THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

PROPOSALS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE AND WORKER MOBILITY

Washington, D.C.

Friday, December 11, 2020

PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

FRED DEWS
Managing Editor, Podcasts and Digital Projects
The Brookings Institution

Guests:

ANNELIES GOGER
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Metropolitan
Policy Program
The Brookings Institution

MARTHA ROSS
Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program
The Brookings Institution

TONY PIPA
Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development
The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. The election of Joe Biden as the next President, even with the possibility of split government, offers a renewed opportunity for fact based federal policy solutions to counter the unprecedented impacts and disparities laid bare by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and bring long needed prosperity to Americans of all walks of life.

To meet this opportunity, Brookings has launched the Blueprints for American Renewal and Prosperity Project, which will publish federal policy recommendations and five challenge areas. These are racial justice and worker mobility, economic growth and dynamism, governance both domestic and international, international security and climate and resilience.

On this episode, two of the authors of policy recommendations in the racial justice and worker mobility area discuss their proposals. Annelies Goger is a David M. Rubenstein Fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings, and author of Desegregating Work and Learning Through Earn and Learn Models.

Martha Ross, a fellow also in Brookings Metro, is coauthor with Nicole Bateman of National Service can Connect America's Young People to Opportunity and Community and Promote Work of Real Social Value. You can find their proposals and five more on racial justice and worker mobility at brookings.edu/blueprints.

Over the coming weeks and months, the Blueprints project will release additional policy proposals in the other four challenge areas and host virtual events. The first of which is being held on December 17th, and will feature a conversation about economic growth and dynamism.

Also in this episode, Brookings Senior Fellow, Tony Pipa, debuts a new regular segment on the show, The Sustainable Development spotlight, part of the recently launched Center for

Sustainable Development, about which I interviewed the Center's Director on the show just a few weeks ago.

In his spotlight, Pipa introduces his proposal published with Natalie Geismar, to reimagine rural policy in the United States by organizing federal assistance to maximize rural prosperity.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on twitter at Policy Podcasts to get information about and links to all our shows, including Dollar and Cents, the Brookings Trade Podcast, the Current, and our events podcast.

First up, here's Tony Pipa from the Center for Sustainable Development, with the first Sustainable Development Spotlight.

PIPA: I'm Tony Pipa, a Senior Fellow in Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institution, ere with a spotlight on sustainable development. A regular segment that we are launching to highlight work published by the newly launched Center for Sustainable Development here at Brookings.

President-Elect Joe Biden in a recent interview with Tom Friedman of the New York Times, acknowledged that people in rural areas of the U.S. feel forgotten. I think we forgot them, he said. And he pledges to focus on rebuilding the middle class in rural America.

As Biden puts his leadership team together, there are even rumors that he will appoint a rural czar to make sure those areas in the country receive focused attention. Reducing the social and economic disparities that have emerged between rural areas and the rest of the country would be a big step forward. And rural areas were much slower to recover from the 2008 Recession.

Employment and prime age labor force participation still had not recovered to pre-

Recession levels in 2019, before COVID-19 hit. And the COVID-19 crisis has exposed more vulnerabilities. For example, significant gaps in broadband and in access to health care.

So, what can a new Biden Administration do to advance social and economic development in rural America? To get a sense of what's needed now, Natalie Geismar and I analyze the current state of federal assistance available to rural communities to support their social and economic development.

We found over 400 programs spanning a head spinning 13 departments, 10 independent agencies, and over 50 offices and subagencies. A total of 14 legislative committees have jurisdiction over the authorizing legislation in Congress. To say the least, the chart we put together to show these programs ends up looking like a hopelessly convoluted spiderweb. It's a landscape of programs that is outdated, fragmented and incoherent.

What to do? First, for rural policy to be successful in the 21st century economy it needs a mindset shift. Rural America is diverse, both demographically and economically. People of color comprise 21 percent of the rural population. Rural areas have higher self-employment rates than their urban counterparts. And rural areas will play an outsized role in the transition to a climate friendly economy.

Agriculture, while strong cultural influence, accounts for under five percent of total rural jobs today. So, no longer can the federal government equate rural with agriculture. The imperative for rural development goes far beyond the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which technically has responsibility for rural policy now.

Second, a set of reforms can modernize and update federal rural policy. A national rural strategy would be a good start to improve coherence across the government. The new administration should create not only a White House position, which it sounds as if the

President-Elect is contemplating, but also establish an office that coordinates across all the federal agencies and give that office the resources to outlive each presidential administration.

The Office of Management and Budget should undertake a rural audit to identify eligibility requirements and regulations that disadvantage rural areas.

Third, the moment also calls for something bigger. A new domestic development corporation that would competitively award substantial, long term, flexible block grants that invest based on local priorities and matches them with state of the art financing tools.

The U.S. government knows how to do this. In the recent past, it's created the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, to improve the impact of its investments overseas.

