

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

INFRACORPS: BUILDING THE FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE WORKFORCE

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Opening Keynote:

TIM KAINÉ
U.S. Senator
Commonwealth of Virginia

Moderator:

JOSEPH W. KANE
Senior Research Associate and Associate Fellow
Metropolitan Policy Program
The Brookings Institution

Discussants:

JANE OATES
President
WorkingNation

NICOLE SMITH
Research Professor and Chief Economist
Georgetown University
Center on Education and the Workforce

MARIE WALKER
Chief Operating Officer
The Corps Network

Closing Keynote:

THE HON. STEVEN HORSFORD
U.S. Representative
NV-4

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. KANE: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's event, "InfraCorps: Building the future infrastructure workforce." My name is Joe Kane, and I'm a senior research associate at The Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program. My work covers a variety of infrastructure issues, from transportation to water to energy, with a focus on workforce development. So, I'm excited to help lead this timely and important conversation.

As we all know, millions of workers have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Lower income workers and workers of color have experienced some of the highest unemployment rates. Meanwhile, younger workers and students don't know where to turn for opportunity. There are mounting struggles to connect workers to any jobs, let alone stable good-paying careers. As we also know, our country's infrastructure has faced its own struggles for years before the pandemic. It's aging, frequently overlooked, and in need of investment, but I'm not just talking about our pipes, ports, and other facilities. I'm talking about our infrastructure workforce.

Many of our skilled operators, engineers, and technicians, who keep our water clean, our electricity running, and other essential services online are reaching the end of their careers and frequently lack visibility, resulting in a pipeline of talent that is drying up. This gap in hiring, training, and retention comes as these jobs, many of which are in the skill trades, offer more competitive pay and the opportunity to develop valuable transferable work experience.

A COVID-19 recovery gives us a chance to not only rebuild and renew our infrastructure, but to connect more and different types of workers to skilled trade careers. How do we do that, and how can federal leaders, alongside state and local partners, accelerate action? I'll be moderating a panel of experts to help answer these questions, and we'll also be hearing from Congressional leaders on this infrastructure workforce opportunity. As a reminder, please feel free to ask questions, and follow the conversation on Twitter, using the #InfraCorps.

To start, I'm honored to welcome Senator Tim Kaine, from the great Commonwealth of Virginia, to provide opening keynote remarks. Senator Kaine, who I can tell viewers does not have relation to me, has decades of local, state, and federal leadership in this space. Tim grew up working for his father's ironworking shop, in Kansas City, before starting his public service career, by running a

technical school in Honduras. His time as a city council member, mayor of Richmond, and governor of Virginia further solidified his leadership on a range of education and economic development issues.

More recently, as Senator, he had served as co-chair of The Bipartisan Career and Technical Education Caucus and has helped expand access to job training programs, for students of all ages. Last year, as a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, he introduced The Building U.S. Infrastructure by Leveraging Demands for Skills Act, or BUILDS Act, to prepare workers for jobs in fields, like construction, transportation, and energy. Suffice to say, Senator Kaine brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, and, again, I'm honored to have turned the mic over to him. Senator, the virtual stage is yours.

SENATOR Kaine: Joe, thank you very much. I'm so happy that I could be with you guys today, and I've thought back about my connection with Brookings, over the years. I don't know what I like better, doing an event at Brookings in a suit, with people in the audience who I can see face to face, or being able to just roll out of bed, and put on a sweater, and do a Brookings event from my house, but you guys have done great work, and, as I think back, I believe my first appearance at Brookings, when I was Governor of Virginia, and we were talking about infrastructure, in particular the innovated use of Public-Private Partnerships, that Virginia uses as a component, not the sole element certainly, but as a component of our own infrastructure programs and plans.

But it is good to be with you today, and to kick off what I know will be a wonderful discussion, I have two staffers, Karishma Merchant, who is my HELP Committee Leader on education workforce issues, and Evan McWalters, who works with me on transportation and infrastructure issues. They're both on the call, and I know they're going to be fascinated by the discussion, as well. I guess what I'll do, to kind of organize my opening, is to go challenge Good New Challenge.

So, challenge, now I'm sure you're going talk about this at length, and, Joe, you hinted at it already, in your opening. We've got huge infrastructure needs in this country. They're well documented, they span a long list of categories, and, frankly, the categories of need are increasing. So, one that's pretty familiar is the American Society of Civil Engineers, who annually does an infrastructure grade looking at our bridges and highway capital improvement status. They list current needs at more -- north of \$800 billion. For bridges alone, that means about one in three of the Nation's 46,000 bridges are

structurally deficient and need repair, if not in the immediate future, in the mid-term future.

Worsening climate conditions play a role, as we suddenly find resilience projects creeping onto so many lists of infrastructure demands. As a member of the Senator Armed Services Committee, we spend more and more on resilience projects to protect our Military Installations, whether it's from the threat of sea-level rise in Hampton Roads, or the threat of drought or water shortages in other parts of the country, and we're seeing just incredible needs being put on agencies, like the Army Corps of Engineers and others, to deal with climate resilience investments.

Energy, a new energy economy, which is a wonderful opportunity for the United States, certainly, to create jobs, will, nevertheless, require significant investments in storage, in transmission, if we're to really harvest the value of the innovation that can help us drive toward a lower and no carbon energy economy. As we've lived under COVID, we've learned we can do this more, we can have webinars, we telework, we can get our healthcare visits by telehealth, we can get course content from K-12 Schools and Colleges, online, but that only works if you've got, you know, one of these devices that you can afford, but also if you have broadband or other telecom connectivity, that enable you to get the content that we are increasingly are able to get remotely.

And so, an item that is now coming on the list, as we tote up the likely cost of infrastructure challenges, is the increased need to make the investment, so that the 30 to 40 million Americans, who still don't have good access to telecom, often people in rural communities, where there hasn't been an incentive sufficient to create the investment rationale for building out telecom, or poorer communities, where people don't have the resources they need to afford these technologies. That is now kind of coming onto the list of critical infrastructures, much as, you know, an electric utility or a road would have been considered critical infrastructure, 40 or 50 years ago, so.

