



A Workers' Bill of Rights: What We Want and How to Get There – Transcript

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

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Description

Work just isn't what it used to be. New technology, increased global competition and trade, the growth of gig work, shifting demographics, the rise of shareholder capitalism, and other factors have reshaped work, economic opportunity, and the employee-employer relationship. In contrast, our system of labor laws has changed very little. Laws designed decades ago have proved inadequate to protecting workers' well-being in this altered context and the outcomes for many working people across the US have been devastating. Despite an increasingly productive economy, wages have flatlined in recent decades and union representation has fallen dramatically. Too many jobs provide compensation that is insufficient to meet basic living expenses, offer few opportunities for growth and economic advancement, and afford no system through which working people can address problems in their workplace, leaving too many hardworking people feeling disrespected and disposable. These conditions contradict ideals of individual freedom, equity, equal opportunity, and the American Dream.

But workers are not sitting idly by. A new generation of worker organizers is now demanding better. Workers organizing against unsafe and low paid work led to a sweeping set of worker protections and rights being passed in the 1930s. Those laws, that collectively became known as a workers' constitution, represented a first step towards a workers' bill of rights. Will today's efforts lead to a renewed and expanded commitment to working people sharing in the country's economic success? What would a workers' bill of rights look like today? What will be needed to make a broad vision of workers' rights reality for America's working people?

This is the final conversation in our five-part series, "[The History and Future of U.S. Labor Law: Conversations to Shape the Future of Work](#)." Learn more about this event at as.institute.org/workersrights

Opening Remarks



Daniel R. Porterfield

President and CEO, The Aspen Institute

Daniel R. Porterfield is President and CEO of the Aspen Institute, a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. He has been recognized as a visionary strategist, transformational leader, devoted educator, and passionate advocate for justice and opportunity.

At the Aspen Institute, Porterfield has worked to build upon the organization's legacy of societal influence and commitment to human dignity while positioning it for a future where it can make its most profound and lasting impacts.

Speakers



Jaz Brisack

Barista and Organizing Committee Member, Starbucks Workers United

Jaz Brisack is a barista at the Elmwood Starbucks in Buffalo, New York, which was the first unionized Starbucks in the United States, and she is an organizing committee member with Starbucks Workers United. Jaz was the first woman Rhodes Scholar from the University of Mississippi, and she studied labor history at the University of Oxford. She was a Pinkhouse Defender at the Jackson Women's Health Organization in Mississippi before moving to Buffalo to work

with Workers United Upstate New York.



Don Howard

President and CEO, The James Irvine Foundation

Don Howard is the president and chief executive officer of the James Irvine Foundation, leading the foundation to focus on a singular goal: ensuring all low-income workers in California have the power to advance economically. Don was previously Irvine's executive vice president, directing grantmaking activities.

He serves on the Public Policy Institute of California's Leadership Council, the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's External Leadership Advisory Council, the Partnership for Public Service's Partnership West Advisory Council, and the Advisory Board of the California Policy Lab.

Prior to joining Irvine in 2012, Don was a partner at the Bridgespan Group, where he served as a strategic advisor to nonprofit and foundation leaders, and he led Bridgespan's San Francisco office for more than a decade. Earlier in his career, Don helped corporate leaders formulate strategy and improve the effectiveness of their organizations as a principal at Booz Allen Hamilton and later as a managing director at the Scient Corporation.

Don grew up in Long Beach, California, and came to the Bay Area to earn his bachelor's degree in industrial engineering at Stanford University, where he also obtained his Master of Business Administration from the Graduate School of Business. He has written, spoken, and taught classes on issues of philanthropic strategy, nonprofit management and funding, and social entrepreneurship.

As a volunteer, Don has been an activist around HIV and other health-related issues, serving in the past on advisory boards at the San Francisco Department of Public Health; the University of California, San Francisco; and the National Institutes of Health. He has acted as an advisor to the boards of several San Francisco community organizations and served on the board of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. Don also has worked extensively outside the United States, including a volunteer posting with a USAID-sponsored initiative to provide business advice to private enterprises in central Europe.



Linda Nguyen

Chief of Staff, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 770

Linda Nguyen is chief of staff of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 770, a union representing 31,000 food chain and other essential workers. She brings nearly a decade and a half of experience building teams that advance economic, social, racial, and environmental justice through organizing, policy advocacy, coalition building, and strategic communications in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. Together with

leadership and staff, Linda drove UFCW 770's worker-led, emergency COVID-19 actions, campaigns, and crisis communications initiatives that led to industry-setting standards such as the right to masking, testing, employer-provided personal protective equipment, and other workplace health and safety measures.

Prior to joining UFCW 770, Linda co-founded Jobs to Move America and was the driving force in developing the organization's national campaigns to re-shore US manufacturing jobs. Her work led to the passing of good jobs policies on \$6 billion of public projects and the creation of thousands of new unionized manufacturing jobs, with pipelines for low-income and 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.



Ai-jen Poo

President, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Ai-jen Poo is an award-winning organizer, author, and a leading voice in the women's movement. She is the president of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, director of Caring Across Generations, co-founder of SuperMajority, co-host of Sunstorm podcast, and a trustee of the Ford Foundation. Ai-jen is a nationally recognized expert on elder and family care, the future of work, and what's at stake for women of color. She is the author of the celebrated book,

"The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America."

Moderator



Dorian Warren

Co-President, Community Change; Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Economic Security Project

A progressive scholar, organizer, and media personality, Dorian Warren has worked to advance racial, economic, and social justice for more than two decades. Like the organizations he leads, Warren is driven by the innate conviction that only social movements — led by the people most affected by racial, economic, gender, and social injustice — can change their communities and public policies for the better.

Warren is co-president of Community Change, an organization founded in 1968 by civil rights, labor, and community leaders to honor the memory of Robert F. Kennedy's fight to end poverty in America. He is also the co-founder and co-chair of the Economic Security Project, an innovative social impact organization that has already shifted the national conversation around cash, economic power, and economic security. And he is the co-host of the "Deep Dive" podcast on "The Takeaway" with Melissa Harris-Perry.

Warren taught for over a decade at the University of Chicago and Columbia University, where he was co-director of the Columbia University Program on Labor Law and Policy. He's the co-author of "The Hidden Rules of Race," co-editor of "Race and American Political Development," and author of numerous academic articles. He also worked at MSNBC, where he was a contributor, fill-in host for "Melissa Harris-Perry" and "Now with Alex Wagner," and host and co-executive producer of "Nerding Out" on MSNBC's digital platform, now Peacock. He was previously a Fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and serves on the boards of Working Partnerships USA, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the National Employment Law Project, The Model Alliance, and The Nation magazine.

As a commentator on public affairs, Warren has appeared regularly on television and radio, including NBC Nightly News, ABC, MSNBC, CNN, CNBC, BET, BBC, NPR, Bloomberg, and NY1, among other outlets. He has also written for The Nation, The Huffington Post, Newsweek, Salon, The Washington Post, The New York Times, Medium, Ebony.com, and Boston Review.

About

Opportunity in America

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 Prudential Financial, Walmart, the Surdna Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Bloomberg, and the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of this series.

Economic Opportunities Program

The Aspen Institute [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 up-to-date on publications, blog posts, events, and other announcements.

Transcript

Maureen Conway (00:00:07)

Today's conversation is the final event in a set of conversations we've been having on the History and Future of U.S. Labor Law: Conversations To Shape the Future of Work. In this series, we've been exploring the role labor laws have played in US history, in reshaping work and opportunity, how these laws align with our values about work and opportunity, and what changes in laws or in their implementations might be needed today. This question of values is really important, and it's a question that we often try to bring to the fore in conversations at the Aspen Institute. I think consideration of values is really important to our dialogue about economics and economic policy, about regulations and the rules we choose to guide our economic relationships. But too often values, sort of our human values, aren't centered in our conversations about economic policy. We instead focus on the technical realm and how well we're encouraging economic growth.