Fourth, since the President-Elect may be faced with governing in a divided government, a bipartisan congressional commission should undertake a top to bottom review of current rural policy. Such a commission can honestly assess the current return on investment, and cultivate champions on both sides of the aisle to build momentum that sustains these reforms and modernizations, since they are going to take some time.

In a nation grappling with depolarization, systemic racism, and an economic recession, President-Elect Biden has an opportunity to build bipartisan momentum for making rural development part of his long term equity agenda. Seriously taking on rural issues and economic development can help him meet the urgency of the moment.

For additional analysis and recommendations, check out our report, Reimagining Rural Policy on the Brookings website.

DEWS: And now my interview with Martha Ross and Annelies Goger. Martha and Annelies, welcome to you both to the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast.

ROSS: Thanks, glad to be here.

GOGER: Yeah, thank you for having me.

DEWS: So, as I explained in the introduction, you are the authors of two separate papers in a set of, I think seven, in the first tranche of the Blueprints for America Renewal and Prosperity Project.

So, I want to ask each of you at the outset of this conversation to just very briefly tell the listeners what your paper proposes. So, we'll talk about the policy challenges in a minute. But what is kind of the high level proposal that listeners can keep in their minds as we continue this discussion throughout the episode? Martha, why don't we start with you?

ROSS: Yes. So, my paper, which I coauthored with Nicole Bateman, proposes that we drastically expand national service programs for young adults. And these programs, like AmeriCorps, YouthBuild and Conservation Corps, put young people to work on a whole range of socially useful activities, tutoring children, building affordable housing, assisting with disaster response, maintaining public infrastructure and restoring the environment.

And along the way, they earn a modest living allowance and a small educational award. Right now we only fund about 75,000 of these positions every year, even though three to five times that many apply. And we're authorized to fund up to 250,000 per year. So, I recommend that we expand it to 150,000 in the first year, then to 300,000, and then up to 600,000 by year three.

DEWS: How about you, Anneliese? Your paper.

GOGER: Sure, my paper focuses on expanding what are called earn and learn opportunities for people. So, it might be surprising to some people, but only about a third of Americans have a college degree. And for the last 20, 30 years most of our policy has focused on

getting people to complete a traditional college degree as a route to economic opportunity.

And yet, we're not seeing a ton of improvement in terms of the rate of Americans. We haven't reached a point where we have those with a college degree being the majority of the population. In fact, most people who are learning are adults who are also working.

So, it's a really big problem that all of our public education institutions are mainly geared towards that traditional student who's young and right out of high school, instead of towards the population that's working, trying to hold down a job while raising children, and also advancing their career.

So, my piece around expanding earn and learn is about really giving people an opportunity to continue earning income while they progress in their education. So, it means a lot of system level changes, not necessarily a new program.

But really trying to make sure that the entire ecosystem of higher education, even K-12 education, but also workforce training, which currently is not only very small in terms of the amount we spend on it, but it's also mostly unaccredited.

And that means that the learner can't really stack those credentials and learn into a degree or into something that shows the employer that they've reached a level of higher proficiency or skill.

So, I'm arguing that we not only need to make those options more flexible for the adult learner, but also allow them to advance more highly while also still in a job. And so some of the examples of what I mean by earn and learn would mean things like apprenticeship, but also the kinds of things that employers might call staff development or incumbent worker training in policy language. Someone who already has a job and is given robust opportunities to learn while they're also working.

DEWS: Excellent. Well, I want to stay at a high level for just a moment before I dive into the specifics of your papers. And I'm going to stay first at the level of the Blueprints Project that Brookings is launching. And the first policy area, or challenge as we're calling it, that your papers are part of, is focused on racial justice and worker mobility. Can you both make the connection for listeners between the two, between racial justice and worker mobility? Martha, do you want to start with that?

ROSS: Yeah, so worker mobility refers to whether someone can work their way up from a lower paying job to a higher paying job over time, probably gaining skills and experience along the way that merits that pay increase.

And it's a bedrock principle of our labor market. Imagine trying to pay a mortgage or for your children's education at age say, 35 or 50, if you earned what you earned at 18 or 22. But the evidence is that mobility is really limited for a lot of workers, particularly people of color and people with lower levels of education. And they stay in low wage jobs, they rely on these jobs to support themselves and their families. And they struggle to make ends meet.

And as I noted before, Black and Hispanic workers make up a disproportionate share of those stuck at the bottom of the labor market. And that shouldn't be the case in a system that purports to offer equal opportunity for all.

GOGER: So, you asked about the connection between racial justice and work mobility. I think Martha did a great job of explaining what mobility means.

One of the pieces I really wanted to dissect in my paper was how it connects to racial justice. And I use the framing disaggregating work and learning in part because the history of our education system in the United States, there's a time when we would track somebody from a very early age based on their level of achievement into either work based pathway, or what we called

vocational education at the time, or a college prep pathway.

