folks who are coming in later years to this country in that effort.

Maureen Conway (01:13:37)

Jose?

Jose Corona (01:13:38)

Thanks again for having me. I'll be quick because I know we're running out of time. I would say three things. One, let's not forget about our youth. And maybe it's because I'm more close to them right now in the work that we do. I think one of the things that we should be working towards is helping them ignite

their passion and their creativity and turning that into opportunity, whether it's economic or social or both, or how do you even marry that. But I think our youth, I mean, we often say it, they're our future and they really are and I really believe in them, so we shouldn't leave them out of the conversation. They're a big part of how we're going to shape our future.

And second to that is igniting that creativity and passion. Let's really be objective about it. Whether they want to be an artist or a writer or a plumber or a retail worker or a tech worker, we have to support in that and we have to value that passion and that work equally. So just because they want to be an artist doesn't mean they're not the future of work. So we have to be really careful about how we define the future of work. Often it's really couched as code for tech or artificial intelligence or things like that, but the future of work is everything around us. So we should be expansive. My advice to them, whether there's government workers in the Biden administration or any administration, is when they talk and convene task forces around the future of work, that it's not all tech, because that's what we just become really narrow in our thinking. It has to be really expansive and it has to be diverse in all levels.

I think that the final thing that I would say for all of us to think about is that as we're tackling whatever problem we're trying to solve, individually or collectively, be clear about what problem it is we're trying to solve. And at the same time, let's not try to boil the ocean because it becomes impossible. Let's pick five ponds that we want to warm up and shine light on and do very specific things that will then, if we find five ponds that turns into 10 ponds that turn into 500 ponds, it does start to become the ocean. So we have to be patient, we have to be thoughtful, but we have to be very intentional and we have to approach all this with a sense of urgency.

Maureen Conway (01:16:01)

Thank you. That's terrific and that's perfect for a transition to how I wanted to close, which was with the words of an amazing young person who I think blew us all away on Wednesday, Amanda Gorman, who is an artist, and just the final words of her poem, "For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it." I share that with my thanks to my brave Job Quality Fellows who show up to work every day with the courage of their convictions, to my fabulous Economic Opportunities Program colleagues who helped me put this together, and a particular shout out to Mark Popovich, who is my partner in all the Job Quality Fellows work, and with gratitude and thanks to everybody in our audience for your tremendous participation in today's conversation and for joining us today. Thank you all for participating in this conversation and for being part of trying to build quality jobs. I hope you join us again next time. Thank you.

Betsy Biemann (01:17:14)

Thank you.