

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
FALK AUDITORIUM
PUTTING DATA TO WORK ON
BEHALF OF AMERICAN WORKERS

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, June 15, 2022

PARTICIPANTS:

Welcoming Remarks:

ALAN BERUBE
Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Brookings Metro

Opening Remarks:

CHIKE AGUH
Chief Innovative Officer, U.S. Department of Labor

Keynote Remarks:

HON. JULIE A. SU
Deputy Secretary, U.S Department of Labor

Moderator:

ANNELIES GOGER
Fellow, Brookings Metro

Discussant:

LESLEY HIRSCH
Assistant Commissioner of Research and Information
New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BERUBE: Hey, good afternoon everybody. It is really nice to welcome you or maybe some of you welcome you back to Brookings here in Falk Auditorium in person. I had to learn how to tie a tie again today, it's been a minute. I'm Alan Berube, I'm a senior fellow here at Brookings and I'm the deputy director for Brookings Metro.

Brookings Metro is a division of Brookings dedicated to building prosperous, just, and resilient cities and regions. Like our colleagues across Brookings we're really grateful to be able to use our knowledge and our platform to highlight important policy developments and bring together leaders from across government, the private sector, and the civic sector to make our economy work better for more people and for more places.

We're really honored today to welcome officials from the U.S. Department of Labor. They're here launching a new data strategy for the Department. So that may sound dry to a lot of people, although probably not to all of you because you're here in the audience today. As you all know, data, and effective systems to manage those data, are an indispensable input for effective policy design and effective program delivery. We've seen what happens when we don't invest sufficiently in those systems. For instance through the struggles we experienced in equitably delivering enhanced unemployment benefits to millions of workers through the Cares Act of 2020.

But we also know that there are a world of opportunities waiting to be unleashed if we can improve access to and coordination across data systems, enabling us to better understand the needs of workers and of employers.

At Brookings Metro we actually host a regular virtual roundtable with some of the most innovative workforce board leaders around the country. And nearly every session that we have with them reveals ways in which better data can help them be more strategic, serve more of their clients, and grow more inclusive local economies.

My Brookings Metro colleague Annelies Goger here in the front row, you'll meet her a little bit later in the program. But she's devoted a lot of her time and thinking and writing about these issues. She and her colleague, Jane McDermit, last year published a report entitled "Digital Transformation in Labor and Education Systems." I'd like to think that was a sort of the think tank spirit

animal for the strategy that our DOL colleagues are going to talk about today.

So just a little bit of the run of show, I'll shortly introduce Chike Aguh. He's chief innovation officer at the U.S. Department of Labor. Chike is going to give some very brief remarks and he'll introduce Deputy Secretary Julie Su. And Deputy Secretary Su will deliver the keynote. And then she'll join Annelies and Lesley Hirsch from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. They'll have a conversation here on the stage, Annelies will moderate that, and there'll be about 15 minutes at the end of the program for questions and answers with all of you.

So with that, I'm very pleased to introduce Chike Aguh, chief innovation officer as I said. He has a very long and impressive bio that I will not read in full because I might be up here for a while. But I'll highlight that Chike himself has been an educator in New York City. He's worked as an education policy official, he's led a social enterprise as well called Everybody On, that helped deliver high speed internet, computers, and digital skills to more than half a million low income Americans.

So, Chike, thank you very much to you and to Deputy Secretary Su for coming to Brookings today. And I'm happy to turn things over to you now.

MR. AGUH: Good afternoon everyone. And really thank you to my colleagues at the Department of Labor and to Brookings for having us today. I'm going to give a gift that is rarely given in D.C. and that's brevity. And really I'm here to introduce my boss, Deputy Secretary Julie Su.

The statement of principles and projects that you're going to see in this data strategy, if you go to DOL.gov/data, really is a roadmap forward for how we can leverage data on behalf of American workers. The reason that we made this a priority, and this really comes Deputy Secretary SU is that data is part and parcel and critical to all the things that we say we care about in this Department and this Administration. From job quality to equity to just our programs delivering for the American people and the workers particularly that we serve. So we see data as a lever by which to do that. It is integral, it is not a sideline. And I think that comes very much, and I'm going to say some nice things about her that she'd rather me not say.

But this comes from, you know, beyond being Deputy Secretary of Labor, beyond being former Secretary of Labor for the state of California, the deputy secretary at heart is an advocate for workers. If you look at the beginning of her career it literally was her getting Thai garment workers out of

literal bondage to make sure that they can have the American dream that we all aspire to.

So this strategy I think reflects that commitment to making equity for workers real. And I will turn it over to the current Deputy Secretary of Labor, my boss, Julie Su.

MS. SU: Thank you so much, Chike. And thank you to Brookings for having us all and for allowing us all to gather here in person, it's so lovely to see so many people live. And I do want to thank also the amazing public servants on my team who are here today who helped to craft this inaugural data strategy for the Department of Labor.

In particular our chief data officer, Scott Givens, our very small but mighty Office of Data Governance, our Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, along with Chike Aguh, our chief innovation officer, who you have already met.

One of the things that really drew me to this administration was the president's clarity about the role of workers in a just economy and the importance of equity in a just recovery. I've spent most of my career, as Chike already mentioned, working with and representing the most vulnerable workers in our economy. Workers like garment workers, restaurant workers, caregivers, and janitors. Mostly workers of color, women of color, many of them immigrant workers, those in low wage jobs who work long hours under often backbreaking conditions.

And what drew me was those were the workers that our president was making central to his vision of how to build a just economy, from the bottom up and the middle out, right. You hear him say that all the time. And that means that we have to judge the health of our economy based on the health of working people, especially those who have been left out of prosperity and economic security even in good times.