So our questions will revolve around, are we producing more goods and services, but not, whether those goods and services are making us healthier or improving our wellbeing. We'll focus on, are we producing more jobs, but not? Are they good jobs, jobs that support a decent standard of living and a dignified life approach? We'll ask, are we creating, are businesses profitable? Are the markets going up? But we don't ask how those profits are being distributed and are they really making us all better off? So fundamentally we don't ask whether our economic policies are advancing some of the values we hold dear, and values we talk about a lot at the Aspen Institute. Are we more free? Is our society more just, and more equitable? Do our choices help us bring us together as a nation, or are they driving us apart? And in no area of economic policy is more important to start asking these questions about our values and how well they align with our laws, than in the area of labor law.

Because the society in which most people earn a living by working cannot be a good society without a set of standards and rights related to work that are aligned with our values of freedom, justice, and equity. In this series, we've been discussing how our labor laws have responded to problematic working conditions, how they've improved work and lives for millions. Why it was necessary in the 1930s to protect workers' rights, to organize and [inaudible 00:02:37]. Why it was necessary to establish a basic standard for wages and hours and to prohibit child labor. Why it was necessary in the 1960s, at long last, to forbid discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, or religion in employment. And how laws enacted in the 1970s set standards for safety and health at work have protected human health and saved countless lives. Our labor laws have certainly had their flaws to be sure, but they've done much to make things better.

But today we're in economy that's vastly different from the 1970s, let alone the 1930s, and we face new challenges for working people. Quality jobs, jobs that provide economic stability, agency and respect and opportunities for advancement are simply too rare today. The Brookings Institution found that 53 million working adults, about a third of the labor market, earned low hourly wages in 2019. The #MeToo movement revealed the endemic workplace harassment too often experience by women. Research on occupational segregation shows not only that it exists, but that the more women are concentrated in an occupation, and the more people of color are concentrated in an occupation, the lower that occupation pays.

This results is not just a market dynamic, it is also a societal choice. The job of a home health aide, for example, an occupation dominated by women, particularly women of color and immigrant women, is a poverty wage job by policy choice. Policy choices made by elected representatives, which in a democracy means that all of us bear some responsibility for these choices. So are these choices on labor market regulation and policy in line with our values around work, around opportunity, around freedom, justice, and equity?

These are the questions we're going to talk about today. We have a fantastic panel to talk about these questions today, and I am going to introduce them soon. But before we begin, we have a wonderful audience in the room. We have a wonderful audience joining us online. I'm so excited about that. We're thrilled to have so many people joining us today. If you're online, please use the Slido box on the right side of your screen to submit questions. Thank you for those who submitted questions in advance. We'll try to get to as many people's questions as you can today. Please use the ideas tab to share your ideas. And before you leave, please use the polls tab to give us some feedback about this event. If you're tweeting, use the hashtag #talkopportunity. And also if you're joining outside the StreamYard way of joining, you can tweet us questions as well.

If you have any technical issues, please email us at eop.program@aspensinstitute.org. Or you can put a note in the chat. The event is being recorded and will be shared via email and posted on our website and closed captions are available. Click the "CC" button at the bottom of your video. Okay. Now I have the wonderful pleasure of introducing our first speaker, Aspen Institute President Dan Porterfield. Dan has been president of the Institute since 2018. And prior to joining us, Dan had a wonderful, wonderful career. I'm not going to read you his bio. You should read it. He's amazing. The thing I truly appreciate Dan is how, well, one, I appreciate how supportive he's been of me and of the work at the Economic Opportunities Program, but I really appreciate his fundamental dedication to the human values, to the values of a free, just, and equitable society. He has been really very strong on that and all of the work that he does, his dedication to equity has been really inspiring for many of us. And so Dan, I'm so glad you can join us today and kick off our conversation. Thank you.

Daniel Porterfield (00:06:40)

Thank you, Maureen. Good afternoon, everybody, here in person and that super bowl sized audience online. It's wonderful to be in first, and then also to be hybrid, because that's a way we can reach even more people. And this is the kind of gathering the needs to reach even more people. I'd like to begin though, by acknowledging the pain and suffering in the aftermath of the atrocities in Uvalde, Buffalo and elsewhere. I don't really have anything profound to say. How many times can we just say that such wanton gun violence is unacceptable and wrong. And then what? And just look at where it happens. It happens in schools, supermarkets, subways, movie theaters, strip malls, places of worship. Places that we go every single day, places where people go to work every single day.

And as we're thinking about workers, I think today is a good day to think about Irma Garcia and Eva Mireles, who are probably two of the greatest heroes of our time who lost their lives. And with that, Victoria Leigh Soto, Sandy Hook. And Aaron Salter and Haywood Patterson, who worked at Tops Friendly Markets. And the three staff killed at Majory Stoneman Douglas. And this goes on. Just a moment of quiet.

So Maureen, thank you to you and your team for everything you do. And for putting this together. And you heard Maureen use the words free, just and equitable a couple of different times, and it was Maureen's work with others at the Institute over four years ago, where we began to think about that framing as a way that organizes so many of our commitments, and working for a free, just and equitable society, which we're doing in the US. We're also doing in places like Ukraine, where we have an Aspen Institute. Or the word freedom, it's like in bold letters now. There's so much we can learn when we think of those big concepts, which of course have to be interpreted and worked through in any

given era. What does it mean, freedom? What does it mean, justice? What does equity mean? And that's a conversation we should want to have, even if the concepts themselves require care in listening and flexibility sometimes in what do we need. It's better to be talking about them, than to simply say, well, we want something better. What are the values that organize that?

So Maureen to your team, thank you. Because you embody free, just, and equitable. As a group, as a person, as a leader. And this panel certainly reflects it too. So Jaz, Don, Dorian, Ai-jen, thank you so much for making time to be with us in person. I also want to call out a good friend of mine, who's in the audience. He was trying to be incognito, but Joe McCartin, who is a labor historian at Georgetown. Joe, thank you for coming. And you know, Maureen went to Holy Cross and I went, worked at Georgetown, and there's a whole Catholic social tradition of labor rights and social justice. And so we speak that secret language. Maybe others do here too.

So this conversation, Workers' Bill of Rights, what we want and how we get there, arrives at a seminal moment in our country's history, courageous and inspiring workers, many of them, women and people of color. One of them here today, are organizing across industries and across the country, in numbers we really haven't seen in a long time. They've stated clearly and firmly that work, the way we do business and our economy need to change. Think it's clear these workers want what so many in the country want. They're not just speaking as a dedicated growing, but still few, but quite the opposite. Their channeling values shared very widely. They want a good and stable income, safe working conditions, benefits to help them take care of themselves and their families, the opportunity to grow and to advance. Who wouldn't want those things? Who wouldn't want someone to not have those things?

They want a successful economy that provides the foundation within which those securities and opportunities can flourish. An economy that can really only be successful though, if it's inclusive. And that actually is one of the stories of the last 20 years, I would argue maybe longer in America, but that we see inclusion on the retreat. And we also see an economy that's really under tremendous stress in all sorts of ways. An inclusive economy in one where women, or people of color, where immigrants are not steered and trapped into the lowest wage jobs. It's one that treats and rewards essential workers as essential. It's one that is free of exploitation, of harassment, of discrimination. It's one where workers have the right to organize, and to address workplace issues free of intimidation and threat. An inclusive economy is one where everyone gets their shot at what is still celebrated as the American dream. That dream that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can build a good life for yourself and your family.

