

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND THE WORKFORCE:
A CONVERSATION WITH
U.S. SECRETARY OF LABOR MARTY WALSH

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THE HONORABLE MARTY WALSH
United States Secretary of Labor

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. TURNER LEE: Well, good morning, everyone and thank you for joining us. I am so excited about today's conversation. First and foremost, let me introduce myself. I'm Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, I'm a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies, and the Director for the Center of Technology Innovation, at the Brookings Institution.

For those of you who are joining us, please be sure to pay attention to the TechTank Newsletter, the TechTank Podcast, my shameless plug, before we get started. We'll be tweeting this event at the #FutureofWork, and if we have time, we will take questions at events@brookings.edu.

I just want to be mindful, that this man, that I'm about to talk to, is a busy man. And just shortly, he'll be going out there with another busy man to really talk about what was recently passed in the Infrastructure and Jobs Act. So, I want to first just give a formal introduction and welcome to Secretary of Labor, Marty Walsh, who was sworn in as the 29th Secretary of this esteemed agency.

In 1997, he was elected to serve as State Representative to one of the more diverse districts in Massachusetts. Following that, he spent seven years as the Mayor of the city of Boston, leading the creation of close to 140,000 jobs, and securing a statewide \$15 an hour minimum wage, paid sick leave, and paid parental leave. There is so much more that I could say about him, but in the interest of time, I want to really jump into this conversation because the timing could not be more impeccable, Secretary, to actually have you here, for this conversation, and I know we've been planning this for quite some time. And I promise, for those of us -- those of you that saw us in the previous event, I will not call you by your first name. My mother was very shamed about that.

SECRETARY WALSH: So, don't worry Nicol, you can call me by my first name.

MS. TURNER LEE: So, let's jump into this, and let's start with the Positive Jobs Report, that was released last week. U.S. added 531,000 jobs in October. Both August and September numbers were adjusted upwards, as well, to account for more growth, and the unemployment rate is slowly going down. And we'll talk a little bit more about where the workers are, shortly. But I'd love to find out, from you, what accounted for this growth, and now that we have this recently passed legislation, Secretary, are

we going to see more upward trajectory, with regards to our Jobs Report?

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, first of all, thank you for having me today, and this is an important conversation, and it's great to be here. As you said, October certainly was a good strong report, and we're seeing -- we're still seeing a strong recovery here. We saw a job gain. And what I liked about this report, is we saw a job gain across all different types of economic -- jobs, in leisure and hospitality, manufacturing, transportation, warehouses, and also in hospitals, and healthcare, where we -- where the last two previous months we saw losses.

Over the past three months, we're averaging about 400 in 42,000 jobs per month. The unemployment rate's the lowest it's been since the beginning of the pandemic. And the recovery that we're having is people predicted that we're at 4.6 percent unemployment rate, that that recovery wouldn't be back for another couple of years. So, that's a good sign. We've recovered roughly 81 percent of all the jobs lost, at the beginning of the pandemic. But there is still more work to be done.

The report shows about 3.8 million people were unable to work, or worked fewer hours, 1.3 million people completely out of the work force because of COVID. There's a lot of reasons. And I think that, you know, as we move forward here, we really have to think about, you know, how do we continue to rebound from this recovery and from the pandemic? I try to tell people, all the time, and when I'm being interviewed on tv, sometimes it works, and most times it doesn't, is that, letting people -- and we're living in a pandemic, you know, it hasn't let gone.

In March of 2020, I was Mayor of Boston, and the unthinkable happened. We literally shut everything down in the city of Boston. We shut down restaurants, and business were sent home, and schools were closed, and colleges sent people home. And it's something that was unprecedented, at least for our -- anybody who was alive on this earth for this particular moment, and we're still feeling the impact and the effects of COVID-19, whether it's people afraid to go back to workforce, whether it's lack of childcare, whether -- whatever the reason might be.

So, we do have a way to go, but the President laid down a plan, in January, to get people vaccinated. He made investments through the American Rescue Plan, in childcare and other places.

The other day, we got a chance to pass the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, \$1.2 trillion, that -- actually, I'm going to be within a little while, today, talking to people about that. Those are big investments that we are making in our country, and those investments, not just needed coming out of a pandemic, but they were needed pre-pandemic, as well. So, I feel good about where we're headed.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, and, I mean, that's good to actually hear that competence come from you, Secretary, because I think, people, as you've said, they still don't realize how much we're still in the middle, right? We haven't really solved this, and I think I read something, the other day, that this is going from pandemic to endemic, in terms of how we navigate through these challenges.