The challenge is, simply, that the list of demands and the price tag for our Nation's infrastructure need is getting larger and larger. That's the challenge. Here's the good news. While we should have done an infrastructure bill sometime in the last four years, and I always thought that President Trump, as a builder, would see the virtue in it, and, certainly, it would be an area where Democrats and Republicans could cooperate, the unwillingness to really grapple with the toughest issue, which is how are we going to pay for it?

The projects to do are tough enough, but we can figure that out. We can negotiate it, or we can set up a process for determining projects of regional and National significance that should be invested in, but in an arrow where the Grover Norquist Anti-Tax Pledge still has some real sway in Congress, and with Administrations, particularly GOP Administrations, what has stopped us is an unwillingness to embrace and be paid for.

However, and this is the good news part of what I'm going to tell you, I think the next Administration, Democratic or Republican, whether it's a second Trump term, or a Joe Biden Term, we're going to decide that we need to do, finally, a sizeable infrastructure bill. We need to do it because of the needs that I've outlined in the first part of my comments, that these needs have been accumulating, and they're just so obvious. We need to do it because those needs have created some unusual coalitions, when both The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Organized Labor are telling us, please, do an infrastructure bill, then the time is right to act. When the interest rates are low, then the time is right to act. When our Nation's Mayors and Governors of both parties believe now is the time, the time is right to act, but additional element, which, to me, sort of tips it from possible to probable, and even likely that we will do a major infrastructure bill has been the effect of COVID-19. The sad reality of this health pandemic and the consequent economic devastation is that we continue to need strategies to grow the economy.

Providing support for families and business to get through the tough times, that's important. Support for hospitals, backstopping state and local governments budgets, very, very, important, but one of the best things we can do, if we're going to -- to really climb out of an economic challenge is to do these infrastructure investments, which will not only create immediate economic opportunity, and the job creation effective infrastructure investments, in the near-term and long-term, are dramatic. It can help us grow out of the economic challenge, but also infrastructure investments, basically, raise your platform for economic success in many instances, for 40 or 50 years, when you're doing road and bridges, rail and ports, airports and broadband, possibly some assistance with school construction, energy infrastructure to expand transportation and storage. We hire people now, but then we will live off those investments with an elevated base for economic success, for decades.

And so, the good news part of what I'm going to put on the table now, is for a variety of reasons, but maybe particularly because of the economic challenge that's been visited on us, by the

Coronavirus Pandemic. The timing is perfect to use infrastructure, an infrastructure investment, to do the good work that it needs to do, and put people back to work. Okay, so that's the good new part, challenge and good news.

Now, let me get to the third challenge, and it's the challenge that you're addressing today. If I'm right, that conditions are such that an infrastructure -- major infrastructure initiative becomes a likelihood, no matter who is the next President, after January. Then we got have the workers to do these jobs, and it's not just automatic. It's not if you -- if you pass the bill, they will come. Now, we need -- we need directed and intentional strategies to build the workforce that's going to be making these investments. As a member of The Health, Education, and Labor, and Pension Committee, working together with other colleagues, both on and off the committee, and especially with my staffer Karishma Merchant, we stole an idea from the House, a few years ago. They had a Career and Technical Education Caucus, and so, Rob Portman and I, in the Senate, created one on, our side of the Capital.

We did that because of a knowledge that we were underinvesting in our Career and Technical Education Institutions, in the financial incentives for students to figure out ways to enter these careers, but also sort of underinvesting, culturally, in raising the profile of career and technical opportunities, and letting everybody know, from guidance counselors, to parents, to students, that these fantastic jobs, and you should be proud to do them, and we should, as a society, value training in these fields every bit as much as we value a college degree.

Joe mentioned I grew up working in my dad's ironworking shop, and then, later, ran a school in Honduras that taught kids to be carpenters and welders, and all through my career in public life, as a mayor, governor, and in the Senate, I have really tried to promote the notion that we have to broaden our definition of what is, in fact, higher education. Everybody needs additional education and skills training, after high school. That's the economy that we live in now, and whether it's to make a living internally, or compete with global economic competitors, externally, everybody needs additional training, but what we need is policies at the National level, that rewards and encourages it all.

When I came into the Senate and started the Career and Technical Education Caucus, we noticed some things. We noticed, for example, Pell Grants. Pell Grants are designed to assist students from low or moderate-income backgrounds, to get higher education, education after high school.

To get a Pell Grant, you have to income qualify, that's well known, but also Pell Grants can only be used in certain kinds of programs. One criteria is that the program has to be about 14 weeks in length, which is the length of a traditional college semester.

So, here's an interesting phenomenon. You're a student, you income qualify for a Pell Grant. You decide that you don't want to pursue your higher education at a Community College or College, but what you want to do is take a, you know, a highly validated and credentialed career and technical program, I'll use my dad's shop as an example, in welding, for example. Well, a lot of high-quality career and technical ed programs are not 14 weeks in length, they're maybe eight weeks in length, but think about it, a 14-week long college course, is maybe three hours a week, times 14, okay, 42, maybe somewhere between 45 and 60 hours of classroom time, over the course of a semester. A lot of high-quality career and technical programs would be eight hours a day, five days a week, okay, that's 40 times eight, 320 hours. So, they're actually more intense, in terms of the classroom time, than the time that you might spend in a class during a college semester, even to take multiple three-hour credits, but we don't let you get a Pell Grant, for this kind of a program. Why not? Because it's not college, we assign in our minds, and in our policy, somewhat of a second-class status.

And, second, my oldest son, Nat, has been an infantry commander in the Marine Corps. He just retired from active and went to Reserve Status. He had the ability, commanding his platoon, to authorize anybody in the platoon to get a Military Tuitions Assistance Benefits, if it would advance their suitability as a Marine, and he could have -- he could approve up to about \$4,500 a year, in this Tuition Assistance Benefit, if he thought it was going to help somebody be a better Marine, but the money had to go to a community college or college. If he had somebody who was a trained Ordinance Specialist, is which a metal working specialist's designation, primarily within the Army, Marines, well, primarily within the Army and Marines, and if he had somebody who was an Ordinance Specialist, say, hey, Lieutenant, guess what, I can pass the American Welding Society Exam, if you give me \$300 bucks. He couldn't do that because that wasn't on a college campus.