But that dream is just that, a dream, for far too many people. Millions and millions of people, all across economy, in the informal economy, in the formal economy, all sorts of ways, doing what we value as a country, and yet struggling to meet basic needs. Workers' rights protections, worker voice are all critical and vital parts of building an inclusive economy. They're actually foundational to how a solid economy functions and operates both for workers and for businesses. And since work is such a big part of our lives. And we talk about it all day long. We spend all this time at work, worker rights are also a large part of us, how our society works. So what are society's solutions to advancing worker rights or for protections and worker voice? What values underpin these rights? So they're not only words on paper, but principles that we live and breathe and teach, discuss, and are proud of.

I think this last question that you're here to address is really important, what is a right? And it's worth time to sort that out. Is it an entitlement? Is it a legally binding contract? Is it a need? Is it a demand? Is it protection? You're all going to think about that. One of the ways I've thought about a right though, is it adheres to the individual and their dignity so strongly that it entails the responsibility of others to ensure and secure it. I'm not sure if that definition works in the context you're thinking about it here today, but it is a pretty strong definition of a right. That your right, is my responsibility. My right, is your responsibility.

And if that's really how we understand the word, rights, when we use it, then we are enmeshed together in a network and a community of rights delivering people. But that's a lot to ask. And so you may have a better definition of right. We'll see how you all think about it. So Maureen, I'm going to turn it back to you. But one more time, to thank our panelists, to thank our attendees, to thank those watching and participate online, have a great workshop, discussion, panel discussion, and best wishes for very successful, fruitful outcome from this workshop. Thank you.

All right. I am not going to say very much at all. Other than to say, we have a great panel here and now you get to hear from them. So next... Let's see. So furthest away from me is Ai-jen Poo, president of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Let's see, next to Ai-jen is Don Howard, president and CEO of the James Irvine Foundation. Next to Don is Jaz Brisack, barista and organizing committee member of Starbucks Workers United. I am hoping we're going to get Linda Nguyen, who is chief of staff for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 770. There she is, up on the screen. Hooray.

Alas, in the times we live in, these are the things that we do. But I'm very grateful Linda can join us virtually from the hotel around the corner. And next to me is the wonderful Dorian Warren, my friend, head of Center for Community Change. He also has an amazing bio. I had so many things written down to write about him. You see he's co-author of "The Hidden Rules of Race," co-editor of "Race and American Political Development," author of numerous academic articles. He's brilliant. And I am sure you'll enjoy the discussion he leads. Thank you so much, Dorian, for doing this. Take it away.

Dorian Warren (00:16:12)

Here we go. So first off thank you to Dan, but especially thank you to Maureen and the entire Economic Opportunities team here at Aspen. Maureen, I think I've known you over a decade now and just watching you work and watching the evolution of this work through Aspen, it's just been phenomenal. So thank you for all the labor you have put in, in this issue around economic opportunity and workers' rights. And I'm going to start with just some opening comments, and then I want to get you all talking, talking to each other. So just to start, I want to remind us all that, yes, we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. It is not over and living through these last two years in the midst of a pandemic has lots of ramifications for all our lives, but especially on the lives of workers and essential workers, which unfortunately is a term we hear less and less of today.

So I want to actually raise that again. And [inaudible 00:17:07] going to talk a lot about this, but there's a lot going on right now, including the pandemic, including frankly, a tight labor market that has been very good for workers, and especially workers who've been organizing for their rights. And arguably now at the time, and Jaz, I know you're going to say a lot about this. It's the time for workers to agitate everywhere around dignity and respect and better positions. And so today we are going to hear from organizers and activists and allies who are supporting the range of efforts around the country, of workers demanding better from their jobs. Workers are voting with their feet, actually. Quitting bad jobs for good jobs. Workers who are organizing and creating unions, to collectively bargain for wages, for benefits and working conditions. And as some of you probably know, unions are now more popular than ever, and especially among younger workers.

There's a lot of action in the streets and at the workplace right now. So a couple weeks ago with teachers and providers, there's a childcare strike, but of course, I think we've all been celebrating the wins of organizing into unions at Amazon and especially, Jaz, at Starbucks around the country. So we're going to dig into that pretty shortly. Everywhere workers are organizing, and it's very exciting. And I'm looking at an old friend, Beth Kanter in the audience who worked for the Chicago Federation of Labor many years ago when I was also in Chicago organizing. And this is a sea change from when we were in our twenties, right Ai-jen? Something different is happening. We're going to dig into that much more. Few other quick thoughts for many workers, this is the first time, frankly, in decades that they can expect better from their jobs. And they are demanding better from their jobs. We have been living through 50

years of declining wages, declining job standards, declining rights, and something's happening in this moment.

There's also something happening at the Department of Labor and the National Labor Relations Board. Something really interesting. So I'm going to invite any of our panelists to talk about that. Let me remind us, not everything as rosy. The black unemployment rate is still twice as high as the white unemployment rate. Women, especially women of color have yet to recover fully from the pandemic and continue to face barriers in the job market. We've already heard about occupational segregation, flexible labor markets, gendered labor patterns, all play a role. All these things play a role in who has actual rights to the workplace.

So let me shut up and get our panelists talking. Ai-jen, I'm coming to you first because I want you to talk to us around your work of the last basically two decades. I know you started a very young age, but you have been the leading organizer and voice, and especially around a worker's bill of rights for domestic workers, when nobody else was talking about this. I remember when you were in New York state and New York city doing this work. And so talk to us, tell us a little bit about your journey and this work, and where you think we are today in this movement around care and care workers, and where you hope we'll be tomorrow.

Ai-jen Poo (00:20:29)

Big questions. I'm so glad to be here and thank you so much, Maureen, for your years of work in the field and creating more and more space for workers and worker organizations to be in these conversations. And I'm so proud to be on this panel of such incredible bravery. Bravery from Don, who was one of the first funders to make a big bet on worker power. And it has made all the difference to movements like ours. Bravery of Jaz, who is on the front lines organizing and building worker power in Buffalo around the country. And bravery from Dorian, who has been in the trenches with me literally now for almost 50 years. Okay.

So just for context, I organize with domestic workers. So it's the nannies, the house cleaners and the home care workers who work inside of our homes, providing caregiving and cleaning services. It's overwhelmingly women, 92% women, majority women of color, including many immigrant and undocumented women. And it's the work that makes everything else possible because it helps to ensure that all of us can go and do what we want to do in the world, knowing that some of the most important parts of our lives are in good hands, but it's also some of the most insecure and undervalued work in our economy. And when I first started working with domestic workers, it really felt like the wild west. And for most workers today, it still does. There were no standards, no guidelines, even if you were an employer who wanted to do the right thing, it was unclear what that was.

And to many, it still is, right? So you could have a family who would pay you a living wage, maybe even cover your healthcare expenses and treat you with respect, where the relationship was really quite positive and healthy, or the entire other end of the spectrum. And we've seen so many cases of human trafficking, rape and sexual assault, nonpayment of wages for years. I mean the kinds of things, the kinds of abuses that are really unimaginable. And it's because there were no standards, guidelines, norms in place. It was a free for all. And so in New York city, in the mid nineties, beginning in some immigrant communities, women started to gather collectively and share their stories and imagine a framework for what it could be like if our rights as workers were respected and recognized. And we started to gather first in church basements and immigrant community centers.

And in November of 2003, a whole bunch of different collections and collectives of domestic workers gathered in a union hall and shared their ideas for what it would feel like to actually have a bill of rights. To actually have a set of rights and protections that would affirm the dignity of their work. That would

allow them to go to work every day with their heads held high, knowing that they are contributing, and their contributions are being valued and recognized. And 2003, that was the birth of the New York Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights campaign. And seven years later, New York became the first state in the country to pass the Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights. After, year after year, people told us it would never be possible. And today 12 states have passed domestic workers' bills of rights, and several municipalities are experimenting with taking it one step further.