But one of the things, while we're talking about the Jobs Report, that I think is really important to talk about, and, yes, those of you who follow me, I do talk about technology, we won't get there, but I want to dig into this Jobs Report because I think there is something to be said here. We saw this great resignation of workers, right, and, across the board, we've not only seen, with the pandemic, businesses close, but we see a lot of folks, like you said, not come back or choose not to work in the jobs that they had, before the pandemic, right? Talk to us a little bit more about how we're going to address this big red -- this big worker shortage, when it comes to, particularly, those industries, like service industries, where we need more workers on the ground, you know, helping customers.

SECRETARY WALSH: You know, one of the things that we're seeing is that service industries, that are very, you know, sensitive to COVID-19, are still not fully recovered from their pre-pandemic levels, and there's lots of reasons, whether it's staff on one side, and the team one side, or the people coming back into restaurants. We know what it will take to restore these sectors, and to end -- we need to end the pandemic. And in most industries, women, and especially women of color, are disproportionately represented. Women appear to have done essentially well, last month. By all accounts, both -- half of the job gain, 304,000 jobs were women. We're still -- there's still 2.6 million women missing from the workforce, and women are still about 3.2 percent lower than it was in February 2020. So, I think, that that's an issue.

The Build Back Better legislation, you know, you have a lot of families and mothers, in

particular, where childcare isn't available. Mothers of young children can't work, and most childcare workers, themselves, are women and women of color, and we're seeing a big issue there, with, really, people, you know, not coming back to the industry. So, the Build Back Better Package makes major investments in childcare, it makes major investments in universal pre-kindergarten, it makes major investments in extending the child tax credit, also some job training programs.

I think, when we think about the great resignation, I had this conversation, yesterday. We were talking to some folks from the administration about it. You know, a lot of people, over the last couple years, had time to think about what do they want to do. I think, the great resignation, a lot of people think, when they think of that, they think of people who are almost of retirement age, who are eligible, potentially, who are retiring. But the great resignation, really, is across the board, people that are in jobs, that they feel they can do better, that they don't want to go back to.

So, how do we fix that? I think that there is a multi-prong approach. I think number one is we have to continue to get people to feel safe to go to work, whether that's through vaccines or testing, and, you know, making sure that we put the pandemic, as I would say, in the rearview mirror, number one. Number two, folks that are in careers, allow them the opportunity to make sure that we have real strong apprenticeship programs and pre-apprentice programs to help people think about the future. And what this -- if people are choosing this time in their life to change their jobs, then we need to be able to be supportive with them.

It needs to be public-private partnerships, too. It can't just be the public sector. I spent a lot of time talking to employers, that -- of tech companies, that talk about apprenticeships, and about setting up opportunities for people. So, when you think about the great resignation, people resigning for a reason. No one that resigns from their job, just, one day, says, oh, I'm going to stop working. They're looking for something new. So, we need to make sure we put the programs in place, whether it's a public sector program, whether it's the private industry, working with the private industry, and we're going to try and do more of that here, at the Department of Labor.

And then thirdly --

MS. TURNER LEE: Again, and I'd like to -- yep, go ahead.

SECRETARY WALSH: Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead, Nicol.

MS. TURNER LEE: Well, so, I was going to actually keep having -- digging into this great resignation, if you don't mind. You know, do you think part it, too, Secretary, is the fact that we're seeing remote only environments, and some jobs are just not, you know, non-negotiable? Because I think you're laying out two points, right? One is for people who have the ability to probably have more flexibility, that can incentivize of the come back to the work force, you know, women who work at home, et cetera.

Then there is, like you said, people -- women of color, or people who have low income, that may not have the opportunity to do remote only jobs, simply because, you know, they don't have the skills, or they don't feel safe, potentially, in that environment. You've got to distinguish that, yeah.

SECRETARY WALSH: I think that's definitely a piece of it. But I honestly think that -- I think, you know, workers are finding power right now. You know, when you think about unions, and you think about collective bargaining, you know, there's a power in workers kind of uniting under a collective bargaining agreement, and looking for better wages, and better benefits, and maybe different work conditions. And, generally, workers who are not covered by unions, that they've -- I think they do, themselves, as kind of an individual or maybe towards the company, but workers -- what's happening here in this country, I think, is workers are, not intentionally, but uniting around a similar cause, and that cause is for better opportunities for them and their families.

So, I think, that part of it is, there's no question about it, part of it is working remotely, and part of it is, really, people trying to find out what they want to do next. Now, the feeling is that there are so many jobs available, that I think we need to do a better job, as a society, to let people know what jobs are available, and the folks that were working in the industry, that they might have wanted a change, what are their options? And I think that that's what we have to do a little more of.

You know, you guys do reports, all the time, and in those reports, you talk about different sectors that are opening, and you talk about different parts of the country, as well, that there's opportunities. And I think this is the time for us to really kind of dig down a little deeper on that and figure

out how do we match people with the jobs that are open, and how do we let people know that, you know, you are qualified for this job, with a little bit of training, with a little bit of help, and we need to do more of that.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, and I love that because I think it doesn't hold our hands as a country, by giving people the same traditional paths, right, the career paths, that we're finding out in this pandemic, that anybody could be an online supplier, right, or anybody could figure out ways to become an entrepreneur. And you're right, we do write about that at Brookings, for those of you who are watching this right now.