We have a lot of policies that, over time, have essentially established Career and Technical Programs, as second class, as not higher education. If you graduate from the Newport News Ship Building Apprenticeship Program, which is one of the most sophisticated career and technical

education programs in the world, the admission rate into it is lower than the admission rate to Harvard. Sixty percent of the people who get admitted already have some college or entire college degree.

The starting salaries are amazing, but if -- if you get into that program and graduate from the traditional program, American statistics, that measure what percentage of adults have college degrees, do not count the standard graduation diploma from the Newport News Apprenticeship Program as higher education. So, you're not counted as having higher education, again, an example of a cultural insensitivity, that's a nice word, an insensitivity that would not view career and technical Education as something worth celebrating and something worth encouraging. That's what the Career and Technical Education Caucus is about.

Here's two things that we're doing, and this is where I'm going to close, but two things that I think we have a significant chance embracing from a policy standpoint, and there's millions of other policies at the local, state, and federal level, but these are two bills that Rob Portman and I had, that we're really excited about promoting.

First is called The BUILDS Act. Joe mentioned the BUILDS Act, and it's essentially an act to use grant funding to inspire partnerships between institutions, levels of government, private sector to train infrastructure workers, the infrastructure workers that we'll definitely need, if we embrace a sizable infrastructure investment package, in the coming years. This is something that is bipartisan. Rob and I support it. We've gotten good read from the Administration on it, and we feel like we have a path to, potentially, getting passed, either as part of an infrastructure bill, or as part of the discussions around Workforce Investment Act, or The Higher Education Act reauthorization, that we'll be working on in the committee. That's the BUILDS Act, and I would encourage everybody to take a look at it. We've introduced it. We're excited about it. It's bipartisan, but there are things that need to be added to it to make it even better. We're looking for those ideas, and I suspect we'll get some good ones today.

The second bill we have is called The JOBS Act. The JOBS Act has a really simple purpose, which is to, basically, expand Pell Grants, so that Pell Grants can be used by those who income qualify, if they want to take high-quality career and technical educational courses. We want the courses to be appropriately credentialed and validated. We don't want to spend Pell monies on courses that aren't going to help students, basically, find a path to a satisfying and economically productive career, but

there are so many careers in career and technical fields, that may not be delivered in the traditional way that a college semester long course would be delivered, that we want Pell Grants to be available to students who choose that option, and, if they are available, we think it will not just be good for students, but parents, and guidance counselors, and high schools will start to think differently about these careers that are so needed.

The JOBS Act is a bill that we've introduced now, a couple of Congresses in a row, recognizing that, you know, in the Senate, the way you get things passed is you attach the as a rail car onto something that's moving, and, all along, we hope that something would be The Higher Education reauthorization, which is -- we're way overdue on it. I thought, because I'm always maybe, little optimistic, overly optimistic, my friend Mark Warner would say, I thought we would do HEA reauthorization, maybe, in 2018 or '19. No, sadly it's been delayed, but, in a way, I'm now kind of glad we've delayed it because I think the COVID experience has probably taught us so many new lessons about higher education, including online content and other things, that, had we done it a year or two ago, we would have immediately probably been behind, in terms of assessing where higher education is going.

But the idea of Jobs Act expanding eligibility for Pell to high quality and career technical education is there, with strong bipartisan support. America's community colleges have listed it as their top priority because our community colleges are offering a higher and higher percent of their curriculum not in a traditional college semester, leading to an Associate Degree, but with shorter term more intense skills, credential, and job training programs.

So, these are a couple of the ideas that we have at the federal level, The BUILDS Act and the JOBS Act, that we're very excited about, and we feel like we got vehicles, whether it's infrastructure builds, or HEA reauthorization, or WIELA Authorization, that we can use to get these ideas there, so that we can train the workforce that we're going to need, for the infrastructure investment that our Nation needs, and that I believe we will -- we will tackle, imminently, in the next Administration.

I want to thank Joe for inviting me today, and you've got a great panel. Brookings has been focused on this for some time, many different elements of the Nation's infrastructure need, and how we creatively address it, but even if we figure out the -- what has been the most complicated challenge, which is just having the guts to finance it and pay for it. That's been the most complicated thing. Even if

we do that, we won't succeed as we should, unless we come up with an effective answer to the challenge that Brookings has the table today, which is how do we train the Nation's workforce to be ready to do this job and raise our platform for success. It's about individual achievement and careers. It's also about our National competitiveness in a very competitive world. It couldn't be a more important topic, and I want to thank Brookings for the chance to be with you to, maybe, open this up today.

MR. KANE: Thank you, Senator, not only for your remarks, but also for your continued leadership on these issues. You know, I think you hit the nail on the head. It's not just a challenge, but there's some positive news here, too, that we can build and work towards. So, I think you set the stage perfectly for today's discussion, which will explore this skilled trades need and opportunity in greater depth.

Our panel will last about 25 minutes, before we will hear from Congressman Steven Horsford, to close out the session. So, I'm delighted to, now, be joined by our three panelists, if they will join the screen. There we go.

First, we have Jane Oates, who is President of WorkingNation, a national non-profit focused on unemployment and the need to create new workforce solutions for a changing economy. Previously, Jane served as Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration, after being nominated for the position by President Obama, in 2009. She has held several other leadership and advisory roles, at that federal, state, and local level, going back to her time as a teacher, in Boston and Philadelphia Public Schools. So, Jane, your expertise on education and workforce policy will be a tremendous addition to today's discussion, and thanks for joining.

MS. OATES: Thanks, Joe.

MR. KANE: Next, we have Nicole Smith, who is a research professor and chief economist at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, where she leads Econometric and Methodological Work. She has developed a framework for restructuring long-term occupational and education projections, and is part of a team of economists working on a project to map, forecast, and monitor human capital development and career pathways. In addition to looking at all types of jobs, she has also examined infrastructure's potential to stimulate economic growth. So, Nicole, I think, your technical background will be immensely helpful, as we look to better define and measure our

workforce needs. So, thanks for being here.