And the reason why this is significant is because there's a generational, there's a long legacy of explicit exclusion from labor rights and protections that this workforce has been subjected to, rooted in our history of slavery in this country. And we don't want to just be protected by 1930s labor laws. We actually want protections that reflect today's economy, work environment and result in good jobs for the 21st century. So we are innovating and building on that. It includes being really proactive about what the care economy, which is what domestic workers are a part of, right, what that should look like. Including making sure that people have access to affordable childcare, home and community based care. And every job in the care economy can be a good job. And we're hoping that these bills of rights and our work to invest in the care economy and make care more affordable and accessible to everyone is helping us to get there. That's the vision.

Dorian Warren (00:25:27)

Thank you, Ai-jen. And Jaz, I want to come to you next. And let me give a little bit of context. Dan, I want to thank you for bringing our attention to this period of violence in which we find ourselves. And I want to remind people, we have a labor historian in the room, so he'll correct me if I'm wrong, but American labor history among all rich democracies is the most violent and blood. We kind of forget that and sanitize it, but especially the 19th century before organizing efforts of workers, the bloodiest most violent suppression of workers' rights has been in this country among all rich democracies. Let that sink in for a second. Secondly, obviously before the tragedy and Uvalde, Texas, Jaz, I was thinking a lot about Buffalo the last two weeks, because of course this Saturday will be two weeks since the violence in Buffalo, but I don't want to stay there. Okay.

So the other story, and I've been reminding people, there's like two stories out of Buffalo in the last several months. There's the awful hate motivated murders in massacre right, of two weeks ago. But there's lightness coming out of Buffalo. And that is the incredible organizing of you and your colleagues to organize the first two Starbucks in the entire country in Buffalo, in December if I'm not mistaken. So I want us to focus on that for a few minutes. Yeah. And just to explain to folks, and again, Professor McCartin will correct me if I'm wrong, what you and your college did in Buffalo is a watershed moment in labor history. Like historians can be writing about what you did in Buffalo for decades. It's a watershed moment, first two Starbucks organized in the country. So that's my invitation to you to tell us a bit about those worker organizing efforts. Tell us about you and your coworkers in Buffalo, why you got involved and what the last year or two has meant to you and your coworkers?

Jaz Brisack (00:27:37)

Thank you for the question. And I'm so excited to be here with everybody. I mean, I came into this, I don't know if I would call myself a labor historian. I'm not a very good historian. I'm not objective in the slightest, but I'm a labor history nerd. And at 16, I was working at a Panera Bread in Alcoa, Tennessee, and I was getting underpaid. Minimum wage was 7.25. And as it is, and I was getting paid 7.50. And they told me that was proof that they were a good employer because they paid more than minimum wage. And they promised me a raise. And I had just read Eugene Debs for the first time and been like, oh my God workers have power. This is how the world should be. So I marched myself into the boss's office and I was like, I demand my raise and I demand that you train me like you said you were going. And if you don't I'm quit.

I thought they were just going to rollover, and respect workers' rights. And they were like, okay well bye. And I was like, okay. At the time, it would've been unthinkable to unionize a Panera Bread in east Tennessee. But I think not the case. And as my coworker, Michelle [Esling 00:28:49] says, she works at the Elwood store with me, and has for 11 years. Organizing is the ultimate group project. So I'm representing literally a thousand plus workers on the Starbucks Workers United organizing committee. But I think, starting out this campaign, we had very high expectations. Starbucks says that they're a very progressive company, a different company that they don't want to see us as workers. They want to see us as partners. So our slogan was partners becoming partners. And we ask once that they sign on to the fair election principles. And if they had an anti-union meeting, we would have equal time to have a pro-union meeting.

And if they fired somebody, then they would go to arbitration so that nobody would be afraid that they were going to get unfairly fired. And we really thought they were going to live up to what they said they were, and do all of these things. And boy were me wrong. So it went very quickly from we could organize all of Starbucks into the industrial union project of organizing the food service industry in Buffalo to, we're going to, we're in a fight for our lives to win even one union Starbucks. And it's been incredible to see so many stores organizing. I think it, the impact of this sank in for me, I was numb when Elwood won, because it was so much stress and anxiety and people had told us maybe that they were going to vote one way.

And then [inaudible 00:30:19] investing and all of accumulation had changed some of that. But it sank in, when I got to go to Knoxville to be with those workers, when their vote count was happening. They'd endured insane union investing. The management had been calling the most incredible kind, caring union leader, like all of these names and trying to pit everyone against her and making it a very personal campaign, because they couldn't win on the issues. They were trying to win on the personalities. And when they won and proved that it was possible to organize a coffee shop in east Tennessee, I thought, we did it

Dorian Warren (00:30:56)

Amazing. I'm going to come back to you in a few minutes to say more about that. But Linda, we want to get you to join the conversation and then Don, will come to you. Linda, the last couple years we began with the pandemic, and you and your union right at the center of the workers experiencing unsafe working conditions in particular, throughout this pandemic with the United Food and Commercial Workers. So tell us about your background, the UFCW and any initial reflections you have on the national discourse and conversation around essential workers and their experiences over the last two years.

Linda Nguyen (00:31:33)

Yeah. Thank you, Dorian. And thank you to Aspen and the Economics Opportunities Program and our panelists today, and Maureen in particular for this opportunity. So at the United Food and Commercial Workers, local 770 that's where I am from. We represent 31,000 essential workers from LA up to the central coast of California. And these are predominantly working class people of color, women of color, immigrant folks, and increasingly young workers. And the majority of our members are grocery workers and when the pandemic happened and the world essentially shut down, our members were put into the spotlight in the center of the conversation. And I think workers being centered, and particular essential workers being centered in the conversation in the national discourse has been incredibly important. It's about time. I think when things shut down, we had a moment of reckoning, right?

As a society as really seeing that it's not bankers, right? It's not Wall Street, it's not corporations and global CEOs that are essential. It is workers that are essential. It is the folks on the ground that are

making your food, that are caring for you in our hospitals, right? That are brewing your coffee, that are teaching your kids, right? Like moving your products in warehouses at Amazon. These are the folks that are essential, that are keeping us fed and healthy and giving us all of our essential goods. And what was revealed, right when the curtain was pulled back that, is that workplaces are not safe, right. And workers were exposed. Far too much, few too many safety gaps and holes that put workers' lives at risk. And that these jobs that essential workers are in are incredibly precarious, right?

And the wages are not sufficient to allow them to sustain a living wage and to support their families. And that workers have not had sufficient protections to be able to have a voice on the job. Right. So being able to have, and form a union like you all Jaz, and to be able to organize and to run collective actions is incredibly key, right? We found at 770 and with our grocery workers to ensuring that there are workplace safety and regulations put into place, right. And that workers are at the center of driving the solutions and crafting the policies, and enacting them. And in real time, being able to enforce them. So these things that the pandemic has revealed are things that workers have always needed, gaps in issues that grocery workers have always faced and will continue to need. And I guess-

Dorian Warren (00:34:21)

These things... Keep going. Yeah. Yeah.

Linda Nguyen (00:34:24)

I guess my last reflection about this great resignation, right, is that it is not a resignation. It is an informal general strike, right. So we're seeing informal strikes happening across the economy. And I think it is like such an important moment right now in history that we're sitting in. I'm really appreciating this opportunity.

Dorian Warren (00:34:45)

Thanks, Linda. I'll make sure I come back to you a few minutes, but Don I want to get you in because when leadership worker's rights comes up, I'm pretty sure no one first thinks of plan. So talk to us a bit about the context of, yes, there have been some foundations that invested in workers' rights and workers' power and improving working conditions, but not a lot. I'm pretty sure it's been lonely for you. So I want you to tell us a little bit about yourself and the Irvine Foundation. Why in the hell did the foundation say we're going to actually take a big risk and invest in workers' power and workers' rights. And any other thoughts you have to begin with on where we are right now in terms of the relationship of philanthropy and workers' rights. But like why Irvine, like, why?