You know, I want to speak a little bit, then, about this word that you keep bringing up, which are apprenticeships and job training programs, right? And I'm going to go into these new sectors like broadband and clean energy, that is obviously going to come out of this new bill, but let's think about the apprenticeships and job training that is going to be needed, you know, outside of the legislation, Secretary, and addition to the legislation. Can you speak a little bit about what the Department of Labor is thinking about, with the apprenticeship programs and opportunities, as well as some new workforce models?

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah, let me just, you know, I always thought, when somebody said apprenticeships, I always thought building.

MS. TURNER LEE: Right.

SECRETARY WALSH: And it's automatic, oh it's an apprenticeship to the Building Trades, and I literally, right before I got on here today with you, I met with some apprentices, who were formally apprentices, that were apprentices in the Department of Labor, people that got in through the Department of Labor, through an apprentice program, and they're working in ETS, they're working Human Resources, and they're working in -- one young woman was at the Navy, and -- but she started her apprenticeship with the Department of Labor.

And apprenticeships, really, I think, are a way of the future, to let people know, first of all, as we have the conversation today, many people are intimidated to apply for a job they feel they might

not have the skill for, number one, or they might not apply for a job because they don't know how to get through the process of applying for a job. What apprenticeships does, it allows a person to get into an agency, into a department, here at the DOL or somewhere else, and really understand what the job is that they're in. And it helps them lay down the foundation where they can ask the questions, where they normally might not have asked the questions when they were employees.

So, I think, we have a huge opportunity here, in the Build Back Better Plan. There's money in there for about two million new registered apprenticeships. And those apprenticeships don't have to be just the Building Trades, and I think that that's the best way, on the job training, doing more of that. This is National Apprenticeship Week, by the way, today, and this week we're doing that.

So, I think apprenticeships are going to be the way of the future, in a lot of ways, and folks that are out there, you know, when you think about it, we just think about the opportunities. It's more than an internship, and it's not -- it's on the pathway to hiring. But giving people that opportunity to learn the job, and you have an opportunity, as an employer and employee, to kind feel out, and how you feel about where you're going, right? I think that that's something in the future that we need to do a lot more of.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, no, I agree. You know, prior to coming to Brookings, I worked alongside National Urban League, and the Multicultural Media, and Telecom Counsel, as well as the Wireless Infrastructure Association, to think about apprenticeships for wireless jobs. We'll talk a little bit more about that, but it's such a great way for people to understand not just the, you know, pulling fiber, but doing customer service and cloud-based work.

We've got to teach people things that they may not see, that are part of the new trajectory. But what about workforce, Secretary, as well? Like, are we going to reevaluate some of our workforce development programs, as well, to sort of think about where we need to plug people in, when it comes to this job training in general?

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah, we're working on that right now. We're looking at workforce development. You know, again, when you think about where we're living, and the times we're

living in, I think everything should be on the table to rethink the way that we hire people, rethink the way that we recruit people, rethink the way that we train people. People certainly -- the workforce is thinking the same things. I'm looking for something different. I'm looking for better paying job. I'm looking for something that's fulfilling. I might be looking for something that I'm not working as many hours as I did before.

And I think workforce development is that pathway, and you know, one thing that I've really been happy about, when I was touring the country -- when I tour the country, I go -- I usually go to a community college, when I go to a place, and I go into those community colleges, and I -- we have them in Boston, as well, as Mayor, but they can be such a driving force to educating the workforce, and being such a great recruitment tool for companies, that I think we have to try and continue to invest in as much in workforce development as possible, so that we can make a difference.

And I think that that's going to be one of the pathways, for a lot of people, is through workforce development programs, through our community colleges. In the Build Back Better Bill, there's a major investment in community colleges, and certainly community colleges, sometimes, have not always been -- people don't think about them as an opportunity, but they're a great opportunity for recruitment of talent to a company.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, no, I mean, in my work on digital access, community colleges often serve as anchor institutions, right, not just for the training, or the vocational training, and educational expertise, but they also are places where we actually can have connectivity into the broader community.

You know, this also makes me think about, you know, these new immersing verticals of broadband and clean energy jobs. And I want to talk about these, before I get into some other solid areas around equity and what we do about some of the other blind spots that we currently have in our workforce system, even data. But let's talk a little bit about, you know, the area that I stay up at night, and I think I've spoken to you about some of the things that I've written around the Tech New Deal, where we actually put some time into thinking about these broadband-enabled jobs. What do you think is the pathway that we should be exploring, as we look at broadband, now, as a critical asset in infrastructure in

this country?