And, finally, we have Marie Walker, who is the Chief Operating Officer of The Corps Network, also known as The National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. The Corps Network advances programs that transform young people's lives and communities, through career development, conservation, and civic engagement, which descend from the original Civilian Conservation Corps, in the 1930s. Marie manages the day to day operations of the Corps Network, including the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative, and manages private and federal Partnerships with AmeriCorps, The National Park Service, and The U.S. Forest Service. Marie, you've had deep involvement with workers and a variety of organizations on the ground, throughout your career. Thanks so much for your perspectives here.

Again, as Congress looks to support small businesses and other affected industries during COVID and beyond, we know there is potential for infrastructure to serve as a stronger economic foundation. As past Brookings research has shown, there are 17 million workers, or more than one out of every 10 workers, nationally, that construct, operate, and maintain our infrastructure. There are a variety of jobs, across all types of regions, with hiring and replacement needs.

Wages for these positions are competitive, up to 30 percent higher for entry level workers, compared to all jobs nationally, and just 13 percent of infrastructure workers have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. So, work-based learning and employer engagement are crucial. To seize this infrastructure workforce opportunity, my colleagues, Adie Tomer, Lara Fishbane, and I have proposed a new InfraCorps Program, as part of a larger stimulus plan you can read on the Brookings' website.

Working in collaboration with the Department of Labor, federal policymakers would establish a new 21st Century Infrastructure Workforce Program, aimed at providing flexible learning and career opportunities in the skilled trades, especially for underrepresented, disadvantaged, and disconnected workers. The ultimate scale and reach of this program would vary depending on funding and other details, but it would aim to create a robust national platform, in support of future-looking skill trade careers, including those in the clean economy.

So, turning to the first question. We know COVID has magnified the need to connect more workers to better paying accessible career pathways. Jobs in infrastructure and the skill trades,

more broadly, offer just that. Yet, even before COVID, we know there had been struggles to connect prospective workers, especially younger and more diverse workers, to careers in this space. With an InfraCorps effort or any broader federal recovery effort, there is an opportunity to hire, train, and retain more talent, but what is the scale of this opportunity? Nicole, I thought it might make sense to start with you for this question, since you have measured the number and variety of jobs in previous research.

MS. SMITH: Well, good morning, everyone. It's really a pleasure to be here. Thank you so much, Joe, for reaching out to me to talk on this panel. One trillion, two trillion, this conversation is not if, but when, as Senator Kaine spoke earlier, it's -- you know, there's a lot of bipartisan support for an infrastructure bill, and, you know, all of the why's have been discussed. We know why, we've talked about the need, the crumbling infrastructure of -- in the United States, we know about the need, but the next level of discussion is how many jobs, and for whom? And that's the next level of discussion.

A lot of research that we've done have estimated anywhere between 11 and 15 million, over a 10-year period. So, we can have somewhere between 11 to 15 million jobs, when the sugar high of the infrastructure, one to two trillion-dollar investment, actually, you know, dissipates. There are various studies regarding exactly how many you get. There was standard and poor study that talked about 29,000 direct jobs created for every 1.3 billion spent, or Department of Transportation spoke about 13,000 jobs for every one billion spent, but irrespective of where we stand on how many, we know it's going to be significant.

When we speak about which jobs and for whom, one of the first conversations we have is education level, and as you rightly put out, only 13 percent of these people are going to have BA plus, close to 55 percent of them are going to be high school or less, and what we do know is that the training for the high school or less people, 67 percent of them will need less than six months of training. So, everyone is going to need training for these new jobs, as Senator Kaine pointed out earlier. You know, we have this life-long learning, that's the new approach to how we do things. Even at the low education level jobs, we're going need training.

Sixty seven percent of those at high school or less, are going to need at least six months of training, 51 percent of those in middle skills, so, people with some college credits, or associate degrees, 51 percent of them are going to need one to six months training, and even those with Bachelor's

degrees and above, about 45 percent will need more training. So, the questions is -- we really need to talk about Pell eligibility and making sure that we extend that for not -- not for credit courses, as well. You know, we did some talk about that. So, that's really an important concern.

The second level of discussion on the for whom should also be gender. As we look at the infrastructure jobs, there are, traditionally, male jobs. Ninety two percent of them, traditionally, are jobs that men would fill. So, we have a public relations problem here, and it's not sufficient, anymore, for us to just put a hard hat on a woman, and put her on the, you know, the front page of a picture, and say, okay, more girls are doing theses jobs, and we need to make sure that, when, when, this quality is enacted, that we spend a lot more time reaching out to training and educating women for some of these jobs, as well.

And the third level of the whom has to do with race ethnicity. And, here, we're not -- we're no longer dealing with a public relations problem. We're, actually, dealing with a historical tracking problem. So, when we talk about, you know, whether or not these jobs are good jobs, we know they're good jobs. We don't get to overcome all of this historical tracking by just simply saying it's a good job. For a lot of people with an understanding of the history of some of this, when we hear good jobs, we hear good enough. So, good enough for whom?

So, you know, too -- I'm concerned that, traditionally, too many of these lower paying high school jobs go disproportionately to Hispanic Latino, and some of the middle skilled jobs to African American and Black workers. So, there's a concern about not only a gender problem, but a race ethnicity problem, and we really need to focus on exactly how we counsel our students, regarding their long-term career development pathway, and to ensure that we don't just reinforce standard, problematic, you know, distributions here, for women, and minorities, by just allotting and allocating jobs and opportunities to the traditional group.

So, just to wrap up, I would say, you know, we have to focus on the three groups, the education group, the gender group, race ethnic group, and to make sure that we are extending and thinking outside of the box, to learn how we can better make this an equable distribution, when that money is, actually, spent on American infrastructure.

MR. KANE: And that's very helpful Nicole, and I think, at the very least, right, we're

talking millions, right, of positions, potentially at play here, and not losing sight of the people, you know, dimensioned to all of this, of who exactly are we talking about, when we think of the need for equity, the need for greater diversity, in many of these positions.