Don Howard (00:35:33)

Thanks. First, again, thanks Maureen for including me. Thanks for the comment about bravery, but I feel like an interpreter. Folks doing real organizing work and being in the trenches, I have the privilege of being in a private foundation. Irvine Foundation is independent of any company or family, we're focused exclusively on California. And our mission is to expand opportunity. We chose in 2015 to move for a singular focus on ensuring that every low income California worker has the power to advance economically. And we did that very mindful of both being singularly focused on the issue, and naming it as one of the handful. We thought two at the time, existential threats to our society and our economy. And we came at it. It's interesting during the [inaudible 00:36:23] of risk, there was some perception of risk when we decided to focus in this way. And I'm eager as I talk to other philanthropic leaders to de-

risk this decision and have folks understand how important it is to support workers power in the economy.

We have a guiding principle to our work, which is that workers should have the power to influence the decisions that affect their lives, in their workplace, in the economy and in society overall. And we invest in career pathway programs and workforce development and training, and there are amazing career pathway programs out there. It is very, very important for individuals who get trained, but it is not sufficient in terms of advancing the cause of low wage workers across the economy. Power building is central to making that happen. And it took a little while as an institution for us to appreciate that. We did start in our new work in 2016, 2017, with those two training and power building in parallel, because we recognized that they needed to work in tandem to create a level playing field for all workers in the economy. And we're proud to support organizations like Ai-jen and the National Domestic Workers Alliance and other worker centers in 501c3 format worker collectives that are bringing low wage workers into common cause to demand better wages, better working conditions and a real pathway into the middle class.

It's, just as you mentioned, other foundations, there are several. Ford, Open Society, Kellogg and Omidyar all invest significantly in this space, but philanthropy could do a heck of a lot more to support worker power building. And I'll just say as a bit of an aside, and in doing so, in addition to rebuilding America's middle class, reestablishing economic mobility, we address racial inequities when we build worker power. There is such a long history of systemic racism in our economy. You've heard it in various ways here.

And in California, 80% of workers are workers of color and 40% are immigrants. So when we empower low wage workers, we are empowering people of color to demand better of the systems in our economy. And I also think we are, I hope contributing to help our democracy heal. I believe that the income and equality that we see in our society and the declines in economic mobility have been one of the drivers of the populist divisive rhetoric that we see take our political process hostage.

Dorian Warren (00:39:09)

Wow. Thank you so much, Don. A lot more to come back to you later on in terms of Philanthropy. Jaz, I'm going to come to you and then go to Linda. To really lift up and have a conversation now about the experience that would inform a worker bill of rights. And talk to us please, a bit more about your experience organizing Buffalo with your coworkers. Like what was it like to try to exercise a right that has not been enforced for way too long? What were some of the challenges you experienced? And based on your experience, what do you think needs to be strengthened?

Jaz Brisack (00:39:56)

So nine months ago we started our campaign publicly. And started out with this very optimistic view that they might actually respect our right for our rights, and that we were going to potentially have a much easier go with this. And within about a week they had flown in Roxanne Williams, the president of Starbucks, north America, and at least 150 other managers, executives, senior vice presidents, et cetera. They called this the Buffalo SWAT team. They occupied our stores. Normally if you were opening the store, it would be a couple of us chatting with no management presence, which made it easy to start signing cards at work. There's no non-work area in a Starbucks, there's the back room and the front of house and there's always people around, but it used to be that there were not managers in those areas.

So we were signing cards on the floor, having, organizing conversations as we were standing [inaudible 00:40:57]. And when they sent in these managers, all of that changed. There was never a space where

we could talk without somebody listening. People were being pulled off the floor for one-on-ones. We were having weekly captive audience meetings where they were telling us you could lose all your benefits. Some workers were even dragged into makeup, captive audience meetings, where it would be one of them and the six managers telling them all of the horrible things that would happen to them if they voted no. And I think this goes to what you were saying about how it used to be very physically dangerous to organize a union. Union busting has evolved. It's not gotten any kinder, but now it's psychological warfare, Starbucks weaponized anything that they could find to try to make people vulnerable and powerless.

One example is a lot of workers have very open mental health struggles, and a lot of workers decorate their aprons with various pins. One Starbucks partner wore a suicide awareness pin that she'd wore for years and she'd been hired. And they started targeting her every day saying that, that pin was an attack on management. That she shouldn't be allowed to wear that. That she was going to get fired if she didn't take off her pin. And they've literally put workers on mental health leaves of absence and just really, really exploited what they see as vulnerabilities that will make people step back from unionizing. It's completely unconscionable and really fundamental human rights violations. And meanwhile they're still presenting themselves as this great company, and we are the ones who are untrue to the mission and values, instead of recognizing that what they're doing is perjurying workers.

Dorian Warren (00:43:04)

I follow up with you because did you say 150?

Jaz Brisack (00:43:06)

At least.

Dorian Warren (00:43:07)

At least, we're flow into Buffalo. And then you just said that Starbucks is, they were really exploiting people's vulnerabilities. I'm sitting with that because how awful. Right? But it's not working. Like I checked this on last night. My latest data of union elections at Starbucks, the win rate is 85 to 10 in favor of workers. 85. That is like mind blowing for those of you who don't know anything about union elections, 85 wins, only 10 losses. So Jaz, tell us why the company who is spending millions of dollars to exploit people's vulnerabilities, as you just said, why are they losing? Why are you and your colleagues winning?

Jaz Brisack (00:43:54)

I mean, I think first of all, I want to address the part about it not working, because I think we don't know what we don't know about which stores haven't reached out to us because they scorched the earth by sending in managers to terrify people. Which stores had the key committee leaders quit or which ones were shut down for a remodel, and that fizzled it out. I think without the union busting, we would've seen a lot more organizing and definitely speedier victories. But I think people are organizing here because this is our last chance to really have a voice and power, and save what this job should be and what this company should be.

And people came to work at Starbucks because they really believed that this was a social justice company. This was a place where it was safe to be trans, where it was safe to advocate for Black Lives Matter. They gave us Black Lives Matter t-shirts that looked like picket signs and bull horns and all of these things. And then they suddenly expect people to go along with, oh, we're so sustainable. We're so

pro GBT rights, we're so pro racial justice, but we're union busters. And everybody's like, that's, you can't view all of those things and be a union buster, or some things fundamentally hollow.

Dorian Warren (00:45:20)

Thank you for that. Linda. I want to get you back in the conversation because folks that don't know the United Food and Commercial Worker's Union span a number of industries, but especially include a lot of workers in grocery stores. And these workers experienced some of the biggest, most significant challenges during the pandemic. Continue to do so, and not just related to low pay, but also of course, health and safety. So talk to us about what stood out to you in terms of workers' experiences and treatment in the workplace. And what does it tell us about where we're falling short and what needs to be done?

Linda Nguyen (00:46:00)

Yeah, I think what stands out the most for me in the work over the last couple years in pandemic is really the callousness of corporations, right? The greed and the callousness of big grocery corporations that today are dominated by multinational companies, foreign companies. Callousness of companies like Amazon and Instacart, how capitalism cannot function without white supremacy. And anti-blackness right? How necessary and reliant these companies are on the exploitation of working class and people of color, and women of color specifically. And also in contrast to that is the incredible solidarity and the mutual aid and the beautiful work of workers coming together in their unions or coming together to form their unions, right. To run collective actions, really rooted in love. And I think back to the beginning when LA for shutdown in mid-March, we held town halls every single week with like 6,000, 8,000 workers coming on the telephone to share their stories of, and the horrific things that were unfolding before their eyes.