So Secretary Marty Walsh puts it this way, he says that our mission at the Department of Labor is to empower workers morning, noon, and night. And that's both a reference to our commitment to working hard every single day and it's a reference to the things that workers need, right.

In the morning, job security, including the ability to get a job free from discrimination and to have their care needs met so they can go to work.

At noon, in the middle of the day it's the assurance that they're not going to be subject to wage theft or unsafe and unhealthy working conditions but are going to be able to work in a job that they

can bring home a just day's pay and come home safely at night.

And the things at the end of the day that make you sleep well, right, health benefits, unemployment benefits during times of insecurity, and retirement benefits.

So since I came to the Department of Labor, and my team has heard me say this a lot, as the deputy secretary I have asked my team to unleash their full power. To take every tool, our statutory authority, the regulations, our talent, the funding that we get, and the people, almost 15,000 strong across the department, and unleash it every single day for the good of the American worker.

So all of that brings us to today. Data is truly one of the super powers of the Department of Labor. Where we are one of the top statistical agencies in the federal government. Whether it is the Bureau of Labor Statistics that calculates unemployment and inflation, whether our Employment and Training Administration or ETA, which tracks unemployment claims, whether it's our Women's Bureau who tracks the economic wellbeing and livelihood of women workers, including occupational segregation and the pay gap, or our Wage and Hour Division which tabulates owed back wages to workers, and so much more, Labor really has myriad data. And that data is powerful because of what we at the DOL can do with it. But even more importantly because of what others can do with it. And so that is really at the heart of our data strategy.

When cutting edge data is put in the hands of policymakers, workers, unions, worker centers, employers, industry, researchers, academics, and others, then we can really evaluate the health of our economy and the wellbeing of workers.

And when the data reflects issues of job quality and equity then we can really be sure that we are delivering, or we can evaluate whether we are delivering on a vision of what a strong and resilient and inclusive economy looks like.

So what do I mean by some of these things? Let me talk a little bit about job quality. We are seeing across our economy now workers making decisions about their lives, about their work, not quite post-pandemic, but coming out of a global pandemic, that demonstrates the choice that workers finally have. What has been described as a labor shortage, we at the department really see as a good job shortage.

And why is that the case? Because the data is demonstrating that workers are resigning

from jobs but they're also taking on new jobs. In fact there's an op-ed today by our Secretary Marty Walsh, along with Cecilia Rouse, who is the chair of the Council of Economy Advisors, in the Washington Post which indicates that hiring has outpaced quits in every major sector, with higher levels of both in lower wage sectors. Which means that workers are feeling empowered to look for new work. And we're seeing that also in workers who are now organizing and demanding, you know, a voice on a job, at a union, sometimes against really great odds.

And so this is something where data can really help to shape the narrative and to tell the story of what our economy is going through and what it looks like.

This is also why we have developed a first of a kind Job Quality Measurement Initiative, along with various foundations, to define and advance job quality at scale across our economy, right.

The question that often comes up is well what do we mean by job quality? We certainly know what it's not, but what do we mean and what are we aspiring to? We have an initiative that is going, putting data to work in helping to measure what that looks like.

I also talk about equity. So as you all know, on day one our president issued an executive order about equity. Saying that we are going to, across government, affirmatively advance equity, civil rights, and racial justice. And that those are the responsibility of all of us in government. And that this is not just about how we expand equal opportunity, but also how we assess the work that we have done to date. Whether our programs and policies are perpetuating systemic barriers for people of color and other underserved groups.

So what does this mean for us at the Department of Labor? It means that we need to look at whether and how our own programs might have been perpetuating systemic barriers and we do this not only because it's the right thing to do but because in order to build an inclusive economy we have to know who's been left out of the economy to date. We have to understand that we approach all of our work in a world in which there was not equity to begin with and so what we do matters in advancing that equity.

So we've been doing these disparity analysis inside the Department of Labor to look at all of our departments' programs. This is part of unleashing our full power. And what we have found for example, is that while African Americans who come out of Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act or

WIOA funded programs do get jobs. They systematically are in jobs in which they are paid less than their white peers. So that tells us something about what we need to do and how we need to focus and what we need to do better.

Similarly there's all kind of data which I won't talk about from here, but I'm sure we will get at later around access to unemployment insurance, right. Even in a world in which there was a massive pandemic-induced global economy crises, the need for unemployment insurance and who got access to unemployment insurance was not equitable.

Same with access to good jobs. Same with who gets wages and who gets higher wage jobs, who's in jobs that have things like paid sick leave and retirement benefits. All of these things are data points that are important for us to measure if we're going to understand the health of our economy. And we at the Department of Labor review this data as really important, not as things to hide from but as truth to confront.

Let me just say one more thing about the exciting data that we are making available. Because so much of this is not just about us evaluating our work through data, but also making data really available for the public in a way that is easy to consume, easy to use, and timely.

And so the Bureau of Labor Statistics is now publishing monthly jobs data about Native American and Native Alaskan workers. And I will just say that one of the things that struck me, I will share this, is when we started to do that, what my BLS colleagues told me was that in measuring unemployment during the pandemic, when we started to break out Native American/Native Alaskan data, they had to increase the wide access of the table because the rates of unemployment were so devastatingly high. And we would not have known that had we not just aggregated that data and continued to put it out there in a disaggregated fashion.

Similarly, BLS is now leading the way in disaggregating data when it comes to Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. Again, a community that for a very long time whose reality has been obscured by aggregate data. Once you start to break out data you see that on all the measures that I just talked about, unemployment, wages, and the like, within the AANHPI community there are vast disparities in terms of how communities are doing, and we don't know that unless we break out the data.