And, you know, Jane, I know your time at ETA was during the last recession, where I know there were conversations around green jobs, and, you know, infrastructure, and trying to connect more workers just to stable careers, and so, obviously, these are topics you've been thinking about, in many different capacities, for quite a while. I'm curious what your sense is, in terms of sort of judging the scale of this opportunity.

MS. OATES: Well, Joe, I think it's such a great moment to really look at what we've done in the past, and how we build on that and improve. I mean, in the AAR and ARRA bill, we really tracked who got the money. We were really good at that, but we really weren't very good at tracking who benefitted. So, on the worker level, I think Nicole brings up such a great point. We have to be direct. We have to measure, from the beginning, who's getting hired. You know, we have great resources in our Country. Organized Labor has built a world class Building Trades Program, with registered apprenticeships, but they say that people have, and I agree, people have to have qualifications in order to get into those jobs. So, we need to build a strong network of pre-apprenticeship programs, for women and people of color, who have been denied those position, for decades, so that they have the skills to compete. That's number one.

Number two, we have to make sure they're welcome. No ones like being the only, on a jobsite. You know, so, we need to make sure, that when women and people of color come in, they're put in a cohort, where they change the climate of the employer, as well, to be much more welcoming to the diversity, quite frankly, that they're going to need to get the workforce talent to create those jobs. And, lastly, I would say, yes, we want to care about workers and a really diverse workforce, but one of the things that we would have done, if AARA had been able to be expanded, is really do more on who's getting the sub-contracts, so, not worrying about entry level workers, but worrying about building small business, in the women-owned, minority-owned, veteran-owned, business community. You know, we made a down payment on that, in the Obama Administration. We need to go to fulfillment on that because, yes, it's wonderful to have a great career path, and a good paying job, and that what's

infrastructure opportunities will bring, but it's also a great opportunity to bring -- to build wealth in communities of culture -- of color, where we bring them businesses, that will survive long after the initial investment of this infrastructure bill.

MR. KANE: No, I think that's -- that's totally right, Jane, and, you know, I think, connects, actually, well, in some ways, Marie, with your work at the Corps Network, where you've really, in some ways, encapsulated this opportunity, that's already in motion, in some ways, across the country, but, I think, you know, there's questions of how additional federal action could help drive even more opportunity.

You know, I'm curious, given the -- given the nature of some of your work at the Corps Network. How are you looking this scale of sort of this National opportunity around skilled trades and infrastructure?

MS. WALKER: That's a great question. Thanks, Joe, and I'm really excited to be a part of this panel on this morning. But when we look about -- or look at what we're talking about here, let's look at a little bit of history. We've heard references to infrastructure, roads, and bridges, and buildings. I'm reminded of the CCC, back in the days of FDR.

The CCC boys built those bridges and those roads that we still use today, and so, The Corps Network, which is a membership association, we have about 134 members, across the country, including U.S. Territories and the District of Columbia, where we actually work with approximately 25,000 young people that works on those infrastructure projects to this day, all across the country. The Modern Corps, today, have longstanding public-private relationships, that help the communities that they live in, and the resource managers complete that infrastructure and conservation project.

Corps have a track record of completing highly professional work, in partnership with the local and state government agencies, and young people earn an industry-recognized certification, or credential, as part of that work experience. Every year, Corps participate, and work with, and achieve certifications in home energy ratings, HAZMAT, HAZWOPER, chainsaw certifications, OSHA, 10-hour and 30-hour programs, PV installers. So, depending on where The Corps is, participants could serve a wide var-range of projects in their communities.

Just recently, Corps, over the past year, Corps have constructed and improved over 13,000 miles of trail, restored 2,300 miles of waterways, improved 7,900 parks and community service

spaces, recycled 31.5 million pounds of waste, and restored 1.4 million acres of habitat. So, we have the young workers that are -- have been affected by COVID, but yet the applications that Corps have received has quadrupled, and we think that is part of the result. So, what can we do?

I think that the bottom line is that it would call us back to what the CCC boys did, back in the '30s. I believe that there is a lot of work to be done, there are a lot of young people who are eager to do the work, and that there are many existing Corps Programs that already work with partnerships, both on the federal, state, and local levels, but there needs to be funding, not just to complete the projects, but to help to provide comprehensive training to those young people, and wraparound services that can support them to be successful in these types of programs.

MR. KANE: That's terrific, Marie, and, you know, all of you kind of made my job easier, in that you almost answered the second question that I was going to ask you on, you know, the importance of reaching more and different types of workers, not, you know, not just to drive a recovery following COVID, but, in particular, to help many of those lower-income Black, Hispanic, and other workers, who have experienced some of the most significant job losses, reaching individuals, including many women, who have been underrepresented in these positions for some time, and not just reaching younger workers, but, also, retraining and helping all workers advance their careers, including those who may have related experience, but don't know where to start.

So, I mean, I think it's one thing to identify the scale of this workforce opportunity and who should be prioritized in a recovery effort, but it's crucial, as you've all touched on, that we ensure any hiring and training efforts are targeted, flexible, and accessible. Work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, as you've already mentioned, are essential in so many skilled trade careers, as are collaborations with employers, educational institutions, labor groups, and many different community actors.

So, you know, what types of training and skills development opportunities are needed? You know, how can a federal infrastructure recovery help the most? Is it, as you were saying, in terms of money? Is it in terms of capacity? Something else? You know, Jane, I kind of am curious to start with you on this one, just because I imagine some of these same questions were kind of coming up, following the last recession, as we think of sort of a federal response to what's, in many ways, a job to challenge,

but also a jobs opportunity.

MS. OATES: Well, dislocated older workers are really complicated because they're the people who really need the wraparound services. They need to get paid while they're learning. They need -- they often have children, and they're often in a hurry. So, I think they require a special look, but I also think that we have to remember to measure everything. I think Marie brings up such a great point about The Corps Network because that's really a pre-apprenticeship type program. You're getting all those employability skills, plus, when you talk about OSHA certifications and other certifications, that's great.