When I don't know if you all remember those days when there was panic buying, right. And there was nothing on the grocery store shelves and everything was flying off. And workers themselves couldn't buy basic things like water or dried beans or rice for their own families to take care of themselves. And there was no science yet to support COVID, and to understand how it was being transmitted. And workers were on the phone with us in the thousands crying, pleading, asking for things like the ability to wear masks. And being told that, their managers were telling workers in the grocery stores that if they wore masks, they were going to get suspended and sent home from work. Because the masks were going to scare customers and the customers would not come and shop if they felt like the grocery stores were dangerous.

And in response, right, because the workers were being denied this right, the union came together and we've made masks, right. That said, union workers paid for these masks. And this was early April, we ran our first action. Everything was still shut down at this point. And thousands of workers, 30,000 workers were wearing these to work in silent protest. And managers were freaking out, the companies were freaking out. And you know, what it taught, and it really taught these workers that they had incredible power and if they came together and they stood up and they demanded things that they needed to protect themselves, the world was going to pay attention.

And I think after that first mass action, as workers began to get really sick and ill in those early days before the medicine was there, workers were telling us that they were afraid to test because they couldn't deal with getting a negative test because they didn't have enough sick time, because they couldn't afford to be sick because they had bills to pay. And so many of their other family members and people in their household could not work. And so workers came together and the union came and we fought for COVID sick pay. Right. And we fought for contact tracing and notification to workers so that they could quarantine and they could isolate and they could protect themselves.

And then we fought for things like hazard pay, right? Because workers were not able to pay for very basic needs, like proper housing, adequate housing. In an industry where workers are surrounded by food, 78% of grocery workers in our local are experiencing hunger and food insecurity. Right. We have a member who shared with us that she's a single mom, she's surrounded by food and she has to feed her kids instant ramen and hot dogs because she cannot afford anything else, because for her, it's a choice between being housed or feeding her children. And so some of the stories we've heard have been really devastating in terms of the conditions in the workplace. And although devastating, I think on the other side of it is the incredible support from community, from shoppers, from elected officials, members of the public.

And that has really bolstered workers and helped support grocery workers to really stand in their power. Right. There has been an awakening of these workers and they're standing up and they're demanding better and fighting for things like hazard pay. Right. And when we stood up and fought for hazard pay in the grocery stores, right, for a temporary \$5 increase that allowed workers for the first time to have a savings. For the first time to buy fresh food for their children, right. To be able to afford to put a deposit down, a security deposit for an apartment. The company's retaliated by shutting down three grocery stores to create a chilling effect.

So the callousness of these companies is really what stands out to me, and also the bravery of workers to stand up and fight back. Right? And recently we ratified a historic contract because workers got a taste of hazard pay, where we stood up and fought and won for it. And they were not going to let it go. And workers knew, right. Grocery workers know what they deserve, essential workers know what they deserve and fought for more. And we're turning a corner, and we are not going to allow these companies to pay poverty wages anymore and to mistreat workers anymore.

Dorian Warren (00:52:01)

Linda, I want to do a quick follow up with you. With a little bit of a personal story, I'm going to try to not get emotional about it. But the hazard pay and health and safety, and resonates deeply for me because my sister-in-law lives in Chicago was a cook at whole foods. She was classified as an essential worker. She had to agitate for mask, because the company owned by Amazon would not provide them. She had to agitate for a stable schedule because she has a five year old at the time. And early on, she got COVID at work, we think. Then her family got COVID. She has long COVID. So is still suffering from the effects of company decisions back in March 2020. And it's made her angry, and she ultimately quit after being a very lonely agitator. And it's both angering and enraging. And it raises something I want you to emphasize, and especially, because I know you represent workers in meatpacking.

Oftentimes when we think of unions, we think immediately of wages and more pay. But talk to us a bit about the importance of health and safety, literally life and death. And I know there's been so much work you've been doing in meatpacking. So if you're a meat eater, thank the UFCW. And the workers in particular who have been still going to work in very dangerous conditions, already one of the most, if not the most dangerous job in America, but going and also as essential workers. Talk to us about the role of health and safety. In addition, of course the wages, but it's just like, I just want people to understand something about, it's not all just about the cash when it comes to human dignity at work.

Linda Nguyen (00:53:50)

Absolutely. Especially in those early days when the medicine wasn't there and the science wasn't there, right. And PPE was so difficult to come by. And the CDC was not acknowledging that masks were critical, right.

Workers in our union, our members were fighting for the ability to be deputized and to have the power, to make changes in real time in order to protect themselves and their coworkers, and ultimately their families at home. Right. Because it was a life or death situation, right. Things like being able to enforce social distancing, right. Things like being able to enforce occupancy rates in grocery stores, or on the line while they're cutting meat, right. And processing meat, being able to have safety guards in between and appropriate distancing on the line on either side to be able to protect themselves and their families, right. At a time when vaccination in particular was not available, is so critical.

We had a worker who, she came from a family of other central workers. It was a household of roughly, maybe five folks, a Latinx worker. She became sick from being at work and not having the ability to properly socially distance because of the way her work was structured. And because she was in a family that was working class and could not afford housing where she could isolate properly, she had to saran wrap herself in her bunk bed, because she did not know what else to do. And she was deathly afraid of making her family members sick and potentially die. This is the thing that... I'm trying not to get emotional now, because...

This is the thing that workers have to deal with. I remember visiting a grocery store, when our first member died in April. And it was devastating. A baker in the back where it's largely monolingual, immigrant women who are doing the work that is unseen, right? This work is gendered. And specifically it's often immigrant women that are put in the back and away from customers in tight quarters with no ventilation, no ability to social distance, working incredibly long hours because workers are turning over and leaving work that is incredibly dangerous. And it's just completely unacceptable. It's life or death.

Dorian Warren (00:56:22)

Thank you Linda. Want everybody to take just a breath. And I want to appreciate you in that emotion, because we are living through a time where we have all become way too numb to mass death, we're at over a million people dead in COVID. Probably most of us know someone pretty close. And then in this moment of mass violence, we're a little too numb. So I just appreciate the emotion because we need to make sure we stop numbing ourselves to these life or death conditions, at work in particular. So Don, with that, here's a hard pivot. Come back to you and talk to us a little bit more about philanthropy and for folks that don't know, when you said this earlier, Irvine Foundation does a lot of work in California. California though is an outlier in America, that has some of the most robust state labor laws and protections in the country. It's home to millions of workers who you've said, did you say 80% workers of color? Which is [inaudible 00:57:26], workers are 80% workers.

Wow, that's incredible. So from where you sit as the head of a foundation, you yourself have a story career in social change. Talk to us a little bit about what you're learning in terms of what works and what doesn't work around the strategy to, for a workers' bill of rights, for high robust labor protections that are also enforced. It's one thing to win the laws, it's another thing to enforce the law. So what are you learning?

Don Howard (00:57:58)

Well first, just to thanks for the reference to my past work, I cut my teeth in HIV activism in the nineties. And I just, so the stories are telling resonate, so both on the health front, but also on the power a small group of folks be able to change the world, what it takes to have leaders be brave enough to do that. I just want to acknowledge that and thank all three of you for sharing those stories.

From a philanthropic perspective, to get technical. As we look for the various kinds of outcomes, sheer membership growth in worker organizations and outcome, it is a good thing. Labor, or having folks in organized labor, where they can experience leadership and feel empowered and get a sense that

they can actually create that change in the world is a valid, viable outcome for us to be focused on. We also focus on addressing where the implementation of wage laws and our laws have fallen down. So in California, we have in funding worker centers to address wage theft. Wage theft, for folks who don't know, that in California estimates are \$2 billion a year of wage theft. Affects the wage workers, to the tune of about \$3,300 per worker who loses wages. 600,000 workers affected. \$3,300 for someone who makes a minimum wage is an enormous amount of money.