In addition, let me just say, let me just give one more example about how we are using data to rigorously measure what we are doing internally at the Department of Labor. This is for accountability's sake but it's also so that we can update our interventions so we know that what we're doing, whether it works or not.

So for example we have a program called VETS. It's our Veterans Employment and Training Service. Basically making sure that Veterans have a smooth transition to civilian work life. And one of the things that VETS has been doing is even in looking at vulnerable communities, or say like Veterans, right, or women, or the unemployed, we are digging one layer deeper to look at who are the most vulnerable within those vulnerable populations.

So what we have seen by looking at data is we have now pinpointed that 30 percent of all veterans who experience homelessness live in 10 major cities. And 50 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness live in five states. They are also disproportionately African American veterans who are homeless. So with that combination of data, we can really look at how our programs, how our services, how our homeless veterans reintegration programs should be targeted in order to reach the most vulnerable workers.

So I am going to say one more thing about the strategy itself. Which is the strategy really builds on examples and many other things that are happening across the department. I'm not going to have a chance to share them all today but we look forward to having you learn more about them through our data strategy and the programs that we highlight through that strategy.

And all this work is not going to be done overnight, right? We know that, we know that both because gathering and disseminating and making data easy to consume and understandable, you know, transparent, comprehensible, and fit for purpose are not things that happen overnight. But also because there's a culture shift that has to happen when we talk about data. Thinking about data as an asset, as a strategy, as a department-wide strategy as well as a public strategy, a public asset. So all of that you will see embodied in the data strategy that we have put out.

My last ask to you is this, today we issued the first ever open data request for information. It is now out and you can find it. And the purpose here is to recognize that our data strategy doesn't come out and land and stay the way it started. It is a collaborative effort. And so what we are

seeking from all of you and stakeholders across the country is what you need from our data. What you'd like to see from, again, academics, researchers, unions, advocates, employers, other government agencies, and anyone who has a stake in this work. Your ability to utilize the data, to study the data, to help it inform what we do and what you do, is going to be really key to making all of this worthwhile.

So I'm going to end there so that we can have a discussion with the panel. Thank you so much.

MS. GOGER: Thank you so much for coming here today. I'm really excited to host the deputy secretary and Assistant Commissioner Hirsch today. Party because I actually kind of got into the data question when I used to visit a lot of job centers and talk to state and local people. And data always, always, always comes up in every conversation. And then when I was in San Francisco I was living pretty close to Code for America, one of the big NGOs that works on civic tech, and got really interested in how that could really be used in the context of things like the SNAP program, the food assistance program, to help people get better access to services through their phone or in other ways.

And then over time once the unemployment systems started to crash I realized that oh, like this is the chance really to rethink our data infrastructure and labor and education and make the case for why, not just about who has access to services and who's aware of them, but how do you actually connect them on the backend to help. You know, if you have the ability to connect systems you can actually tell people oh, it looks you'll also eligible for this thing.

So it's a lot of power and I really appreciate your remarks, deputy secretary, about the way in which it's not just about like having data to look at as a researcher, but it's actually finding things and stories that are hidden if you look at the aggregate level. So I really appreciate the intent behind this data strategy.

Last year we convened a roundtable that informed that report that Alan mentioned about the dual transformation in labor and education systems. And one of the key things they talked about was this culture shift from seeing data as a reporting and compliance thing to actually analytics. And so I really wanted to ask you, deputy secretary, what do you think motivated your, like why start here with this strategy, and what are your thoughts about how that will filter down from the state to the local level to change that culture. And how will end users then benefit?

MS. SU: Well thank you so much, Annelies. Let me just say, you know, a lot of this, for me, was about I think that the principles, you know, that the president's laid out and, you know, the moment that we're in in this country really demands that we, we have an opportunity as you said, to really look at the things that have failed historically and how we build them back better, stronger, and ensure that they don't fail us again, right, and that we really build an economy that is really centered on making sure that nobody gets left behind.

So for me this whole area of work is so important so that we just don't just talk about that. Because it's easy to agree on those principles, it's a very different thing to try to deliver on them. So a lot of it for me was how we deliver.

But, you know, and then within that other things I talked about, you know, interest evaluation, and also but being really creative about how we do our work, right. I think that looking at where we want to go really pushes us to think more creatively about the ways that we can do that work.

But I also just really want to credit the Department of Labor's team. Like this was something I, you know, it happened within the first year and half of us being here in large part because it has been a vision for the data experts inside the Department of Labor for a very, very long time. So if there's one thing I want to like be known for and be good at, it's to recognize when I'm surrounded by people who are smarter than I am, who are, you know, doing really good work, and really, you know, unleash their power to be able to do things that are impactful.

I want to build on one thing you said about that which is I think in the workforce space there is so much room for data to better allow us to, again, deliver on services but also ensure that the basic goal that everybody who wants a good job can get a good job, is met. And that is everything completely about what I mentioned before how we were measuring people who come out of workforce programs. There aren't always equitable outcomes but it's also just this whole idea of who needs a job and what are the jobs that are available, right. This could be so basic that it's not well connected.

Recently I was speaking to a group of workforce state and local workforce programs and I was talking about good jobs and equity. And what they said was well, you know, we'd love to do that but tell us how to make those connections. And so we've been doing a lot of work in really trying to bring the labor market information network, right, local network a real deep granular data that we thought was

academic, was really critical to understand what was happening on the ground and what the needs were to really try to provide that data within the workforce system to help those make those links between the large number of people who are now looking for jobs, and match jobs to the employers who are looking for workers and need those workers.

MS. GOGER: That's a great point about the matching and how to let people find each other. Yeah, using information to do that.