How do we make sure that the older workers are pushed into programs like that, where their training includes real certifications that are recognized by business, that can help them get a leg up in the world? And that's been difficult. And, again, women -- you know, we just -- WorkingNation just did a survey with Storyline Group, and it was amazing, 31 percent of the people surveyed had never had anyone talk to them about a career path, and 51 percent of the people surveyed didn't know where to get training in their local area, other than a traditional route.

So, we really have a lot of work to do to get ready, to get -- make sure people are using great curriculum, you know, whether they're using it for commercial, construction, or home construction, whether they're using it for travel and logistics because these things are going to have to be -- or we're going to have so many materials being transported. How do we make sure people know those jobs? And how do we make sure people know about jobs that exist in their local community, with employers, like utility companies, who are going to be such a big part of this, as we deal with the grid? It's a big job, but we need to start on it now, long before the bill passes, to educate people about where are the real pathways to get to these jobs, when they're available.

MR. KANE: Right, and, you know, Marie, I think, you know, kind of turning to you, that, in some ways, as Jane was describing, you know, you were already -- The Corps Network is already kind of doing this, to some degree, across the country, and, you know, that this idea, as we were talking last week, you know, funding for people, not just funding for more projects, per se. So, I'm curious, you know, what do you see, if there's an increased sort of federal role, here, that would help do your work almost already that you're doing, right, or is there something else that, that we're not talking about, that would be

helpful?

MS. WALKER: Well, like Jane said, it has to be an investment in the people, and I've come up with the term, or the slogan, The PPP. We need the people, the programming, and the projects. We have to be able to take young people, or even the older worker, invest in them, start where they are.

We have to make sure that the, as Jane eluded to this, we have to make sure that the playing field is level, that it's -- there is equality that's based on whom everyone is, not just a certain group of people, and so, when we look at The Corps Members, that work in The Corps Network, and on those projects, we also know that those young people have been adversely affected in a time of COVID, whether it's been economic, whether it's been health. All of those, those issues, definitely have an impact on the people doing the work.

So, we have to make sure that we in -- put that investment into the people. We have to make sure that the programs are structured, so that it helps give them the lift up that they need, in order to do the project work. It's great to have the programs, it's great to have the projects, but without the people, none of that gets done.

MR. KANE: Right, and, you know, turning to you, Nicole, it's -- you know, there's a demonstrated need, there's a demonstrated opportunity, here, there's a need for targeting, right, that's focused on people, but we also have to hold ourselves accountable. We have to assess where we're going, right, measure where we're going, and I know this is something that you have been covering in some of your work, not just in infrastructure, but all types of jobs, right, when we think of sort of where is the workforce going here, the changing nature of skills, even, right?

We're not dealing with a stationary target. In many ways, there's a moving target here, to make sure that we have a workforce that's prepared for the future. You know, how do you see potential sort of federal role in addressing, you know, these people-centered strategies, but ones that also develop sort of changing skills, and really creating that durable pathway that so many people are look for right now?

MS. SMITH: Well, there's one thing that -- one common thread that meanders throughout all of these discussions about where we're headed, and that's technology. So, we know that all of these jobs are going to use technology more intensely, whether it is, you know, using it as a

compliment to what you're actually doing, much more so than substituting for a pre-selected job, and what we've observed, I guess, from the doing the research, is that even if we were to look at the apprenticeship programs as structured, as currently structured, it's not going to be enough.

I mean, the registered apprentices, we probably have a few million of those who are currently here. So, we have a scale issue, from apprenticeship points of view. We're going to have to enlist the assistance of community colleges, in some way, and, immediately, we have an infrastructure problem because we need to ensure that we can train these groups of people. Even if you were to look at 11 million over 10 years, that's 1.1 million additional persons a year requiring that type of training. If you want to do it remotely, in the way that you and I are communicating right now, remotely, then the infrastructure we're talking about is broadband, and who has access to broadband, who has access to the devices that they can connect and actually, you know, do that particular type of work?

Senator McCain, earlier, talked about, sorry, Senator Kaine, earlier, spoke about looking about infrastructure from the perspective of rural communities not having access, but, three to one, urban communities are disproportionately affected by not having access to broadband, in those numbers. So, you can't -- you can no longer decide to go to the library or go to Starbucks, in an age of COVID. I mean, we have to prepare to ensure that -- you know, maybe present MiFis to students at home, so that they can actually access the technology. So, this -- we are fighting a problem here, of scale, using resources that, by definition, favor those who are higher income. So, we have to be cognizant of that, and make sure that we really reach down to the groups of people that need it the most.

MR. KANE: I have -- I'm sure I'm speaking for all of you, I have such a long of questions, that we're just barely touching on here, and I know Congressman Horsford is waiting, in the next couple of minutes, to talk, but I did want to just end on this question, give you all sort of 30 seconds, each, to react to this. You know, we heard for -- from Senator Kaine, earlier, about some of the federal efforts that are already underway, around this.

I was describing this, this InfraCorps sort of idea, that my colleagues and I have had put forward. You know, there has to be a willingness to experiment, I think, with new solutions, but we also don't want to add bureaucracy or duplicate other existing workforce development efforts that are out there. So, you know, 30 seconds or less, just to kind of wrap up. How would you imagine structuring,

you know, the federal programming and investment around this skilled trades effort? Is it imagining up a magic wand? Which I know we don't, but in your -- in your view, what could be done, you know, that we're in this moment right, in COVID, it's a bipartisan priority. What do you think would help the most? Nicole, why don't we just keep going with you, since you were just wrapping up there?

MS. SMITH: You know, I, if I had a magic wand, I would really make sure that we extended Pell eligibility to non-credit, and to make sure that, you know, even people who are doing a few courses that are directly related to, you know, getting a job in infrastructure, they have access to the money to do that.

MR. KANE: Marie?

MS. WALKER: If I had a magic wand, I would invest in the people. We can take monies from a lot of different places and pool them together. We're resilient. We are a group of people, I think, in this country, who will push and will move forward, and I think, as we begin to do that, we look at what already exists, take the people where they are, push them, give them a level playing field, and move forward.

MR. KANE: Jane?