The worker centers in California under the wonderful leadership of Julie Su, who's now here in DC, created the Strategic Enforcement Partnership, to enable workers with their worker organizers, to bring wage theft claims forward. To feel comfortable that they could do that and to be able to have those wage theft claims adjudicated. And frankly pennies on the dollar, get back into the pockets of the wage workers for a host of reasons. One of which is understaffing in the implementation of the Strategic Enforcement Partnership. And more folks need to be staffed in these agencies to deliver on the implementation that's required. The best wage an hour laws and worker rights laws don't matter, as you accurately point to, if they're not implemented well. We also see low road employers, shielding themselves from being subject to enforcement by using contractors. So the up the chain liability is a really important piece of the puzzle. And we were fortunate in California to have garment workers protected in this way. So that folks up the chain are liable for wage theft by the contractor. So there's move afoot there.

I would say in the health space, around COVID, there was also an opportunity for one of these partnerships between, in Los Angeles county, between the Department of Public Health and worker centers to create public health councils inside the workplace. So that workers could have a formal mechanism for bringing forward violations of health and safety laws in the workplace. And we hope that'll leave behind a legacy and a structure that could be piggybacked on for ongoing worker organizing in workplaces, like meatpacking as a good example, and the garment industry.

Dorian Warren (01:01:12)

Thanks Don. Ai-jen, as you've already mentioned, there were a whole lot of jobs that were deliberately excluded from labor protections in the 1930s, domestic workers, agricultural workers. We kind of know something about who those workers happened to be at the time, and the motivations for those exclusions. So talk to us about the Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights, and some lessons learned there. Obviously it's an attempt to, a successful attempt, did you say 12 states? I think I heard 12 states. To respond, to redesign those exclusions, right, and be inclusive. What are some lessons learned from all of these battles. State after state and the national fight? What are some lessons learned from the Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights campaigns, for us to take away in terms of the broader fight around worker's bill of rights for our workers?

Ai-jen Poo (01:02:11)

Well, the first thing that I thought of is just listening to Linda, and Jaz too, before there a pandemic, there was an epidemic of low wage work in this country, and nobody cared. And then all of a sudden, because we were in a pandemic, we started to realize that these workers who didn't have sick days, job security, healthcare, fair hours, or consistent hours of work, they're actually essential to our health, to our safety, to our wellbeing. And that frame has given us the biggest opportunity of generations, I think to address the epidemic of low wage work, which persists to this day. It has both given workers, the confidence to organize and step forward. And it has given us a framework to talk about how unjust and nonsensical and unsafe, right? And unsustainable, our dynamic of work is in this country. And workers are also organizing across sectors.

And I think, in Houston, a bunch of unions and independent worker organizations came together and created an essential worker's health and safety board, where you actually have workers across sectors and the county government actually talking, setting the terms for how to manage through crisis and keep workers safe, right. And not just pandemics, but also hurricanes. And all of the things that we know are coming. Making sure that workers have a voice and a seat at the table. So it not only gave us a sense of confidence, but it gave us a sense of collective confidence as low wage workers, to assert the dignity of this work and to organize together. And I think what we're seeing is the beginning of this wave.

And at a time when we actually have the most pro worker administration in the White House, maybe of generations maybe ever, where the department of labor actually wants to enforce labor laws. And the great Julie Su, left your state, sorry. But she's now deputy secretary of labor at the US Department of Labor and is going to take all of these lessons from the co-enforcement work into that work. And we have an NLRB that is actually favorable towards unions. Now we can talk about what some of the challenges are with the NLRA. And I think that's what brings me back to the bill of rights, which is that we have to do everything within our power to enforce the existing labor laws, and the protections that exist. And make sure that they include protections for everyone, including domestic workers, and all forms of excluded workers. And we have to recognize that these laws are no longer sufficient, that these laws are embedded inside of a deeply and profoundly unequal economy and unsustainable economic framework, that is extractive of people's dignity.

And so we need to be... I'm not, like let's not throw the baby out with a bath water. Let's enforce the laws we have, but let's also imagine what we need next. And with the Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights, what we've done at the federal level is try to do both, address the gaps in the 1930s protections, but also create a new framework that we call a domestic worker's standards board, which establishes what some people call a sectoral bargaining framework, but basically the ability to bring a creative voice for workers as an entire sector. And bring workers to the table with representatives of government and employers, to talk about what fairness, dignity, and respect looks like. So we're trying to innovate and create new frameworks. And I think that's what this period is about. As we strengthen the existing frameworks with measures like the PRO Act of others, like it's all necessary. And frankly, I think that we couldn't have enough initiatives to protect workers at this point. That is, it should be all hands on deck and huge focus on that front.

Dorian Warren (01:07:02)

Well, listen. I know we're growing a bit short on time, so I'm going to a final speed round. So I'm going to ask you like, if you can in a minute or less, but I'm going to just ask all the questions, starting with you Don, to give you a little time to think about. And also if there's something you've heard from your colleagues in the course of this conversation, that you also want to respond to, an open invitation to that. So here we go. Speed round. For you, Don, as I said earlier, if we looked out at the philanthropic landscape a decade ago, it would've been like a bear and desert in terms of who is out there on workers' rights and worker power. So can you talk to us about what is changing in philanthropy in this moment and what still needs to change going forward? That's a question for you,

Linda. You'll be second. So you're in a union now, but you've also worked in other institutions that have partnered with unions and labor on these issues. What do you think unions and partners need to be doing right now and the years ahead so that we don't lose the moment of work organizing and worker upsurge.

Ai-jen, I'm going to pack a punch into my question for you, which I want you to answer in a minute or less. You are just such a visionary. I think I first heard the term care economy and care infrastructure from you, but I also know you've been doing a lot of culture change work, or narrative work. So I want you to talk to us about what is the role of cultural narrative strategies going forward in this work.

And last but not least Jaz, what support and partnership has been helpful for you and your colleagues? And paint us a picture of five or 10 years from now. What will be the state of workers at Starbucks? Obviously an optimistic utopian picture is the idea. So Don, then Linda and Ai-jen then Jaz. And I'll turn it back over to Maureen. I could take a couple questions.

Maureen Conway (01:08:59)

You can take a couple of audience questions.

Dorian Warren (01:09:00)

Amazing. Okay. Audience get ready. It's going to be speed round for you too. So Don?

Don Howard (01:09:06)

So I have seen a greater embrace of investing philanthropic funds in advocacy and power. So I would be continuing that momentum, invest more in these great organizations who are doing this important work on ground. It's important for the individuals in the organizations and for economy, and provide general operating support, flexible dollars, so these organizations can do their work on their terms. I would say it's been interesting to see philanthropy begin to support more of these cross sector partnerships around the implementation of existing laws and hopefully better laws to be implemented in the future. Last thing I'll, two things I'll add. One is, with the tremendous infusion of public resources coming into communities between the bipartisan infrastructure law, ARP and robust in California with a tremendous budget surplus. There is an opportunity to recreate our economy and to define out crappy jobs. And to define in jobs that pay family sustaining wages, have career mobility and upward pathways to better work, and that are available for everyone, particularly people of color who have been left behind so systematically in our economy.

And I have seen philanthropy begin to rally to help communities prepare for those dollars, to chart a just transition to a better economy for the future so that we can engineer in jobs that provide the kinds of dignity, wages, and supports that are here. Last thing I'll say to my philanthropic colleagues is, we have to work with business. And it's interesting to see our growing ability to work with labor, if you will, the business round table came out with its position on stakeholder capitalism. And yet I hear these horror stories about the way businesses are treating their workers. You can't say a thing and do nothing about it. And there's commitments to equity and racial equity, as well as building a more inclusive economy. Let's figure out how to do that, they need risk capital, they need relationship. We can be a conduit for that, and we need to step in that space.