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, first of all, you know, one of the pieces of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment Act that passed the other day, broadband. And just to take people back 18 months or a little longer than that, in March of 2020, all across this country, in most cities and towns, schools closed, and businesses shut down, and people had to work from home, and figure out what a Zoom was. We didn't know what a Zoom was back then but figure out what a Zoom is.

And our kids did because they did some remote learning, a little bit, on some of their computer technology or technology. But what we had to do in Boston, we had to go out and buy 40,000 Chromebooks, and we had to partner with the cable companies to get families hotspots, so their kids could go online and learn online. And so, it was a good process, and, for the most part, it was successful. But I'd say, for the most part, when too many people were on the hotspot, and not every family had the ability to get on and connect on the internet.

This investment, that the President has pushed on broadband access, to have broadband across the United States of America, in rural America, in urban America, is going to be a game changer. It's going to be a game changer, in the 21st Century, in so many different ways. I mean, just think about access to opportunities for employment, access to opportunities for education, access to opportunities for information. And that is going to make such a big difference, I feel, as we move forward. It's probably one of the most important things in this bill.

I know there all important, but it also creates and opportunity for good paying jobs. The administration and the Department are doing -- we're going to be working closely with the Department of Transportation, Commerce, Energy to ensure that we're making these investments and creating more jobs. And I think that's an important piece.

And it's also going to be enabling community colleges to train hundreds of thousands of students. It's going to be an opportunity for us to be able to really think about creating sector-based training. We're going to be able expand a lot of our different programs that we have here, in the Department of Labor. There's so much opportunity, and you're absolutely right. I mean, you're

absolutely right, with the way you framed the question. On this -- this is probably -- could be one of the biggest changes, that we'll be talking about for the next 20 years, what was done in this bill, and how it changed the way the workforce -- it recruits, and retains, and moves forward.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, you know, look, I'm publishing a book on this, Secretary. So, I'm just going to tell you. I'm asking you to read it, when I finish it, and it gets published because I think it's so important for us to look at technology, not just from a consumptive side, like you said, of just getting people devices or hotspots. But we have to see how people engage in the productive capacities of these technologies.

And what we've done in this bill, which I'm excited about, is we've actually put broadband alongside our water, and electrical, and energy grid, in ways that it can generate types of jobs that get people employed. I mean, you've got a great -- I was looking at your suite of leaders that work with you. You've got a department of innovation, now, at DOL. And I just wanted --

SECRETARY WALSH: It's great stuff. I mean, just think, I -- you know, I often think about the Zoom world, that we're in, you know. Even long after the pandemic, we're still going to be using Zoom because it's such a great way to throw a quick meeting together, where you don't have people flying in, from all over the country, all over the world. You can actually just set up a time, do a Zoom. There's still nothing like having an in-person meeting, however, but when you need it, the impact of it, and, again, technology is going to allow other people, all across America, to be able to be connected.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, and it goes back to what you said earlier, right? It just provides people with different options, that they can, to enter the workforce. So, I'm glad to hear that you're thinking about this, in terms of how do we even modernize, you know, our workforce, here in the United State, to be even more competitive.

You know, another area is these clean energy jobs. Talk a little bit about, you know, that investment. I think it's a big game changer, as well, that we're actually paying attention to that in the legislation, but just overall, as a country.

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, I think, President Biden set the tone early, when he talked about climate change and clean energy, from the perspective of working people and creating jobs. And I think, it's both the importance of creating good jobs, and the importance of addressing climate change, and for families, right? There's a win-win all over the place, there, and we know that our latest -- our least advantaged communities will be hardest hit by climate change, which is kind of -- which is very sad.

As Mayor of Boston, you know, I served as Chair of Climate Mayors, a coalition of 450 Mayors in the country committed to bold actions and addressing these issues. We need to ensure that our climate investments support workers' empowerment and promote good strong labor protections. We need to ensure that there are good union jobs emerging in industries, like clean energy and electric vehicles. We need to make sure that we are building coalitions with climate groups and organized labor, so that we don't have those automatic, you know, kind of two sides.

We need to build a modern inclusive workforce, ready to benefit from the growth of green jobs. One example of this is, in late September, the Department of Labor announced that we're investing 30 million dollars to 23 different organizations to support a transition for workers impacted by climate through workforce opportunities and rural community grants. And I've been traveling the country, as, quite honestly, as Secretary of Labor, and the thing about this, that a lot of people don't see, we -- if you pick up, and I didn't realize this till I lived in Boston, if you take a map and you see where the vulnerabilities of climate is, in the city, and this is most cities when I say this, when you take the same map and you look at where the poverty is and you look where the -- where, in a lot of ways, community kind of live, it's the same space. And you think about that. And so, when we think about climate change and if you think about jobs that go with climate change, we really have to be intentional about making sure that our communities of color have opportunities in this space.