MS. OATES: I agree with everything that Marie and Nicole said. I would add, with my magic wand, I would double down on the really high quality programs that already exist, make sure they're funded to deal with their backlog and their waiting list, like The Corps, like YouthBuild, like programs that Goodwill's running in digital. All of those I would make sure they had enough money, and I would leave money for experimentation, and I would -- when I experiment, I would really include employers. Employers know what they need, they know exactly the skills they're looking for, and, in those kinds of employer-led partnerships, we're going to find really accelerated pathways for these folks to get on the job as quickly as possible.

MR. KANE: Perfectly summed it up, and, you know, I think, again, speaks to the importance that many different actors have to be involved in this, right? It isn't going to be just one solution from the top down, it's going to do everything, but there are some successes we're already seeing across the country, that you highlighted, but, clearly, there is room for improvement, too. So, Jane, Nicole, Marie, thank you, again, for your insights.

As often is the case in infrastructure, the devil is in the details, when it comes to programmatic design and funding, but, at a fundamental level, the timing seems opportune for this type of federal effort, and there is a need for more demonstrated federal leadership on these workforce development issues. I look forward to following your work in the months to come.

MS. OATES: Thanks, Joe.

MR. KANE: So, to close out our event, I'm thrilled to introduce Congressman Steven Horsford, who serves as a U.S. Representative for Nevada's 4th District. Congressman Horsford has considerable leadership and experience advancing workforce development priorities focused on equity and inclusion. For more than a decade, Congressman Horsford led the Culinary Training Academy, the largest job training program in Nevada, helping thousands of workers find quality careers in the hospitality industry. Congressman Horsford also made history as Nevada's first African American State Senate Majority Leader, where he, among other accomplishments, passed The Clean Energy Jobs Initiative and positioned Nevada as a leader in renewable energy.

More recently, during his time on Capitol Hill, Congressman Horsford has served on the Ways and Means Committee, Natural Resources Committee, and Budget Committee, and further elevating these workforce and economic priorities, including support for a federal infrastructure bill. Our team actually had the opportunity to testify at last year's Budget Committee hearing, on America's infrastructure, and have had a great dialogue with Congressman Horsford.

So, we are pleased to have him speak at Brookings, or at least virtually at Brookings, to continue the important conversation about our country's infrastructure, including how we can focus on people, support training partnerships with industries and advance apprenticeship opportunities. Congressman, thank you, again, for joining us.

MR. HORSFORD: Well, thank you, Joseph. It's great to be on, and to have the opportunity to join with Senator Kaine, and all the other phenomenal panelists for a great conversation, and to outline the priorities that all Americans really need around workforce development and training. I want to thank Brookings Institution for inviting me today, and I'm so grateful to partner with Brookings, as a leader in recognizing the significance of preparing for our Nation's future infrastructure and ensuring that workers are an essential part of that discussion.

Today, during the unprecedented circumstances caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, our Nation faces exacerbated challenges of fostering and evolving and adaptable workforce that meets our unique economic needs. As many of you may know, Nevada's 4th District is very diverse. It's over 52,000 square miles. It represents urban, suburban, as well as six rural communities, and it is demographically and geographically diverse. Our state, unfortunately, was one of the hardest hit states, economically, in the country.

We, in April, we witnessed our unemployment rates skyrocket to just over 30 percent, the highest in modern history, and, today, that unemployment still remains among one of the highest in the country. Every corner of Nevada has been economically affected by this pandemic, which is why this event and the discussion that you're having is so critical at this time, in helping to shape what the next Congress needs to do to advance these important legislative initiatives. And the rest of our country continues to suffer, as well, and we need a strategy that works for every corner of this country. And while we are seeing slight improvements in September, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 12.6 million Americans are still unemployed, and those are Americans who are struggling to keep a roof over their head, put food on the table, provide for their children who are also displaced, many of them from their education, and who are also at risk of losing health insurance in the middle of a public health crisis.

As Joseph indicated, before coming to Congress, I led The Culinary Academy, which is the state's largest -- Nevada's largest job training program, for more than 10 years, and I was able to see, firsthand, what a joint labor management partnership can really do in improving lives, equipping people with the skills that they need, and helping people not only obtain occupational skills, but also complete their GED and high school diplomas, earn their citizenship, buy their first home, and really live out the American Dream, and so, those are the experiences that I bring with me now, as a member of Congress, to push my colleagues to keep this at the center of the legislation that we work on.

I am fighting for legislation that not only provides our workforce with the training that it needs, but also make sure that we are creating good paying jobs, family sustaining wages, with benefits for the workforce, to fill, so that our economy can get back on track, and so that we cannot just go back to normal because normal wasn't all that great for a lot of people, but to build something better for workers, for families, and for the employers that they help to make successful.

We must keep asking ourselves this question: what kind of jobs are we generating, and do they pay enough to live on from a family sustaining standpoint? Fifty-three million workers, 44 percent of the entire workforce of our country, earn barely enough to live on. That is unacceptable, and that was pre-COVID. So, now the situation has gotten even worse. Of those millions of workers who are barely earning enough to survive, their median annual income is just \$18,000. So, the takeaway is that, before the pandemic, millions of hardworking Americans, who were working full-time, year round, were struggling to eke out a living and support their families on very low wages, and we know that, now, that things have only gotten worse.

We not only have to secure good paying jobs, but we must provide the workforce with the tools that it needs to fill those positions with competent, highly skilled workers. Last year, I worked across the aisle to introduce The JOBS Act, which is a bipartisan bill that would make Federal Pell Grants accessible to all Americans enrolling in job training programs, that may have seemed out of reach or unaffordable without federal assistance, and I know a number of your panelists just recommend that, as one of the things that this Congress should act on.

Prior to the pandemic, Nevada was one of the Nation's fastest growing economies, with new jobs added to the job market every month, but, unfortunately, we've seen too many projects halted because of the real economic turmoil of this pandemic. As many of these projects pick up, many of these roles will still go unfilled because our workforce needs to have the skills and the training to meet the demand of the work that lays ahead.