So as anyone that studies the workforce system knows, states play a massive role in actually managing and creating and improving data systems to actually implement a vision like this. And so I'm really excited to bring upon the stage assistant commissioner of Labor in New Jersey, my home state, Lesley Hirsch. And I would really love to hear your insights about this culture shift we've been talking about, making data part of a management strategy and insights and not just reporting.

What kind of opportunities might this strategy vision open up for states to do more innovative things? And feel free to introduce yourself too because I know we haven't done that.

MS. HIRSCH: Hi everybody. Assistant commissioner of research at the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. And I'm really happy to say that we have an assistant commissioner of research. First of all, in New Jersey, I think research functions tend to be, well, if you've seen one Department of Labor you've seen one Department of Labor, as somebody I know has said multiple times. But research functions tend to be spread across the business areas. And we are actually one research division and I think that really makes a difference, and we're covering not just workforce development but also a lot of the enforcement and benefits work as well.

So although I have to say my original coming to this work has been focused mainly on workforce, so please forgive if I'm a little bit biased on that.

But I do want to say I came to state government only about four years ago. And probably like many of you if you've, you know, walked through the doors of a state Department of Labor, you would have been pretty shocked at the state of data infrastructure. I have a research division with about 95 people and most of them have to put a service request in to our IT department in order to query a data set. Which is really crazy. It's no longer the case anymore but it really was antiquated and I think that's also the case at the U.S. Department of Labor as it is in many if not all of the states in the United States.

So I do want to commend the U.S. Department of Labor for doing an overdue assessment of your capabilities, of your skills, of your ability to do evidence building, which is essentially, you know, part of what this is all about. And I think that it stands to be in the short term, certainly some amazing benefits to the states, and in the long term transformative if we really stick to it. And I'll talk a little bit more about what I think, what I hope you will do from the states' perspective.

So I think this is rarely do we have an opportunity to really rethink something like the data infrastructure. And I would like to really encourage you to be brave and to really buck up your courage and try to rethink it all. Start from scratch. There are some things that we are going to need to be able to just build upon. Not everything needs to be put out to the curb. But I suspect that there's an awful lot that needs to be put out to the curb at this moment. And so I want to encourage that.

So to your question. If we layer this on top of what we're already doing I think, you know, and up at the U.S. Department of Labor and the state Departments of Labor, I think that we are going to be further stretching some seriously inadequate resources. And so I want to encourage as well while we're looking at the data systems, to think about ways that we can streamline and automate compliance reporting. Because compliance reporting takes up so much effort and so much of our time.

I would encourage us to think about, you know, especially because ETA is the one that I'm most familiar with. To think about reducing redundancies in our reporting. And possibly reducing redundancies across program areas when states can send you some information about how many people they've employed through, you know, TANIF funds, then perhaps we don't need to say it again, when we're reporting to the Employment and Training Administration.

I guess the other one is from my friend Amber, who's in the audience. Remember the purpose and meaning, just always keep that, you know, close to your heart because that's what it's really about.

And then I think what benefit I could hope to really see here. Here's a very, very specific example. I think we can stop being numbers crunchers and start being business partners with the one stops, with our field investigators, with all of our partners who are carrying out the services and programs in the field, and really become focused on service improvement and putting the data at the fingertips of the end user when appropriate. And when it's not appropriate not putting it in their faces, because an

awful lot of time they just don't want to know.

I think last of all is I think of Julia Lane. Almost everybody here knows who she is. She was one of the co-founders of the Longitudinal Employment and Household Dynamics Program at Census. And she once showed me a slide that she created for the system, or the country of New Zealand. She created a longitudinal data system that incorporated multiple data from multiple agencies. And that data was able to point New Zealand to a sub-set of people who were the most at risk of being incarcerated in their early adulthood. And we were able to look at that by, you know, by looking at people who were held back or not admitted into, not enrolled in preschool, who were in the juvenile detention system, who were in the public assistance system, and so forth. And I think our attempt to do wrap-around services and to really treat people as a whole people and to do good for our customers and constituents, I think that's the dream. That's sort of my North Star that I'd like to be able to get to someday.

MS. GOGER: That's really great. And I think one of the insights that I've gained in thinking about end user, making the user the center of the focus is how do you reduce the burden on that end user if you're thinking about returning citizens, for example. They might have to apply for health insurance, get transportation support, find housing. And these are all separate administrative things. If we can do the work on the back end to connect those things then it takes that burden off the front end. So I think that's a great point.

Deputy secretary, so you talked a lot about how equity can help you identify and target services, which is really awesome. And I think the strategy really lays out a way for local offices even to have access to their own data so they can do some of that targeting themselves so that, you know, it's just less top down and it's more of an interactive thing. And even end users could have access to more data.

I'm curious if you could elaborate a little bit on what do you think will be required to get to that point where the front line staff, instead of just entering data, they're actually using it for analytics. What will that take?

MS. SU: So I want to both say something about, you know, our being realistic about where we are. But also to the point of being brave and being bold and unleashing our full power. I think

it's important to realize both.

So again, these are not things that happen overnight. You know, part of the issue, as anybody who cares about data knows, is even the collection of data now, you know, outside of the incredible work that BLS does, but internal data, there has to be some consistency to it in order to be able to do some of the things we want to do about it, right, to compare it to, you know, share it across different enforcement agencies or between enforcement agencies and the workforce system. So there's a lot of that kind of base work that needs to be done.

But I will say that just in a short amount of time that I've been here I've seen that there's a real hunger for this internally also. And so when I talked about like our disparity analyses, looking at where we have not being meeting the needs of multiple vulnerable workers. You know, across the department these are like, you know, people feeling like this is information we want and we want to be able to utilize more.

Similarly, you know, because we operate in a world where the resources we have are never going to be enough to do everything we want to do, right? We're not going to be to, you know, we're not going to be, and we don't want to investigate every single workplace. We need to be smart about where we put our resources, right? We want to target investigations of wait staff into industries, employers, and regions where wait staff is more likely. Same for health and safety violations, same for mine safety, right?