And I think that, you know, the President, when he passed the Infrastructure Bill, and we talked about the Build Back Better Bill, he talked about equity being the core of that. And when you look at the unemployment rate in our country, historically, not just post-pandemic or during the pandemic, there's a lot of work that we have to do, so. So, I think when we think -- when I think of climate, there's an

opportunity. We also have an opportunity to create other jobs.

I mean, I live in New Jersey. We broke ground on a PLA job for a wind port. I visited a coal mine in West Virginia, and we talked about their energy and transitions for the mine workers. I was in New Mexico. I visited an orphaned well site, and there's thousands of them all over, all over the country but in New Mexico. I was -- I broke ground in Ohio, a Made in America supply chain manufacturer, a solar panel factory. You know, we talked to Heartwork Oregon. We talked to farmworkers, advocacy groups, that talked about hazards, due to the heat hazards, due to climate change. So, there's a lot of opportunities that we have here, and the people work in these industries. So, I think that that's another area of great potential growth in our country.

MS. TURNER LEE: You know, I'm just thinking about the broadband and clean energy jobs being like a new space for us, as well. You know, Secretary, do you think that there's like a need, this just kind of popped up in my head, for like a taxonomy, so we could also let American workers know what these opportunities are?

SECRETARY WALSH: I think we --

MS. TURNER LEE: Because I think most people just don't understand, right?

SECRETARY WALSH: I think we have to. I mean, I think we have this. It's kind of what I said a little earlier about, you know, the five million jobs available in the United States of America. And there are people out there that, you know, might have been a server in a restaurant, and they might have had some college, and they might have said, okay, I've always wanted to be in the tech space, or I wanted to be in the clean energy space, or I wanted to be in whatever space it is. And a lot of people don't know where to go to look for these jobs because they're watching the news, and the news is saying there's five million jobs, but there's nobody saying where the resources are.

So, it's about creating these pathways and these opportunities, so people can fully understand where they go for the job, or it's the old days, people that are watching, if you're old enough, you used to get the paper, open it up, read the help wanted, you circle it, you call, and you go for an interview. We have to think about how do we -- and, again, having to get better connectivity to broadband

and internet will help people, help us match people up a little more.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, and, I mean, that kind of relates to this equity question, right, because digital is the new normal. It's the new language. This is not, you know, for people who are listening, just -- everybody has to be an engineer. We're talking about, as you said, some grunt level jobs that we need to put people in place for, if we're going to build expansive 5G networks and everything else.

The question I have for you is on this equity piece. I also read this article, this weekend, about climate change being an issue for communities of color because communities of color tend to be sick by the lack of remediation of climate concerns. It's a really interesting article. I'll send it along to you. When you think about equity, right, you were the Mayor of Boston, this is some real big part of the Biden administration, and I'd like to hear from you, how are we going to position equity, not just in the awareness about these jobs and the placement of displaced people of color and other vulnerable populations, rural Americans, low-income Americans. But more importantly, how are we going to change the paradigm among folks, that they are part of this change, right, versus being on the sidelines at the margin of that change?

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, first of all, I think we need the commitment by government and by the private sector to really be focused on change and creating a pathway. Any time we've had a major investment in this country's history, the communities of color, all the time, have been left behind, and, oftentimes, women have been left behind. And this time, you know, the President and the Vice President have been very intentional about making sure that that doesn't happen this time. So, I think you need a commitment from the highest level, and, in this particular case, with Washington, you have -- we have a commitment from the President and the Vice President, number one.

Number two, part of it is education, educating companies on the importance of diversifying. You know, if you look at -- if you look at companies across the country, there was a stat the other day, companies with the most diverse Boards are the most successful companies, in creating opportunities at a high level, and not just -- and then also creating entry-level opportunities. But when you

create those entry-level opportunities, you need to have a pathway upwards at the company, into management, into higher paying jobs. So, we have to really be focused on how do we do that.

Part of it is through what we're doing here at DOL, when we think about these Two Million Registered Apprenticeship Program. We're going to make sure that we have a strong number of folks of color that have access to the Apprenticeship Program to be able to get into these higher paying jobs, which it's good for the economy, at the end of the day. This is great for the economy. It's creating opportunities and allowing people chances to get into the middle-class.

But when I was Mayor of Boston, I started a couple programs with the Building Trades. One was called Building Pathways, and one was called Operation Exit. And when you think about that, you get a young person, an African American young person, in Boston, who gets into the Building Trades, goes through his or her Pre-Apprentice Program, becomes a Journeyperson, and now is on a pathway. That's a career for those folks. Now, they might be working on different construction jobs throughout the course of their career, but that's a career because, at the end of the day, they're going to have a pension, they're going to have a 401K or equivalent to that, they're going to have healthcare. You're going to have an opportunity through your career to earn good revenue and good money. So, we have to create more of those opportunities, more of those pathways, if you will, into good paying jobs.