And once you went down that pathway, sometimes quite young, it was very difficult to get back on to that other track. So, let's say you started going down academic and you realized you really wanted to be a carpenter, like it would be kind of hard to track back over to vocational. If you're in vocational and you wanted to track over to academic and you really wanted to go to college, it was hard.

And so many researchers start pointing out how this institutionalization of education ended up repeating inequities, especially for immigrants, Black and Latinx Americans, that ended up getting stuck in that vocational pathway without opportunities for a college degree.

So, what I'm trying to do in my paper is sort of disrupt this dichotomy between an either or, and figure out what is it going to take to reach a point where we can actually -- because for the current economy where technologies are changing all the time, where employers need people to learn new programming languages every year, that kind of thing, we have to be able to continue learning throughout our lifetime, and just going to college once at a young age and then being done with your education just isn't going to cut it in general.

But also how can we make sure that more Americans have the ability to continue to progress up the education ladder, even while they're working. And so earning and learning is more of a thing that comes in hybrid and comes together. So, you might start in high school, for example, and doing an apprenticeship at Google let's say, and then go to college with that on your resume.

And I think that that would look good to any college or for that matter an apprenticeship in health care in high school, that then shows that you have some work experience. And you understand that you actually do want to pursue a degree in science or health, or no, you don't and

you change your mind and you want to do something else.

So, this would be a system that gives people more options and doesn't lead people into dead ends. And in that way that's how I'm trying to really take this history of segregation of funneling certain types of people into certain types of jobs, which often means separate and unequal, right, going back to Jim Crow. And trying to give people more opportunities to move between pathways and not just stay in the same one.

DEWS: You bring up some points there that really highlight the moment we're in, but also the moment we look forward to being in. As a general proposition, this whole Blueprints for American Renewal and Prosperity Project, your papers, the other papers in this challenge area, and all the other ones that Brookings is going to release over the next few months, are really aimed at federal policy solutions in the context of the new Administration, the Biden-Harris Administration coming to Washington.

So, we do have policy ideas for what we hope will be kind of a post-COVID world. But we're still in the COVID world now. And so I think I do need to ask you both to reflect a little bit on some of the conditions, some are old conditions and some are new conditions brought about by COVID-19, that as you both point out are testing our democracy and our democratic institutions.

And I was really struck by, in both your papers about two separate policy proposals, you both focus on the issues today that are testing our institutions, our democracy. So, could you comment on some of those issues before we get even more specific into your proposals?

ROSS: Yeah, so one of the challenges we're facing now is how fragmented we've become as a society, in which people have different classes or political parties or cultural backgrounds, they're less likely to interact with each other and to trust each other and to assume good face on

the other's part.

And this has a lot of causes. We've had geographic sorting over decades where people move into different communities where people like them live. There's the online bubbles and echo chambers. Our educational systems are really stratified by class and race.

But in a diverse democratic society, it is just a disaster, if people are not willing to communicate and collaborate with those outside of their own in group. And the way national service addresses this, it's more of a long term play than an immediate solution. But it can start to build trust and bonds among its participants who are mostly going to be young people, who are going to assume leadership roles in the coming years. Working together on a shared project is much more likely to build trust, then an abstract call for mutual understanding.

For this to work, we have to design it well. It matters both what the nature of the work is and who is doing it. So, the work should be visible, open to inspection and have widely recognized significance. Like tutoring children, running disaster response, all kinds of things.

And it should be carried out by people of different interests and backgrounds and resources. If the participants are mostly white college graduates we're doing it wrong. It needs to build a sense of trust that over time will make it harder for people to just immediately assume bad faith or ill intent from other parties who are different from them.

DEWS: And Annelies you wrote in kind of a similar vein in your paper that the COVID-19 recession, and the changing nature of work which you've already alluded to, are both testing the strength and endurance of our democracy. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

GOGER: Sure. Yeah, I think the way in which these two disruptions are challenging our democracy, I think has to do with, on the one hand, the way in which both are threatening to increase inequality, because they're both about major displacements that are likely to happen and

have happened in the last nine months. In terms of people that have lost their jobs, their job may not be coming back. And they're in a position, no matter what life stage they're in, where they might need to change careers, and they're not going to look like that traditional four year college student to the employer.

And on the employer side, we have a lot of really ingrained systems where they're relying on things like degrees or people that they know already, which as we all know is very much connected to class and existing relationships in society, reproducing racial inequality and gender inequality. So, it's all about who you know and what degree you can show in high quality jobs.

And so on both the supply side and the demand side, we're seeing a lot of pressure to both be more inclusive on the employer side, but also to try to figure out how to transition when you may not have work experience in that field.

So, I think when you have such a major disruption it requires a government response to help people adjust to that, help people make that transition, and help people make those connections that otherwise are really challenging.