So all of this, we are doing much more around providing guidance internally to staff about how we use analytics information to put our limited resources. And I think that's just about, it's about being more effective and more transparent in terms of what government does.

I will also just tie it to something that Lesley said, which is, you know, coming from a state myself, much of what you said is, you know, is speaking my language. And so part of this is inside the Department of Labor people also don't want to be dealing with redundant data, asking for information that, you know, that when you get it from two different sources you can't match them or make them make sense of each other. So this is very much, you know, not just sort of a, you know, externally we need to make it easier for workers to use the resources that are available and states and local agencies who are truly our partners in implementation, to implement. But internally it also makes sense in terms of how we

target our resources, how we use them in an intelligent way and in how we measure what we are doing. And there's tremendous interest and leadership inside the Department of Labor to make that happen.

MS. GOGER: And I would totally agree that there's a lot of interest in this topic right now in all levels of government for sure.

Assistant Commissioner Hirsch, I was wondering if you could, there's this term in the strategy, "interoperability." So I'm going to lead us down a little bit of a wonky path right now. What is, can you break it down for us, what is interoperability? Why should we care about that, and how does it relate to what the Deputy Secretary just said? And what are you doing around this topic at the state level?

MS. HIRSCH: Right. Okay. So I think I can define data interoperability as it describes the extent to which data can be merged and analyzed with other similar data. That's it in a nutshell. But that really involves a lot of other kinds of things. It relies on data standards, it relies on clear, complete documentation. And then it can help us understand what researchers, but also people who are running programs, whether data fields are comparable. So when we're looking at two different data systems. It's really particularly challenges across geographies, certainly across agencies, but really across geographies.

And so I have a couple of ideas about other things, or things that are happening now in the field as well as in New Jersey, that are really, really helpful about trying to bring us forward around interoperability.

One is federal data collection that imposes common data structures. I think, you know, whenever possible that's actually probably the most efficient way that we can ensure interoperability.

Another one is initiatives that's standardized, like Jobs and Education Data Exchange, JEDx. Many of you know about the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Many of you may not know that there are, according to the U.S. Chamber Foundation, 200 instances when state and Federal government are soliciting data from a single company, the same data, right, from the single company.

And so, you know, we joke a lot at the New Jersey Department of Labor because I very much would like to see enhanced wage records. Enhanced wage records would mean that we could, you know, we can see particularly occupation hours, things like that, geography, where people work. And it

would really help us particularly with policy evaluation. Imagine somebody graduating from an engineering school and we can find out whether they were an engineer when they graduated. Not just that they worked in the engineering industry, because who knows what they're doing in the engineering industry.

However, that's not going to get us there, just making the case that it's going to be helpful for program evaluation. As much as I think it would get us there, you know, millions of businesses around the country don't think it'll get us there and so I think the way the U.S. Chamber Foundation is going about doing that project is very smart. They're focusing on standardizing and streamlining reporting for businesses.

And so while we're at it we have a democratic, small-D democratic, conversation around what are those items that'll really help businesses and government. As well as non-profits, quite honestly. As many people as we can get around the table. I think it's a really good model.

There's also the common education data standards. And I see we have the credential engines here, a common educational data schema for all credentials. A non-profit organization, not a governmental organization. And there are a number of other vendors out there who impose their own data standards. But I think if we're talking about really trying to get interoperability it's going to be, and this is where I would say we would love to have the U.S. Department of Labor not just lead by example, but also bring us along. And bring us along so that we can give you input about interoperability.

I do have one more example. We're involved in JEDx, I should say that. And then Rutgers and the New Jersey Department of Labor are in a partnership, we're part of the Coleridge Initiative, which is a regional collaborative. And we have, at the moment we don't have members states but we're all, pretty much all of the states on the Eastern Seaboard, are toying with the idea of a full-fledge collaborative. And what that does is it allows us to work together to identify data models to define what we mean by employment, define what we mean by wages, so that we can put, and this means a lot for New Jersey because 15 percent of our workforce, you know, commutes to New York. It would be great if New York State here, please share your data with us. I always have to say that. But, yeah, so it gives us an opportunity to create some common data definitions. And that way we can merge data from different states.

And I would recommend that that's something that we, you know, it's also a Midwest collaborate is already formed and has done a lot of work on that. And I would recommend people who are interested in hearing about how data interoperability works, to take a look at the Midwest Data Collaborative.

MS. GOGER: Yeah, good response. And I think that goes back to the culture, creating a community of practice across states to have those conversations.

Okay. I want to make sure we have time to open it up for questions from the audience. So my colleagues will run around the room and answer some questions.

I'll also, while the microphone is moving, just build on that last comment to say this is a priority across federal government agencies as well, right. It's something that's so important for all the things that you said, you know, to the extent federal different agencies impact the lives of individuals in a very concrete way.

And user experience is something even though the funding stream or an agency is as a basic need and how they get it doesn't matter to them, right?

Okay. Go ahead.

MR. HAMOON: Good afternoon. First thanks to Brookings for bringing together some of the most seditious leaders in this space in one room, so thank you for that. My name is Hamoon, I'm the CEO at Future of AI. We use the power of AI to help workforce boards and states think about providing a career GPS for the workers and then more practically measure progress and outcome data at the aggregate level of service delivery.

One of the questions I'm curious about having looked at the initial version of the data strategy is how you're thinking about leveraging the leader of federal procurement, specifically in the form of having any vendor that is funded by public dollars needing to commit to making their outcome data machine readable, available, publicly. So whether that's a training provider, whether that's a service provider, that could transform the shift to going from a provider centric ecosystem that we have today to one that purely puts the worker truly at the center.