And also, when it comes to the educational component, listen, I'm -- I went back to school when I was 30 years old. So, I didn't have a college degree. I ran for office, State Representative, and I won. So, but not everyone is geared towards a four-year degree. But you have to create a program and programs towards that educational opportunity. It might not be a full college degree you get, at the end of the day, but you're still getting an education, and that's why I think community college and some other institutions come into play.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, I mean, what you talked about, I think, is the keyword, and it's called pathways, right? And so, pathways towards more equitable employment and workforce development training means that we have to make sure that we understand that there are multiple ways to enter this labor force right now, some of them online and remote, some of them in person. But the end

of the day, it has to go towards sustainable jobs. And I love the way this sort of ties back to the earlier discussion on, you know, this resignation and these worker shortages. Are we really giving people what they need, right, to be successful, safe, in this society?

SECRETARY WALSH: And some people don't know what they want and what they need. And I think we have to just be there to give them assistance. I mean, a lot of people still don't understand what they want to do with their career or their next career. And I think that they -- helping people with pathways, you know, listen, I'm a first generation American. My parents came from Ireland. They didn't really understand what college was, and they didn't understand all that. And there's a lot of folks like that in this country, that, you know, we need to help, you know, be counselors to them, be academic counselors or job counselors to them.

MS. TURNER LEE: That's right. That's right. Look, and I'm not going to go onto pathway because people who know me know me very well, coming out of civil rights. You know, you're inheriting, and it sounds like you've got the same spine as -- of other labor departments to ensure that we also make sure people have equitable rights, right, in this workforce. So, going forward, that's going to be important, as well.

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah. Let me just say one thing. You just said an important thing. We inherited a situation, and in the larger sense we did. But at some point, that reasoning for not doing something got to go away. And it's okay. We did inherit. We all inherited something that was some good things and some things that weren't so good. But now it's an opportunity for leadership. And leadership, you know, I'm not -- it's not just about me. It's about making sure the whole department, everyone with the Department of Labor understands the importance of moving in one direction. And that's what makes a difference.

MS. TURNER LEE: That's right. That's right. Thanks for saying that. You know, for those of you who are watching, we've got time for a couple of questions. Events@brookings.edu is where you can submit your questions, or you can put them on Twitter, @FutureofWork. #FutureofWork is our hashtag. Secretary, I have one more question, and then I'm going to jump into just a couple of

questions on Q and A. And, again, I want to be mindful of the fact that I am standing between you and a very important person, more important than me, in the next few minutes.

Let me ask you about data. You know, one of my colleagues at Brookings, Annelies Goger, actually talks about, you know, data systems. We've just recently had (inaudible) on talking about the modernization of the UI, the unemployment insurance system, et cetera. What are you thinking about, in terms of modernizing those intake processes and how we collect data, so we can be more carefully targeted to know that we're, you know, achieving the right metrics and outcomes?

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, you know, there's an expression that what gets measured is what gets done. And the one thing that attracted me to Brookings, from the very beginning, when I started to pay attention, and I get the -- I get like a weekly email, is the data. The data says it all. It tells the story, and it lays out kind of, in some ways, what's the pathway to coming up with some solutions, creating solutions. At DOL, you know, we do a lot of thinking about what we -- what to measure, how to get the best data, and to make changes, you know, a focus to make sure -- ensuring that we have the data in underlying infrastructure needs, that we need to know to make a difference.

So, I'll give you an example. The example is what's going on right now in the country, with people not going back to work or the perception that people aren't going back to work. If you have the data on the reasons for people not going back to work, whether it's the right resignation, whether it's the amount of people that were working in the workforce that lost their life due to COVID-19, the information of people that are worried about going back to work over COVID-19, the implications of families that are worried because they don't have good, strong, adequate childcare. There are many different data points that you have to look at. And once you get that information, you can really think about how do you create or solve an issue or a problem that's out there in the world by having the data right at your fingertips, and I think that that's really important to have. You know, the first focus should be on our outcomes, you know, and what those outcomes were, whether it's in our workforce system. We have to work to know if our workers are getting quality jobs and -- as a result of the training that we support here. The -- yes, it's -- I think that's important. Second piece is the focus on equity. As

I mentioned before, President Biden issued an executive order, advancing equity in Federal Government to the -- here, at the Department of Labor. And I'll speak for other Cabinet Secretaries, as well. We want our data to reflect our priorities. We're focusing to make sure that the more -- more of our data that can be broken down by demographic group. It's also important to understand how we can serve the community and enable it more equitably.