And then there's another aspect that I think this is threatening our democracy, which is there has been a lot of emphasis on free college as the answer to economic resilience. And I think free college is really critical. So, I'm not trying to say we shouldn't do that. I'm a first generation person for college, and so I'm still carrying loans. And I understand that. But my father never got a college degree and never would want to. He works in the trades, actually, and he's really an expert at what he does. But there is a way in which elite groups tend to judge anyone who doesn't have a college degree, as if that work and that skill isn't valuable.

And I think as we start to see new ways of new technologies getting applied in various sectors, people that are in agricultural manufacturing, people who are in various aspects of health

care at multiple levels, are going to be using technology at a much higher level into the future. And we have to have a way of valuing the skill that it takes to actually understand what are the problems that your industry is trying to solve? And how can that technology help solve them. And you have to know both the classroom side, but you also have to know that industry really well.

So, I think part of this is not just focusing on sending more people to that academic classroom, but giving people that opportunity who, while they're working, and they have all that knowledge and expertise, and really valuing that as a type of applied knowledge that is really useful to an employer and to society. And being able to connect them with opportunities to build on that and advance further in their career.

I think to the extent that we can also value things like military experience, and all the valuable skills that folks coming out of the military have that can offer to employers, that too is often neglected and not valued.

So, I feel like part of the need is to acknowledge that in any economy you have multiple types of skills and orientations. People have different types of passions, some people like working with their hands, doctors like to be serving patients in person. You can't learn that in the classroom.

And then we need to prepare institutions so that we can have a labor market that offers people ways to get to higher levels of advancement within those different types of learning and move across them more easily, like I said earlier.

DEWS: As we move into some more detailed discussion for policy proposals, let me stick with yours Annelies, here for a minute. And one thing that you write in your section of your paper on the challenge that we're facing is, you write about what you call the haphazard

proliferation of alternatives to the traditional college degree. You talked about the traditional college degree and the kind of the, I go to college, I get a job.

But you say that over time, this has generated what you call a confusing and chaotic landscape of credentials and programs. You say workers and employers struggle to understand quality levels. Can you talk a little bit in more detail about this specific challenge?

GOGER: Yeah, absolutely. So, I was describing earlier how we used to have the system of vocational tracking, partly because of the equity issues and partly because of simply just cuts to all types of education and labor institutions. We scaled back and cut a lot of those programs. So, all that was left in terms of policy was policy gearing people towards four year.

But there was still a need for the majority of Americans that didn't have the college degree. There's a lot of demand from the students and then employers as well. So, what you start to see are you have noncredit training programs that often function in a silo, in community college systems and a separate department. They are usually short term programs that don't give you credit although there are exceptions.

And so it's okay for just getting like say an entry level maybe a certificate in safety and health. But if you're trying to reach a higher level of proficiency, there's not a clear way to do that.

Credential Engine published a report last year showing there are over 730,000 different credentials, public, private. And a lot of times you see like there's this certificate, that credential. When an employer sees them, and they don't always know is this person showing me that they're advanced level, that they're basic level, or that they're midlevel, how do I understand the value of that credential?

And this is a huge market failure in the sense that it reinforces what's going on with

employers where they just seek that college degree as a proxy for skill level. And they overlook a lot of talent. A lot of talent. And even disproportionately talent that are people of color.

And then on the other side, I think it's important to just give the learner a clear sense of, okay I'm at this level, what do I need to do to just get a notch higher. And over time maybe I can move from being a CNA, a nursing assistant in a hospital, to being a registered nurse. Can I do it in little chunks so that over time, even though I am balancing a job and a family, I can still show to that employer that I'm working my way towards something higher without having to leave everything, go to school, which for many people is just impractical.

DEWS: So, is that the essential meaning of what you call and others call, earn and learn? Like you have a job, you're on a professional career track already maybe, but you need these opportunities to learn without leaving your job entirely?

GOGER: Right. So, the way that our college system works is on a semester schedule. It's not designed around somebody that's working. But there are ways you can chunk the learning into modularized coursework, right. So, you just take a small chunk at a time. You can still have milestones like a degree, similar equivalent to a bachelor's degree or an Associate degree.

Yeah, I mean typically someone is told -- I've studied the trade adjustment assistance program for many years and interview workers who have lost their job from trade, and they're 45 years old, and someone's saying to them go and sit in the classroom. To that worker it's often an affront to be told, like this isn't my identity. I'm not going to be able to abandon my family and go and sit in the classroom.

So, how could you design that content, the same content, or even content that is more applied and more specific for a specific application like advanced manufacturing, or whatever, for that worker so that they can have a job, get connected to an employer, get some new

professional networks.

This kind of links to Martha's paper, right. You get that first job, you meet people. But you can also advance and take some things on the side. And it's designed in a way that's for that type of learner who isn't able to just throw everything down and go to sit in the classroom.

DEWS: One other thing I want to ask you about to talk about specifically, and you mentioned it already, and that's the idea of apprenticeships. And I'm really fascinated by this idea. And this does reflect my bias and I apologize but when I think of apprenticeships, I think a lot of people think about Paul Revere was an apprentice to somebody and he worked for seven years and learned how to be a silversmith. And I know that's really dated and basic.