That's why I introduced The JOBS Act, to help bridge that gap and open those opportunities up to a wider swap of capable Nevadans and all Americans. In my state of Nevada, we have just under 200,000 people who are currently unemployed. Some of them, unfortunately, may not go back to the job that they held previously, and so, it's imperative that we pass this JOBS Act to help these workers transition into new good paying careers that are in demand, after this pandemic, and as we reopen our economy.

I also introduced The SKILL UP Act, another bipartisan bill to assist businesses in growing the number of skilled workers and train our workforce for 21st Century opportunities. Sixty-two percent of small and mid-sized business leaders say that it is still difficult to find skilled workers.

Currently, there is no federal policy designed to adequately support businesses with filling this middle skill job opportunities that are available, and very little policies or programs that empower workers who are ready to take their career to the next level.

Currently, The Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which is an important provision that The Ways and Means Committee has worked on, helps businesses hire workers with barriers to employment. That includes veterans, disadvantaged youth, and low-income workers, but does little to offset the cost for employer-provided training, and that is an element that we need to change. So, as a result, many employers that offer well-paying but higher skilled jobs are unable to take full advantage of the program by training workers with low skills to add to the workforce they desperately need.

Millions of jobs remain open because workers do not have an opportunity to develop the necessary skills to succeed. That's why, as a member of The Ways and Means Committee, I have worked to provide targeted tax incentives to businesses that invest in work-based learning for workers most in need of training opportunities. We already know that on-the-job learning and credential attainment are successful at improving wages and keeping employees. We've seen the success of the TANF recipients and other workers who can take part in job training or skill building programs.

So, The SKILL UP Act would make job training programs more accessible to employers by offering an additional tax credit for those employers that hire Work Opportunity Tax Credit eligible employees and invest in those employees with job or skill training programs that lead to higher wages and advancement within the company. So, I hope that this piece of legislation -- we can help businesses and employees have the support that they need to grow our well-skilled good-paying job market and, in turn, grow our economy.

As you know, this summer, the House voted in favor of H.R.2, The Moving Forward Act, which I was a proud co-sponsor of. This is a sweeping legislative package investing more than \$1.5 trillion to rebuild America's infrastructure, while creating millions of good-paying jobs, combating the climate crisis and addressing all kinds of disparities throughout America. H.R.2 firmly delivers on creating the infrastructure of the future, while creating good-paying jobs and delivering far-reaching forward-thinking progress for communities across the country.

The bill re -- builds our highways, bridges, transit railways, airports, ports, and harbors, all

while protecting American jobs with strong Buy America provisions and labor protections. It invests in our children's future, modernizes our energy infrastructure for a clean -- clean energy future. It invests boldly in affordable housing and expands affordable high-speed internet to underserved communities to help close the digital divide, which is especially important in rural communities and counties, like the ones I represent. It upgrades hospitals and healthcare infrastructure to increase capacity and strengthen our ability to respond to COVID-19 and the future, any future, public health emergencies. It ensures all communities have clean water. And, lastly, it promotes investments in our communities by spurring private investment through the tax code, through a revitalized bill -- Build America Bonds Program, the expansions of the private activity bonds, and significant enhancements to The New Market Tax Credit and The Rehabilitation Tax Credit.

H.R.2 serves as an important marker to the beginning of the conversation on what we need to see done in any future infrastructure package, but I want to close my remarks today by addressing the issue of inclusivity in our workforce because any conversation we have about infrastructure must include human capital and innovative workforce development initiatives to help promote a diverse and inclusive labor pool.

Earlier this year, the Congressional Black Caucus released our 21st Century Infrastructure Principles to help guide Congress on how to build a stronger more effective Nation that works for every American, not just a select few. One of those principles is that we must redefine what infrastructure is. Traditionally, the term infrastructure has been largely understood to include our transportation systems, telecommunications, and public buildings, but we must also include human capital in our definition of infrastructure because, for far too long, we have talked about how to build infrastructure without investing in the skills and education of the very people we trust to build our roads and schools. Another key principle is promoting gender and racial inclusion in infrastructure building. Often, the economic benefit generated by infrastructure construction does not accrue to some of our poorest communities, and the infrastructure workforce, traditionally, lacks gender and racial diversity. We cannot build the future infrastructure workforce if we are not purposeful about extending such opportunities to those that have, traditionally, been left out. That includes African Americans, Latino Americans, youth between the ages of 18-25 that are not in school and not working, including homeless

youth, foster youth, and runaway youth.

In addition to being inclusive, we must also focus on developing a skilled and technical trained workforce. So, I'm fighting to create a training system that prepares workers for the industries, that gives many -- them the tangible skills and credentials that position them for hire and, more critically, for advancement. A skilled technical workforce that reflects the diversity of our Nation is critical to our continued growth and advancement, and, in fact, our recovery after this pandemic.

That is why I am laser-focused on developing an infrastructure workforce plan that will focus on training for good-paying middle skill jobs, closing the equity the racial equity gaps within workforce training, and doing it in such a way that ensures that those opportunities are available to everyone, and making sure that we develop our youth to be ready for this job market because one-third to one-half of workers in transportation, water, and electrical utilities are currently over the age of 55. So, we must be ready to replace those workers, as they retire.

In closing, I am so looking forward to continuing to work with all of you on these important issues of workforce and creating opportunities for all Americans, and I strongly support the work of The Brookings Institution, and the conversation, and the work ahead. Thank you for having me here, today. I hope to be back soon. Please, stay well, stay healthy, and, most importantly, get out and vote.

MR. KANE: Thank you, Congressman. Greatly appreciate all those thoughts, especially your closing thoughts, and your continued commitment to focusing on these issues. Clearly, many pieces of legislation focused here, but also just a recognition that the normal that we even had, before COVID, was just not good enough, and so, how do we focus on people, and, particularly, those most at -- disadvantaged individuals to connecting with these opportunities. So, thank you for joining us.

I also wanted to extend my thanks, again, to Senator Kaine, and our panelists, and to all our viewers. Thank you for joining us. It's been a packed hour, but you can tell all the energy and interest around this topic, not just in an InfraCorps, as we've described, but the combination of infrastructure and workforce development, more broadly, and how it continues to grab attention. I'm excited to not simply see where this conversation goes, but where there could be potential action, and I hope you have a good rest of your week.

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