Dorian Warren (01:11:04)

Say all those words Don.

Ai-jen Poo (01:11:05)

Yes.

Dorian Warren (01:11:05)

Say all the words. [inaudible 01:11:07]. Linda. And then Ai-jen.

Linda Nguyen (01:11:10)

Yeah. Thank you. I think we need to hold accountable, put pressure on the CEOs of Starbucks and Amazons and other grocery companies so that they know that people in polite society are watching them and their behavior. And we need to pass the PRO Act. And most importantly, we need corporations to find their conscience. They need to get off the wrong side of history and stop fighting us, when we're organizing and standing up and taking collective action around health and safety and fair pay, and get out of our way and let us organize.

Dorian Warren (01:11:46)

Thanks, Linda. Ai-jen?

Ai-jen Poo (01:11:49)

Well, I think that working people are obviously clearly the vast majority of this country and we live in a country where 60% of the workforce earns less than \$50,000 per year. So there's a lot of low wage workers in this country, and we are incredibly powerful. That also means that we're a huge part of the market for the entertainment industry, we're consumers, we're... And so I just think we should be creative about how we organize. And I do believe that until we have a new story about work and what workers deserve, and what a good job is in this country, it's going to be a real struggle.

And I do think that narrative and culture change is really about that, is about how we start to collectively tell a new story about work and the dignity of work and what workers deserve. And there's a market for it. So just a quick antidote from my sector is that we've been partnering with the showrunner from the limited series called, Maid on Netflix. Have any of you seen it? It is the most watched limited series in the history of television.

Dorian Warren (01:13:05)

What?

Ai-jen Poo (01:13:08)

There is an [inaudible 01:13:10]. People want to see working class stories, because they identify with them and because there is courage and bravery and dignity and dynamism. And that's what we need right now. Stephanie Land shout out. I hope you're watching. Jaz?

Jaz Brisack (01:13:25)

So, I mean, I want to say, I am maybe sadly, very pessimistic about labor law reform and the labor board. We've been dealing with the labor board in Buffalo, where our regional director is married to a corporate union busting lawyer. That's a whole nother thing. But I think going to what Linda said, we need accountability. We need people to be calling people like Howard Schultz, the CEO and Mellody Hobson, and the chair of the board of directors are Democrats. Howard Schultz was going to be Hillary Clinton's secretary of labor, Mellody Hobson is friends with the Obamas, and was just the

commencement speaker at William & Mary's, getting all of these accolades. And also union pension dollars in her investment firm. We need people to hold them accountable and say, you can't get away with this.

There was just a letter from 14 senators, I believe, that actually condemned Starbucks union busting in strong terms, but there's a lot more senators who need to get on board. Who actually, not saying just, hi, we support you, union coffee is great. But actually saying we're not going to let you terrorize workers. And if you continue to do this, there's going to be real consequences. So I think we can, going back to your last point, in five or 10 years, we really can have every Starbucks worker in the country unionized and Starbucks workers united, and a model for organizing the coffee shop and restaurant industry and really building an industrial union that can raise everybody's living conditions. But we need everybody's help to actually pressure these companies to stop terrorizing workers in the meantime.

Dorian Warren (01:15:09)

You said the restaurant industry, shout out ROC, which is the Restaurant Opportunity Center in the room as well. Okay. Maureen gave me permission for like two quick questions. So if there's someone with a burning question that you can ask in like 45 seconds or less. One.

Ai-jen Poo (01:15:29)

I'd love to hear from Siby too, if he has any comments to add to this conversation.

Dorian Warren (01:15:33)

And then we'll do Siby too. Putting you on the spot. Okay. Yes, please.

Dennis Olson (01:15:39)

Hi, thanks for this event. And I have a quick question for Linda. I'm Dennis Olson with UFCW in the meatpacking division here at the international. And I first met John Grant over 10 years ago, working on the good food purchasing policy in LA, which was first embedded there. And so I was going to ask Linda what her thoughts are on how the role of public procurement and requiring a union preference and other preferences [inaudible 01:16:05]?

Dorian Warren (01:16:04)

Thank you. Fantastic question, Linda.

Linda Nguyen (01:16:09)

Thank you, Dennis. I mean, I think public institutions and public purchasing is roughly \$2 trillion that spent each year by public institutions on purchasing. And I think there is a tremendous opportunity here to ensure that there are standards built in to ensure that public taxpayer dollars are going to high road employers, and ensuring that one's products and goods are bought that they also create jobs in lone communities of color, right? And that communities benefit from those tax dollars being spent in those same sort of places.

Sekou Siby (01:16:48)

Okay. My interview, most likely a comment. To say I really support everything that-

Dorian Warren (01:16:54)

Can you introduce yourself, please?

Sekou Siby (01:16:58)

My name is Sekou Siby, I am a president and CEO of the Restaurant Opportunity Centers and a founding member of organization, having been a restaurant worker myself, our windows on the wall. So I very pleased to be here. So I really want to emphasize what has been saying back on the restaurant workers. It is very important, they have suffered a lot. We have workers who died on the floor during, in 2020 because they didn't have healthcare. And it was a choice to make between going to work, and to feed your family or stay home and with children, who you cannot feed. So many things that happen that we believe in building worker power today. And because those workers have suffered so much, because nobody was there to help them. because at the same time, when everybody was staying at home, they were the one going to work. And they have that anger and that desire to see things change.

So we are asking ourselves today, why is it possible to organize workers? It is because they want to be organized. They really want to see things changes. They want to be involved, just to want enough people who are talking to them, who are organizing them, who are making things possible. And that's really key to make changes possible. So again, for us, that power building will require all of us, right? To come together as one to say these, building worker power and making sure that all of them come together will be critical for tomorrow's business, or what we want workers to be tomorrow. So again, I really want to thank all these person, thank you for all the perspective that came out today and the restaurant workers, are the lowest also [inaudible 01:19:03] of the lowest workers, they are in the [inaudible 01:19:04]. And I would like to thank you for giving me a chance to say a few words.

Dorian Warren (01:19:10)

Thank you. And that's a great place to close. And so Linda, Ai-jen, Don, Jaz thank you so much for this conversation and please join me in thanking them as well. Do you want to close us out?

Maureen Conway (01:19:27)

Yeah. Huge thanks. Thanks to all of you. Thanks all of you for giving us ideas that all of us are in this. And we don't have to be really optimistic, we don't have to really pessimistic, we have things we can do and choices we can make. So I really appreciate everybody's, just huge engagement in this conversation and all you've given us to think about. So big thanks to, on behalf of the Institute to Dan, Ai-jen, Don, Jaz, and Linda. Thank you, Dorian. Well done. Thanks to my colleagues, Yoorie Chang, Colleen Cunningham, Amanda Fins, Matt Helmer, Adrienne Lee, Tony Mastria, Victoria Prince, Yoorie Chang, Natalie Foster, Shelly Steward, and Sinin Young, for all of their help.

Let me tell you, it has taken a lot of people, a lot of work to put these events on. I have an amazing team. Give them a round of applause. Thank you for joining us. Thanks to everybody who joined us virtually today. I could prevail upon these people to talk with us all day. I did [inaudible 01:20:28] in

going over a little bit and thank you for indulging us all that way. And love to hear people's feedback on our events. If you have thoughts to share with us, if you're online, you can use the Slido, the polls thing on your Slido tab. You can always send us a note eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. We love to hear from you. We love your feedback, ideas, other things we should be talking about, let us know. Thanks everybody. Bye-bye.