I think the idea that there is formal apprenticeships in this economy today might be news to some listeners. So, I'd like to give you a chance to explain what apprenticeships are, but also then talk about your proposal in your paper for expanding those apprenticeships.

GOGER: Yes, many people do have this idea that an apprenticeship is this ancient institution that mainly serves the trades. And it is old in the U.S. And the Act that we still have that authorizes apprenticeship is from 1937. And it hasn't been updated in a really long time.

So, it's not that that isn't still there. And the trades and electricians, building trades is still quite a common way to break into the field. Although it's outdated in the sense that many of the requirements and institutions that are there to support those apprenticeships are not there in fields that are more common now, such as healthcare or technology. And these are all very applied fields where you do need to get a lot of exposure to the job itself in order to really know how to do it well.

So, you see the rise of things like tech boot camps. But we don't have a system for really scaling tech apprenticeships, or maybe you don't need to go to get a computer science degree in

school. But you can learn all those things as you're working through the mentorship of an apprenticeship program.

And so for those who aren't familiar, generally apprenticeships differ from internships, for example, because internships tend to be three to six months, whereas an apprenticeship is generally a year to four years. And it's really a long-run way of employers to not just purchase talent, but actually have a very active role in shaping that talent.

And so, there have been lots of pilot programs and grant programs to stimulate new innovative approaches to apprenticeship in the U.S., but they haven't been systematized. And the processes for employers to get involved them in the U.S., and the employer has to invest a lot of their own time in creating the program and customizing it for their need.

Whereas in other countries, a lot of that is more systematized. So, there's a set occupation, there's clear competency milestones. The employer can customize it to some extent for their setting, but there's clarity around what is that occupation, and what do you need to be able to advance in it?

And so we don't have those institutional frameworks and that's really what my paper is trying to propose is what couldn't the federal government and states do to allow for expansion of those models to some of those nontraditional sectors, in order to meet today's need.

But also, we need something like an intermediary. In those trade school models they often involve a union that does that sort of collaboration between, you know, connecting the potential apprentice to the employer, making sure it's a good fit, educating the employer about what their role is, making sure there's not any kind of exploitation or abuse going on. There's an intermediary role that the union plays that's really valuable.

But if you're in a nonunionized sector, like technology, it's really challenging to figure

out how to do that coordination and make sure that you're getting the right fit as the employer, that you understand what your obligation is as employer and what you're getting out of it.

And for employers, if we had a system it would make that engagement with talent a lot cheaper to do. A lot cheaper to participate in something that's already there, than to try to figure out how to create it from scratch within your organization.

And then finally, apprenticeship what we have here on the ground from the folks that are trying to implement these new systems, is that it helps within that employer to create a culture of learning, which is so vital to today's needs as well. Because the people that are in the company, even that are serving as mentors, are reporting higher job satisfaction, because they're able to really learn from the new apprentice and get fresh ideas and create that exchange. And it feels really rewarding to be part of that.

And apprenticeship is just one of the types of earn and learn training that I talk about. But I think it's important, especially in terms of thinking through all the young people that have been displaced in this current COVID crisis, and how we could create opportunities for them to both get a job and earn income, but also be on a really clear path to a career progression is through an organized program like an apprenticeship.

DEWS: Yeah, to your point Annelies, apprenticeships is just one of the many specific policy proposals you have in your paper. And that's to underscore for listeners that your papers, all the papers in this group, and all the papers that will be released, really offer a very specific policy solution. So, they're all, at least the first set of racial justice and work mobility papers are now online. Listeners can go to our website, Brookings@edu, and find them, download them, read them, think about them. And they contain a wealth of detailed information.

Let me turn to you, Martha, about the challenges that you identify in your policy paper.

And I want to ask you specifically about something that really caught my attention. And that's when you wrote that it is more effective to prevent the disconnection of young people from the labor market than to try to reconnect them after a long period of disengagement. Can you elaborate on that?

ROSS: Yeah, there are a couple reasons about that. One is that the longer someone is out of a job, the harder it is to find one, and the less likely they are to get a new job. That's one of the reasons why we worry so much when long term unemployment goes up. Because that's a group of people who you worry about their ability to get new work.

It could be because of their contacts and their networks aren't as good. They're not as up to date on developments in their industry. Their skills may get stale. Employers may discriminate against those who have been out of work for a while, and wonder about their reliability, why they haven't been working.

And then you also want to try to reach people before they are alienated and discouraged. Especially if you're thinking about young adults who are more likely to have, by virtue of their lower levels of education and experience, they're more likely to have had lower waged jobs. They may think that if that's all there is for them, a low wage job, perhaps with unpredictable scheduling, with no benefits, they may not be that inclined to think it's all that and that it's worth the effort for.