The third is in the area of openness and transparency. We're making sure that we make as much of our data open to the public and other parts of the government because that will help us. You know, as you may know, the Evidence Act of 2019 requires that government agencies make all the data open to use in making decisions. And so, I think that, you know, data is really important. And to be honest with you, when I became Mayor of Boston, we didn't -- we had data, year to date, and I put what's called a data dashboard in my office, called City Score, and I had four screens that had data on all day. It was driven by -- it was day to day. And I could literally watch, in my office, over time, I could watch something that was a problem, and I'd be able to witness it on the board, and then ask how do we fix that problem.

And in some cases, I used the data in front of me, that was on my wall every day, to be able to make decisions based on the budget. So, for example, I would be looking and seeing that, you know, commerce in the city of Boston, where it's high-paced, the outpace, last year, the outpace, last month, the outpace, yesterday, and I'd realize that that's a money revenue source for the city of Boston. So, why wouldn't we make an investment by hiring somebody, more people, to be inputting the information permitting because it's a revenue generator for the city of Boston. So, data is going to be key. Data is going to be key. And you -- listen, I'm speaking to Brookings, you guys are all about data. So, you know more about data than I would ever think to know about data.

MS. TURNER LEE: Well, no, look, I'm just following you. I'm becoming a fangirl because I think without data it becomes harder for us to address issues like equity, right? I mean, how can you know who is actually part of the economy and who is really the product, if you don't have the data, right?

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah, true.

MS. TURNER LEE: And so, I think what you're talking about is really relevant. And tell them to go get you those four screens up there in the Labor Department.

SECRETARY WALSH: I know. I don't have any yet. I have to get them in here. I don't have any. But we are working on making sure we can track what we have.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, no, I'm very happy to hear that. I want to jump into a couple of questions real quick. One, I think, is related to, this comes from the audience, related to the childcare and working mothers. So, as you've said, you know, part of the challenge of women is their ability to go back to the workplace. And a part of the challenge with mothers is childcare. Speak a little bit about what is in the legislation around childcare, or what should we be doing around childcare to incentivize more working mothers back into the workforce.

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, I think the -- first of all, when you think about childcare, there's a couple things. Number one is, well, you think about a childcare facility. First, the folks that work in those industries are often women and women of color, and they're underpaid, and they're taking care of our little ones, and, oftentimes, families and people working in that industry won't stay at that industry a long time. So, we're losing those schedules, those staff members, to schools and going to teach public education. We also, during the pandemic, many of our childcare facilities have been decimated because they run on a per voucher or a per child income, the family paying it, and, for the last year and a half, the parents have been home. So, kids haven't been going to childcare. So, that's impacted our childcare facility, as well.

Another issue impacting our childcare facilities is that families are paying 30, 40, 50 percent of their salary to send their kid to childcare, to send their children to childcare. So, in the present plan, in the bill that's being debated in Congress right now, no family who earns under \$300,000 will pay more than seven percent of their salary in childcare. There are also investments in there for job training, and there's also investments in there for better wages and better work conditions for the folks who work in these industries.

When you think about the future of America, and childcare also allows young people the opportunity to have a good, strong start and get into a structured program early on, and the outcomes, and then get into universal -- the President also has a plan for a universal free kindergarten. And when those two plans get in place, I think you're going to see a major shift, not only in our workforce, but you're also going to see a major shift in opportunities for young people and the success young people will have, as they go through eighth grade, 12th grade, onto college.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, no, I agree. I mean, education, at the preschool level, actually, has great data points that we're able to look at. You know, one other question, and, again, I want to be mindful of your time, but I do want to ask this other question that comes to us in the audience. We haven't talked a lot about older workers and workers with disabilities. So, I'd love to hear your take on, you know, what are we going to do with workers who are aging into the workforce, you know, how are we going to treat their situations, and what are we going to do with people with disabilities, given the fact that we have these new opportunities coming down the pike?

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah. I had a meeting the other day, in the Department of Labor. We have an Office of Disabilities here, in the Department of Labor. And in some cases, unemployment is as high as 80 percent in the disability community. And we're working to create better pathways, if you will, for the disability community to get into better opportunities for employment. That's a challenge, not just here in the Federal Government, but that's a challenge all across our country. And we have to do better. We have to do better there. And, you know, obviously, there's many different types of disabilities that keep people from work or get them to work.

But, as a society, we have to treat our folks with disabilities better, and not just employment opportunities, but also access to services, access to data, access to the websites and other information that are out there. So, yeah, we still have a long way to go in our country. With the Department of Labor, we are focused on, internally, what we're doing and how we can do it better. We're also going to be with employers to better the situation across our country.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, that -- and I would add to that, too, Secretary, we've got to

look at rides, the transportation options. You know, my mother, she's not actually in the workforce, but she was heavily dependent on a lot of these ridesharing apps and public trams, that, you know, you can order, like Metro Transit Systems, to be able to get her where she had to go. And maybe that's another way that we can look at the support services that we need for older Americans and people with disabilities. Just a thought.