MS. SU: So this is what is so exciting about all of this happening, right, is the chance to think bigger about what is possible and what we ask for the front end so that all the things that we say we

want to do, we can do at the back end.

I will just say one thing about the complexity of all this though. Which is that one of the things we hear a lot about is, and that we're very committed, right, to using federal procurement in order to meet the overall, you know, equity and other prosperity goals of this administration. Which also includes expanding those who are eligible for procurement to communities that have not been represented in the past, smaller organizations who may not have that kind of capacity. So how we then provide the support, technical and otherwise, in order to make those things happen is another piece of the puzzle that I think we just have to be aware of.

But that's 100 percent right, that what we can do at the front end and that's another reason we're so excited about the guidance and the strategy is to be clear signaling where we want to go so that, you know, it's a way of organizing the field, right, and getting others to help make some of those things happen. Even in ways that we don't have to be involved in on a regular basis because there are folks who are already deeply, you know, in the space and working on it and can help to push us even beyond some of the things that we've explicitly put into ourselves.

MS. GOGER: And briefly, I want, federal procurement is one thing but also states procurements. I was wondering if you had a couple brief thoughts on that?

MS. HIRSCH: Yeah, I wish I had the solution because then I would be running that company that could sell that solution. But I do think it's incredibly broken and I think what we have now is a system where we are, you know, who's available to us to innovate and to help us with the data technologies that we really need are not the people who are the best necessarily, but the ones who happen to be on the right schedule. And so, you know, I do think it's seriously broken and I wish I had the answer. I'm so sorry that I don't.

MS. GOGER: Andrew. Andrew can talk loud.

MR. REAMER: Andrew Reamer from George Washington University, member of Secretary Walsh's Work Force Information Advisory Committee, with Lesley, which Chike has presented.

And so two questions to deputy secretary. One is, and I came in just a few minutes after you started, but the Evidence Act, and the government is now, every department, including Labor, is charged with developing a learning agenda which they're going to identify which questions they don't

know the answers to and they want to get the answers to.

You posted a learning agenda two months ago. So talk a bit about the implications of the strategy for informing the learning agenda.

And the second dimension of implementation would be around the hire initiative that Department of Labor is doing with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission around what are the barriers to hiring because of algorithms, because of all sorts of misinformation and how the data strategy would facilitate that.

MS. SU: Right. Right. So let me see if I can -- so each of those is a whole conversation we could have. But I will say this about the link between the learning agenda and the data strategy. Is part of my job is to provide some framework for how all the pieces inside the department actually do fit together. And you're 100 percent right to highlight the connection between, you know, what do we need to know in order to drive the department's work, and where do we get that information.

And then what are we, within the powers that we have, asking people to actually collect. Because some of the issue is that some of what we want to know we haven't asked for that data to be collected at the outset. And so it's not only a like how do we use it and how do we, you know, how do we collect and aggregate or disaggregate it and then how do we make it usable. But at the outset what is the data that we want to do. That really drives a lot of what we're actually measuring, right?

So I mean I'll go back to my points about job quality and equity, is that one of the things that's so exciting for ETA and all of our workforce dollars, and to your point too, about, you know what we're asking people to report, is we have for a very long time asked to report on things like how many people get through programs, how many people finish programs and how many people end up in jobs.

But if we're really concerned about equity and job quality in the economy we're going to ask for different data to be collected, right? So some of that pushback is going to be well now we have more data so, you know, what's the burden benefit analysis. But some of it is also what is it that we want to know and how do we make sure that we're asking for things that we want to know.

So within the learning agenda and the data strategy, obviously those things come together. And then to add another layer to it we're also using both of those things to help inform our own internal strategic planning, right? So I think where it all fits together is, you know, I say this a lot, my team

hears this a lot, like these are all pieces of a puzzle and we just need to be clear, I need to care about what the overall puzzle, what's the end puzzle supposed to look like. But there's no question that those things go hand in hand.

As to the hire initiative, you know, that's sort of a different part of the same idea. But the idea that, you know, we are concerned with, and this is an external, it's an initiative about, you know external hiring, but it's also something that we care a lot about in terms of the federal government, right?

I mentioned the president's initiative, or executive order around equity. There's also a diversity equity inclusion accessibility executive order around how we build the Federal government, who we're hiring and who has access to Federal government jobs too.

And so again, without knowing what we don't know, right, without knowing who faces barriers, why they face barriers, why they fall out of a process of getting hired, at what point in, you know, what criteria are we putting in place for hiring that is not connected to the jobs we want. All of these are ultimately data points.

I know at the beginning, you know, there was a comment, this is not really selective work, it's actually, it actually ties to everything selective that we try had to do, right? Which is how are we going to deliver on making real this promise of, you know, true equity, access, and the like. So all of those things arguably kind of, and without a data strategy, which is what we're so proud of this, we really don't have a way of, you know, saying this is the foundation on which all the rest of it rests and here's what we're going to expect about the strength of that foundation.

MR. POPOVICH: Hi, Mark Popovich with the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program. Hi, Julie. So I'm a consumer of the data and also trying to gain some things that you learn from the data that DOL currently has. And a lot of it is around the platform that we've helped create called Working Metrics, and it allows a company to measure their analytics about turnover, retention, and growth and wages, benefits and the rest. We rely on the QCEW quite a bit for having benchmarks, because you can't have meaning from that analytics result without a measure to have it up against.