DEWS: And that kind of circles back to the issues you were both raising earlier about disruptions to our democratic institutions, that people feel disconnected from even just the labor market, then they're going to feel disconnected from their community, from their society.

ROSS: Yep. Some really interesting research from the Educational Testing System found that disconnection among young people goes up over time. So, at age 18 it's really a small

number of people are disconnected from either work or school, because they're mostly in high school. It's like one percent. But by the time it's up to age 26, about 12 percent are attached to neither school nor to work. And that is a problem.

DEWS: So, Martha, am I correct then in concluding that your proposal for expanded national service not only is intended to solve a widespread set of issues with the kinds of service jobs that you envision, but it's also intended to kind of address this endemic problem with youth disconnection from the labor market. Which today under COVID-19 is even more strained not only for youth, but also for women and Black, Latino, and Hispanic workers.

ROSS: One long standing challenge that existed pre-COVID that then COVID has layered on top of, is that we do a really lousy job in this country of helping young people make the transition from school to full time employment that enables financial independence.

High School is the last universally available education option. And after that you're generally asked to make a really high stakes bet on college as your next step. In many cases, with very limited information and preparation. And it's a losing bet for a lot of people, because we're much better at enrolling students in college than we are at ensuring that they graduate. Only 60 percent of those who start college with the intention of earning a degree, have actually earned that degree within six years. Then they likely have debt and no degree.

For those going the non-college route, or for going apprenticeships, or other post-secondary training, if they're armed with only a high school diploma, they're entering a labor market which will likely slot them into a low wage job with limited possibilities of advancement.

So, overall national service would provide more structure and stability to young people. It would give them a chance to gain work experience, to learn new skills, support themselves financially along the way. Very important. Expand their professional networks and reduce their

financial barriers to post-secondary education.

DEWS: So, can you talk a little bit then about the kinds of jobs, the kind of projects that people enrolled in an expanded national service program could do? Maybe some of them are similar to the kind of jobs that national service participants do now, but maybe some of them are new?

ROSS: Well, national service participants now do engage in a huge array of work. What I'm proposing is that we focus on a couple of lines of work. And especially in this post-COVID environment where education and socialization have been so disrupted for K through 12 students that we place a heavy focus on tutoring and enrichment activities.

Obviously, in the next at least six months or so there, any kind of work is going to have to be carried out with social distancing and safety protocols and masks, but you can still do it. And we know that students are just having huge learning losses and suffering from loneliness, and being away from peers and organized activities.

So, young people can do a lot to organize activities and help students improve their reading and their math. And we know how to do tutoring well, notably. We should learn from other evaluations about tutoring, ensure that there's one person consistent over time that it's a couple times a week, that kind of thing.

We should also have folks put to work on addressing computer literacy. Another lesson from this pandemic is that connection to the internet and knowledge of how to use these devices is crucial. It's actually easier to get devices into the hands of various people than it is to ensure that they know how to use it regularly to accomplish what they need to do, whether it's for school, or for general activities that enable you to participate in today's society.

We can also have them work on emergency assistance and response, including public

health efforts, COVID testing, distributing food. We can take a page from the Civilian Conservation Corps from the 1930's and have people work on conservation restoration needs, such as maintenance back logs, in public parks and wildlife refuges, neighborhood development, that kind of thing.

And then lastly, one of the virtues of national service is flexibility. And the fact that states and localities can determine what exactly they want to put these young people to work on to benefit their local needs.

DEWS: And you also propose that participants in national service programs would then get some kind of an educational benefit that is itself expanded from the current level of educational benefits. What is the current level and what would you propose to be expanded to?

ROSS: If you're in national service for a year the award that you get is pegged to the Federal Pell Grant, the maximum amount of that, which is currently about $6,000. And the Pell Grant has been losing purchasing power over the years as tuition costs have risen. And now it doesn't even cover a year for in-state tuition at a public university. And it is considered taxable income, unlike most scholarships and grants, which reduces its value even further. It's just not enough to meaningfully promote post-secondary education the way we want to.

So, what we propose is increasing the award to cover two years of in-state tuition at a public university of the service members' home state. And we borrowed that recommendation from our Brookings colleagues, Isabel Sawhill and Richard Reeves, and their report Contract with the Middle Class.

DEWS: Our listeners can go listen to the podcast I did with them last summer, and go find on our website a wealth of information and resources under the Contract with the Middle Class.

Well, another way that their proposals in the contract dovetail,, Martha with your proposals is this very idea of national service is kind of a way to generate new community spirit feeling across America. We're all in this together. Having people from different backgrounds interact with each other. I find that idea very striking. Especially your paper also picks up on that.

ROSS: Yeah, absolutely. National service, if it's done well it can accomplish a bunch of really important things at the same time. It can help young people gain work experience and support themselves financially. It can help meet important community needs. And it can help reduce the fragmentation that we've seen among different groups of people.