SECRETARY WALSH: Okay, and also, in the Investment Bill that was signed by the President earlier this week, there's a major investment in infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, including rail.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah.

SECRETARY WALSH: And part of that is expansion. So, when you think about -- there are some communities in this country that are cut off from public transportation. And we have, you know, kind of a once in a generational opportunity to change that.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, I mean, rural communities, as part of my book, we're finding in some rural communities that they don't even have options in some of these ridesharing applications because they don't have good broadband. So, I love the way that you sort of caveating this. We've got to all be in it together, right? Because all of these things matter to complete the whole.

Secretary, I know you are going to have to jump because you've got to go meet the President, but I wanted to give you this one question that comes from the audience, as well, is how long is it going to take for us to implement what's in that bill and actually get people back into these livable wage jobs and sustainable (overtalking)?

SECRETARY WALSH: Well, I think implementation started the day he signed the bill. Well, actually, it really started the day he talked about the bill. And I think that, you know, by the time the President hired Mitch Landrieu, the former Mayor of New Orleans --

MS. TURNER LEE: Yep. Yep.

SECRETARY WALSH: -- and former Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, who is going to be --

MS. TURNER LEE: Yep.

SECRETARY WALSH: -- operating to make sure this money's spent and it's spent correctly and efficiently. He already reached out to me here, at the Department of Labor, yesterday, to say, you know, I want a point of contact here in the office. We have a couple people who are going to be doing that work here. I would say, probably by early next year, we'll start to see these projects kind of taking shape. By mid-next year, we'll start seeing ground -- some projects actually being physically being done. But the project starts long before that. The projects start early on, and what we want to do, at the Department of Labor, is making sure that we're creating pathways for people to access these jobs, whether it's with architectural companies or engineering companies, design companies, you know, companies that that's going to spark a lot of growth. But I would say, you know, people will start to see the physical buildings happening, but I think people who are going to be going over to jobs will start to feel that impact in the next several months.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yeah, well, that's good to know because we got to get to work, like you said. The train has sort of left the station.

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah.

MS. TURNER LEE: And it's so important for us to sort of close these gaps because we're leaking to -- you know, we're leaking, right now, in terms of getting everybody at full capacity, while we're in a pandemic.

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah, let's remember, we're still in the pandemic, unfortunately.

MS. TURNER LEE: Yes, yes. Well, Secretary Walsh, I want to just say thank you. Again, I want to be mindful of your time. The team worked very diligently with us, with your change in schedule. But, you know, you go out there and do your thing, and please remember to always pick up a Brookings Report because we were paying attention to this, and we're working on these issues that you care about. So, thank you, again, for appearing. And for those of you that have questions, we'll gather those questions, send them up to your office, just for you to see what people are -- what was on their minds.

SECRETARY WALSH: Yeah. We'll get them an answer, too.

MS. TURNER LEE: All right.

SECRETARY WALSH: I'll get them answered. And thank you. Sorry, I know we cut it a little short here today, I apologize. But, you know, the President is going out today to Detroit, Michigan to talk about his bill and his plan, and I'm going to be with him. So, I'm excited about that. And, you know, just, everyone, just let's -- let's keep working together. The one thing that I think we all -- we didn't talk about, but we just need to be patient with each other and continue to --

MS. TURNER LEE: Yes.

SECRETARY WALSH: -- move through this. We will get through the pandemic. As the President said, there's never been a time in the history of our country where, as Americans, we went into a situation and didn't come out strong. So, we will come out stronger together.

MS. TURNER LEE: That's right. And you tell that -- you tell my President up there that I got a book I want him to read, as well. So, I'll get him a copy, a signed copy.

SECRETARY WALSH: I'll let him know. I'll let him know.

MS. TURNER LEE: All right. Well, thank you so much, Secretary. And then, for all of you that are listening, let me give you some closing remarks. Again, I'm Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, at the Brookings Institution Center for Technology Innovation. We've just done really great work, as the Secretary said, on these issues. Those reports are available on the Brookings website. And you can follow us at the TechTank Newsletter, which actually regularly publishes all these types of topics, as well as listen to us on our TechTank Podcast, which is available through Apple, Spotify, and Acast.

As the Secretary shared, we've got a lot of work to do. We're also curious, at Brookings, to hear your thoughts and opinions on what some of the best angles are, as we think about how to advance more people into the broadband economy, something that is very dear to the Center for Technology Innovation and many of our scholars that work with me. So, thank you, again. We appreciate your patience, and we also appreciate you sticking around. Though the Secretary had to leave, I'm still here, but I'm probably not the person you came to see. With that, thank you for attending, and we will be back talking about this

topic once again. Send your questions, and we'll be sure to get them up to his office.

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