It would be really helpful if that data were available, I'll write a bunch of RFIs when I get back to my desk. It would be really helpful if that data were available somewhat in clumps of business sizes, within sector by business size. The other is like what we're seeing out in the field now is

businesses are as much interested in this in terms of measuring job quality. They're as much interested in it in terms of seeing where their equity results and inclusion results are coming. And the QCEW is pretty limited in that regard. And I'm wondering if we're eventually going to have to rely on EEOC data. And I know Department of Labor will never put down the championship for providing this kind of data to the EEOC people, but you know, it's going to happen if we can't get progress on getting some other splits here in the data.

So anything you want to add to that.

MS. HIRSCH: I would love to just chime in three words. And I bet you Bill and Scott can anticipate what I'm going to say. Enhanced wage records. Right, exactly. So that's what the JEDx program is about, and we're trying to figure out a way of not just enhancing wage records for our analysis and being able to track, well not just, because these are some of the most important questions around diversity and equity. But also to streamline, you know, what businesses must report. So that would be one way.

And then, you know, I'm not going to school you, Aspen Institute, about what we can do by industry and establishment size, but happy to chat with you afterwards.

MS. GOGER: Yeah. And I'll just add to that because I think if we had more frequent, more detailed data about our labor markets during this COVID we would be able to design policy that was much more easily. If it was standardized we could have had much more precise unemployment calculations that weren't difficult to roll out quickly. We could have changed the policy quickly, you know. So I think it's a really great point about the QCEW but I want to push us even more ambitious. Like we need this every time people report payroll to automatically be able to be sent to the appropriate place.

And we need actual intelligence about -- we actually did a study in California about incumbent worker training, looking at firm sizes. And when you invest in training and reimbursing employees for training, how do small firms do, how do medium size firms do. If we had better data that we could do that every day in real-time instead of like spending months and months trying to get the data, trying to buy the data, you know. So anyway, I think it's a really excellent point.

Other questions?

MR. EASTER: Hi, Jake Easter, AEI. Thank you so much for a great panel and being a

great panel.

I just wanted to ask a question. If this is as you say, Annelies and Lesley, that it requires state change, what stands in our way? What are the main obstacles that we're seeing in states to kind of I guess revolutionize the data structure and, you know, within the Departments of Labor but also in government structure? I think that would be helpful to know.

MS. HIRSCH: That was the procurement question I think. Annelies knew that I was going to talk about the procurement as one of the things that stands in our way. But I think there are other things that stand in our way.

And probably the biggest one is capacity, analytical capacity. So not just, I think it's really important to invest in the technology, certainly. But I think what gets lost in the soup sometimes is we're looking at hardware and we're looking at applications but we're not looking at the underlying data. And so that's why I'm so thrilled to actually, that there are all these people sitting in here talking about this for as long as we are. The hope is that we do some capacity building around data.

And I actually really commend you, Chike and deputy secretary, for identifying the dearth of civil service career pathways. It's something that we just identified in New Jersey. There are physical science career pathways, there are economics career pathways, and there are IT pathways, but there are no data career pathways. And so when we are trying to build a strategic enforcement infrastructure where we can pull together data on companies that we're trying to pre-clear before, you know, before we give them any money out of the state of New Jersey, we don't have the people who can do that. And recruiting them is very difficult when you're putting out a job ad called "administrative analyst."

So sustained focus and investment, because I think it's not just, you know, it's not just a one-time thing. So I really would hate to come back, and I pray that I can, come back 20 years from now and have the same exact conversation, that we haven't figured out a way to make this last and be a lasting feedback loop that we're continuously modernizing.

I think data production issues stand in the way also. And so I don't know how exactly I can tie this to your question, but I think what we have is a situation where people on The Hill, or people writing regulations, are creating data systems are asking for reports that are people who are actually in the field don't know how to or don't understand why it's needed. And so you have, you know, and we've

talked about this, a number of us talked about what the one-stops when people are entering information about employment barriers, that will stop at the first one because that's enough, we just can say, you know, that person has one employment barrier.

But what it means is that we're seriously undercounting the number of people with disabilities, the Vets, the displaced homemakers and so forth, and so that stands in the way as well as this inability to really bring the on the ground experience and the data literacy into the conversations through the complete soup to nuts data literacy from the ground up.

I think that's really, you know, I have about six other ones, but I think those are the big ones.

MS. SU: I'll just build on that to say one thing, which is that is all true. Part of that is why we so value our experts inside the Department of Labor. And why I call our team small but mighty. I think there's a lot of work to do to build capacity.

But I will say just to tie to the release of a data strategy by the Department of Labor, is some of the issues is just sort of attention, right, and the kind of coordination. And we're hopeful that our data strategy will help to bring some of that attention and coordination effort. Again, not necessarily at the direction or just to the Department of Labor, but by indicating, right, that this is something that we'd like feedback on and so where we want to go that it will help to organize the field in some way.

I mentioned earlier the Labor Market Information Network, right? This is a 50-state system funded by the Department of Labor that is a wealth of really key valuable important information, you know, and something that we've been working, I've been working on closely with BLS is trying to figure out how we unleash, sort of capture that power and unleash it for some of the things we're talking about here today.

So hopefully that's a positive side of the coin to the things that we've mentioned here.

MS. GOGER: Okay. We're going to ask one more question, but I just want to add one more barrier, which I want to highlight here, which is the tension between fraud detection and usability. We put barriers to access programs because we don't want the wrong people to get them, right?

So there's this real tension in administration between how do you effectively prevent fraud and how do you make sure it's accessible.

And I think that if we don't invest seriously in capacity and technology and processes, then we're always going to be vulnerable to fraud. And we could have prevented a lot of that if we had that standardized infrastructure and had the technologies we needed to really more effectively identify people. But also, you know, like basically not give benefits to the wrong people, but also make sure we're giving it to the right people.

So anyway, one more question.