DEWS: Now, in both your proposals, there are issues of cost. I want to set those aside for listeners to go investigate them themselves. Because I'm going to ask a question about a possible synergy I see between your two papers. There's lots of them, but one in particular.

And let me address this first to you, Annelies. And this might be oversimplifying, deeply oversimplifying the proposals. But it strikes me that with your earn and learn proposal, your focus on expanded apprenticeships, your ideas are kind of focused on a perhaps an older worker, somebody who's in the labor market already.

Whereas, Martha, maybe yours is a little bit more focused on youth, like immediately post-college or maybe not even college age students. And so that there's an interesting convergence in the demographics, if you will, in your two papers. I mean am I oversimplifying that?

GOGER: Well, mine was meant to be overarching for adults and youth in terms of lifelong learning. Like through every stage of life. But I definitely agree that part of it is understanding this process that Martha was describing. Whereby somebody either makes it

through that pipeline to college and grabs the success in terms of like how the dominant culture deems it the most valued way of showing that you're a valued contributor to society.

Or you don't make it and you're one of the two-thirds of Americans who haven't gotten there yet. And we don't really have much for you. And she's really correct in the sense that the longer someone, especially at a young age, is disconnected from engagement in the labor market, the worse it is for outcomes and the harder it is, and more expensive it is, to get people back into a job.

ROSS: What I like about Annelies' proposal is that it explicitly talks about education beyond the "traditional ages group" of 18 to 24. And at some point, we're going to have to update our language. Because the majority of students in college are not 18 to 22.

And what Annelies is pointing out is that we really need to update our systems so that we can live up to this mantra of lifelong learning, which is often used fairly glibly, I think.

And mine is really focused on helping young people navigate this stretch in their lives, that's quite a time of possibility but also a real chance to get off track. I mean their lifelong trajectories stem in some part to whether they graduate from some kind of post-secondary education with the skills and the contacts and the knowledge to get a job where they can support themselves.

In theory, I don't think this program, what I propose needs to be limited to only young adults say capped at age 24. But I think that is the group that is most likely in a position in their lives where they're ready to sign up for a year of learning and working.

DEWS: Let me, as we're sort of wrapping this conversation up here, give you both an opportunity to talk about some of the policy proposals that we haven't addressed so far. Again, these papers are both very rich with policy proposals and we can't possibly get to them all. But

let me ask you both what more you want listeners to take away from this conversation before they go and read the papers online. Annelies, do you want to start with that?

GOGER: Sure. One of the things that I think you can see in both of our papers is occupational segregation. Historically, but also currently as it is reproduced and may even get more entrenched because of the pandemic.

And so what is occupational segregation? It's basically the idea that you have certain types of jobs that are overwhelmingly of one demographic. So, you'd see in the pandemic the hospitality and leisure sectors tend to have more women in them, have more young people in them, tend to be more likely to be Black, Latinx, or indigenous. Or agricultural workers tend to be Latinx in many parts of the country.

It's like classifying a certain group of workers in a particular demographic. Same with tech workers, they're highly white and male, maybe Asian and male. Or construction, and the trades has a long history of not having a lot of women in it.

And as you have concentrations of certain groups and certain types of jobs, then you start to develop what many researchers have looked into and shown to be the devaluation of women's work, and the work of people of color. And many barriers to getting entry when you aren't somebody that looks like the majority in that occupation.

So, there's this way that our policy has enforced that through specific mechanisms, right. So, I think the whole series gets into some of the dynamics around generational wealth and how having access to more generational wealth among, for example, white families gives that individual, they're not starting from a level playing field, but they're actually starting from an advantage in terms of being able to take that time and go to college. Or should be able to not have to borrow as much, and that kind of thing.

And then that person who doesn't borrow as much, can then buy a home sooner, or buy a car sooner, and be able to have more opportunities that way.

So, it's partly this broader policy history that we have where certain Americans have been systematically excluded from opportunity and from protections. In my piece, I talk a little bit about the way that tipped workers have a lower minimum wage. You know, that's partly what I mean by occupational segregation. We have whole categories of gig workers who don't have protections from discrimination.

So, I think if we're talking about how to dismantle structural racism we have to actually figure out how to get rid of that way in which we subordinate whole classes of people and then give them less. That's one thing.

The other piece is about mobility knowledge as Jasmine Hill from Stanford would say. So, a lot of people, even if they have access to programs and scholarships, they may not know of all the options. Or they may not have access to insider information about that career that they want to get into.

And then the only way to get it is by knowing people that are in that field. So, let's say you want to work in user experience but you don't know anyone who works at a tech company and works in user experience, it's going to be hard for you to know, do I need to go to college? What do I need to study? Which program should I take?

So, all of that information and those personal networks are critical for people to not just know how to prepare, but also to get notifications of a job opening, or to have someone vouch for you inside the employer to say, yes this person is worth hiring.

All of that is a way in which knowledge about careers and opportunity gets filtered and reproduced in uneven ways based on what your demographics are. What your background is.

Whether you're first generation or not in college. So, I think that we need to really unpack some of that in our policy.

And, for example, in our WIOA workforce system, typically the average that we'll spend on a training will range between $1,900 and $2,200 per participant, for the very few that do get training through that program.

But if a parent is getting ready to send their kid to a private school, they'll be told you should save $300,000 to send your child to school. So, we have $2,000-ish, on the one hand, that we're willing to invest in someone who's going through our public workforce system. And we have $300,000. And who do you think is going to have the better outcome?

So, I think that the scale is totally off. And we have to be investing more equally in our talent. Because by not doing so, there were some researchers in Raj Chetty's shop at Harvard who showed that we can have four times more innovation if we invested more equally in our talent. We're wasting talent that because we're not able to find it, cultivate it, and really invest in talent.

So, really, my piece is about how do we not create new programs per se, but really think about a holistic ecosystem that gets us away from that $300,000 versus a $2,000 option.

DEWS: The wheel that you refer to as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, a federal program that your paper has a lot of focus on --

GOGER: Yes, sorry for the word salad.

DEWS: Martha, do you want to add to that?

ROSS: Another one of the main recommendations that I'm making is that we need to increase the living allowance that we pay to service corps members. Right now it's close to the poverty line. And it's a real barrier.

In 2018, the average amount was about $15,000, which is very hard to live on without either public assistance, which people do, or family assistance, which then means you're filtering for middle class and affluent young people. And we want everyone to be able to do this. And that means making it financially feasible.

What we're proposing is aligned with what is in the recent legislation proposed by Senator Coons, which is to raise the living allowance to about 175 percent of the federal poverty line, which in regular English translates to about $22,000 a year.

So, it's a sizable increase, but it's still not living large by any means. It's still a modest living allowance. But it makes it feasible for people of all backgrounds to participate.

DEWS: So, as we conclude this conversation, I want to ask you both, in light of the fact that your papers and all the other papers in this project are federal policy recommendations, and so we know the role of government is essential. Are you hopeful, at this time, a very intense polarization in Washington, that significant policy action can happen?

GOGER: I can say for my piece, that, yes, I'm hopeful, because when it comes to our education system, I think we're starting to see bipartisan agreement. Agreement from employers, from students and families all over the country, that what we have is outdated and is not really keeping pace, and is excluding a lot of people from opportunity.

And so most recently, the House passed a modernization bill to modernize apprenticeship. And in my piece, I say that we need to do that for four different large pieces of legislation. But that's one of them. To make sure that these systems actually coordinate with each other better.

And there's a lot of really good material in there that I think is a really good starting point to build the systems and not just add another program and stir. And so I'm really hoping that that

can see some daylight.

And, you know, I think that there's agreement in rural America, as much as urban America, that we need to value everyone's learning. And whether it happened in a classroom or whether it happens on the job as you became a master electrician, or master beer maker, whatever it is that you've taught yourself, that that is a form of expertise that we need to value. And be able to allow -- equip people to transfer that knowledge when they're laid off to be able to get a new job or to be able to advance in their education to the next level.

So, I am hopeful that there's a growing consensus on the need from this from multiple angles.

ROSS: National service does have bipartisan support in Congress and a lot of support among the public. But despite this support, it remains underfunded. And people really fight for what they care about in budgets. The fact that it has not been fully funded up to the amount that it can be, up to 250,000 positions, makes me worry that the support is broader than it is deep.

However, this is a historically awful labor market. And most people can relate to the difficulty of being somewhere in the 18 to 22 to 24 range, and trying to find your footing in a labor market that is crumbling underneath you. That may provide more impetus to get this done.

DEWS: We'll leave it at that. Martha Ross, Annelies Goger, I want to thank you both for spending so much time with me on this podcast episode today, and sharing your expertise on these very important interesting policy recommendations.

ROSS: Thanks so much.

GOGER: Yeah, thanks for having us.

DEWS: Listeners should know that you can find their papers, along with the other papers in the racial justice and worker mobility group, on our website, Brookings.edu. And stay tuned

for additional papers, including this month on economic growth and dynamism. And over the coming weeks and months.

Also on December 17th, there will be a webinar event on economic growth and dynamism and a webinar event on this racial justice and work mobility topic in early January.

The Brookings Cafeteria is possible only with the help of the team of amazing colleagues. Our thanks go out to Audio Engineer Gaston Roberto and our intern Brian Jacobs. To Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press who does the book interviews. To my communications colleagues, Marie Wilken, Adrianna Pita, and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. And finally to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horn for their guidance and support.

The Brookings Cafeteria is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network, which also produces Dollar and Cents, the Current, and our events podcasts. Email your questions and comments to me at bcp@brookings.edu. If you have a question for a scholar, include an audio file and I'll play it and the answer on the air.

Follow us on Twitter at Policy Podcasts. You can listen to the Brookings Cafeteria in all of the usual places. Visit us online at brookings.edu. Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2024