MS. HIRSCH: I'm so sorry, now I have to say this one thing. Can I just say one more thing about this? Because I do think this is the connection between the data and the policy, right? Which is to build on that which is all absolutely correct. If you pay attention to what actually happened and what the data tells us about what happened during the pandemic and fraud versus access.

The most fraud I think the people in this room are going to know, the most fraud occurred in the pandemic unemployment assistant program, not in the unemployment insurance system per se. Not that that wasn't a problem in both. Because the system was completely overwhelmed.

But the pandemic unemployment assistant program was highly vulnerable to fraud because it was meant to provide assistant to those who were left out of the traditional safety net. So what it highlights, if you get past the noise of like it's all about, you know, fraud and the whole system is overrun by fraud, is how an entire, you know, everything is vulnerable if you don't have an adequate safety net in which workers are protected, in which people who should be employees are classified as employees, and in which, you know, in which employers who are supposed to fund the system that is supposed to help make up for, you know, for times of deep insecurity and uncertainty, if that hasn't happened.

So I think that's another important part of this overall conversation, right, which is a direct way to draw the tie between the importance of data and the policies that are in place to, you know, what the intersection is between those. And this space gives us a chance to be really honest and take a close look at that outside of the, you know, sound bites and the easy solutions that sometimes get put forth.

MS. GOGER: I agree 100 percent. There were a lot of workers we're not seeing as workers and that gets to your bold point in the beginning. And I love the theme.

Okay. One more question.

SPEAKER: Yeah, hello. I'm here from the National Governors' Association. And so we're working with a bunch of states learning about skills and learning employment records and the data questions that come along with that. Certainly those data questions are not just directed at DOL, they're, you know, Department of Education, they're Department of Veterans Affairs, they're Department of Commerce.

So I wonder how are you all coordinating federally around innovation in the data space. And then specifically around the interoperability question. We certainly want to have a united conversation about what that means for state systems. So I wonder how you're envisioning or collaborating in a conversation around that.

MS. SU: Thank you so much for that question. And that does relate to the point I made earlier about, you know, of everything we've talked about, the need for the Federal government to have a, if not one uniform data strategy, at least a shared data strategy, is really important.

And that's something that is important to the administration, it's something we, you know, our doing it through our programs with other federal agencies, but also this in the launch of a strategy allows us to think about this from just the data perspective with other Federal agencies too.

So I guess I'm kind of like crystalize a couple of examples that I can use to answer what you just said. But let's just, focusing on the workforce space because we talked about that some, right?

The Department of Education does have a, like basically a score card, right? It's their information sharing with the IRS to understand outcomes of education. And so as a result there's a lot of information out there about, you know, the value of, you know, a high school degree, a college degree of different things.

We've been looking at some of these in the workforce space, right? So understanding the connections between education, workforce, and job outcomes. And so, you know, whether we could develop some sort of scorecard that would help us look at what are the, you know, what kind of training programs are most effective.

We have a theory with the Department of Labor that demand driven training is the most effective, that we shouldn't just train people for the sake of training and then count how many graduate from programs. But actually connect partnerships between employers, employees, industry, labor, you

know, management and unions to develop training programs for in-demand jobs in local communities.

So our ability to measure whether that's what happens relies on a whole bunch of exchange between, again, education, you know, the Department of Labor, the IRS, and job salary and income outcomes as well as long-term incomes, right? We're not just looking at whether people get jobs that pay well at the front end, we're really interested if we're talking about wellbeing of workers in long-term job security and the like.

So that is one example of many examples in which we are working across Federal government agencies to try to be smart and strategic and transparent about the impact of programs that affect working people.

MS. GOGER: Any last comments?

MS. HIRSCH: Oh, last comments. I was just going to comment on that.

MS. GOGER: Go ahead.

MS. HIRSCH: But if I have to go to last comments I'll come up with something else.

I think the last comments really are around some of the things that are floating in the ether right now. One is around the National Secure Data Service, that it was introduced into the House of Representatives last May I think, May of 2021 if I'm not mistaken.

And right now there's an advisory committee on data for evidence building that's putting together their recommendations for that National Secure Data Service. And they were asked to actually define what that's going to be.

I think, you know, I think with our Workforce Information Advisory Council and with the Data Foundation, we have a different idea about what we'd like to see the National Secure Data Service be. And that would be a matching system, not a data warehouse for the Federal government, but a system that could actually facilitate this kind of matching or the kind of work that we're doing in the regional collaboratives. And would be something like a federally funded research data center for example.

So that's my bully pulpit for a last thought. I think there's also a real need to be thoughtful about how we recruit and train people for this field.

And I did want to comment on the MJJ or the question around multiple agencies working together because what came to my mind immediately was when we were trying to put together a

predictive analytics around strategic enforcement and we were unable to identify what the industries were that the companies were in because who was asked to enter the FEIN, the Federal Employer Identification Number, the complainant.

So imagine calling and saying, my wages haven't been paid. And then being asked to say what your Employer's Identification Code is. Or if you're not even being, you know, paid as an employee, you know, and you have a 1099 or you don't have a 1099, you have to go and look that up in order to make your complaint, so you can put in the --

Here just to give you an example, we also within any particular department need to cross silos between the people who are building those systems, particularly for compliance reporting, and the people who are trying to take meaning out of those systems.

And so, and I think that's a real big challenge because those silos, we talk about silos between agencies, but the silos between occupations within agencies is also really damaging to the quality of the data that we have.

MS. GOGER: Yeah. Well we certainly have a lot of work to do. But I appreciate this vision because I think we gotta start with a North Star.

And it's really an honor to host you, deputy secretary, great to see you again. We last met in Fresno, California several years ago.

And also Assistant Commissioner Hirsch, thank you so much for sharing your expertise as well.

* * * * *

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