

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

CREATING 'GOOD JOBS' FOR VULNERABLE WORKERS IN THE BROADBAND SECTOR

WASHINGTON, D.C.
Thursday, March 23, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT – CHECK AGAINST RECORDING

OPENING REMARKS:

BETH COBERT
Acting President, Markle Foundation

PANEL DISCUSSION:

NICOL LEE TURNER (Moderator)
Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Technology Innovation, Brookings

KEVIN LY
Director of Special Populations, Workforce Development Department, National Urban League

RYAN LUBY
Associate Partner, McKinsey & Company

ERNIE PACHECO
CA Broadband Lead, District Environmental Programs Coordinator,
Communications Workers of America – District 9

* * * * *

NICOL TURNER LEE: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining us. I am Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, a senior fellow in governance studies and the director of the Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institution. And I'm excited that you decided to spend a little bit of time with us today as we take on this really important topic on how we're going to create some good jobs for vulnerable workers in the broadband sector. As you all know, closing the digital divide is one of the Premier and Prime policy proposals that I have out there, and this is the best time to have this conversation, particularly as America has a huge down payment to ensure that we have universal connectivity among all parties. And we've been working really closely. If you've been following our work to ensure that broadband in particular the type of closure that we want to do among vulnerable populations has created a pathway for sustainable and livable wage skilled jobs. And we think in our research that it doesn't require a college degree in order to enter this marketplace. And so today's discussion is really a way for us to continue this dialog. We're very gracious to a few folks as we've formulated our perspective. First and foremost, we've been talking to all of you, many of you who are participating on this webinar today and others who so humbly joined us for us to iron out our discussion. And more importantly, we're excited and we're going to begin this webinar with the acting president of the Markel Foundation, Beth Cobert, who is currently in that role. Her organization has been leading the Rework America Alliance, which is a unique partnership of civil rights organizations, nonprofits, private sector employers, labor unions, educators and others who are interested in creating opportunities for millions of Americans who are vulnerable or low wage work. And so prior to that, Beth was honing her leadership skills as the acting director of the Office of Personnel Management under President Obama. And before that she was at McKinsey. Before I introduce her, let me say what we always say at Brookings. We at Brookings know that the Markel Foundation provides generous support to our program and has helped us to make this work possible. In fact, we are one of the grantees in their program, and I'd like to reiterate that the scholarship that we actually have at Brookings is independent, and all the research questions and policy proposals have been formulated independently. So with that, I want to open up with some remarks from Beth, because I think this larger initiative at Brookings as a part is significant to talk about. And then after that, I will introduce our panelists. We're going to dive into the, you know, the spectrum of how we begin to think about how we're going to leverage this down payment on America's broadband infrastructure and create the kinds of jobs where all people can participate. So with that, thank you for joining us. Be sure to send your questions to events at Brookings that you. And we look forward to this conversation. I'm and turn it over to you and then I'll come on back.

BETH COBERT: Thanks so much, Nicol. It's delightful to be here with you and the rest of the terrific panelists today and all of you joining in the audience, as Nicol said, I'm Beth Cobert, the acting president of the Markel Foundation. And I know this conversation about creating good jobs for vulnerable workers in the broadband sector will provide a lot of thought provoking input for all of us. I want to thank everybody here who's joined probably via their own broadband connection. The last few years have really illustrated how important broadband is for so many of us to do our jobs and participate in education, family work and civic life. And we'll hear today about how the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is expected to create up to 200,000 new jobs for broadband deployment, which brings with it the potential for industry to engage in a broader group of workers and provide more equitable career opportunities. But that doesn't come without its challenges. And the challenge is recruiting for roles that people don't fully understand or don't understand whether their skills are really relevant for those opportunities. And so we have to find a way to address those challenges, and that's what we're going to talk about. By the way, these challenges aren't unique to the broadband sector. And so as we listen today, I think it's important for all of us to reflect on how can we take the lessons that our panelists will share and think about where else they can be applied. As Nicol mentioned, the Markel Foundation. We've been focused on workforce issues for roughly the past ten years with a goal of helping people move out of low wage roles into good jobs in our changing economy. We particularly focused on people who had great capabilities and great potential and who built their skills through work and life experience. They might have some post-secondary education, but they don't hold a bachelor's degree. That's more than 60% of the people in the U.S. workforce today. That means over 60% of people are automatically disqualified from a good job if that job includes a degree as a minimum requirement.

So those are the things we're working to change. And it's important to note that this issue about degree requirements is particularly acute for black and Latino workers, for whom four year degree requirements automatically exclude over 75% of black workers and over 80% of Latino workers. So it. MARKEL As we think about this challenge, we're working to address this in a number of multiple interconnected ways. First, as Nicol mentioned, through our work with the Rework America Alliance and the Rework America State Network, the Alliance is a partnership of civil rights organizations, including our colleagues in the National Urban League, who are here today. Those nonprofits like Goodwill and rural LISC, private sector employers like Microsoft, Boeing, Workday, labor unions like the North American Building Trades and the AFL-CIO educators and others, including McKinsey, who have been big supporters, the Atlanta Fed and many others. Our goal is to work with organizations doing work in and across communities to help millions of workers move from low wage roles into better jobs. And part of that is our collaboration with over 30 states and the District of Columbia. In a nonpartisan rework, America's state network helping those states share ideas about how they can innovate and make better things happen for the residents of their states. Another part of this work is developing a deeper understanding of the potential for the major federal investments in infrastructure, including broadband and what is needed to translate this really once in a generation opportunity into tangible opportunities for workers, especially those who've been underrepresented in the past. A part of this effort has been working with another great team at Brookings, Joseph Kane and his team at Brookings Metro, with support from our friends at the Strada Education Network to really identify the scale of the opportunity presented by Infrastructure Investments. The report that Joseph and the Brookings Metro team produced highlighted there's more than 6 million workers nationally who are employed in infrastructure occupations. That's nearly 12% of the US workforce. And typically, these jobs pay more than similar roles in other sectors. But still there are workers who don't have access to those jobs. In fact, many prospective workers don't even understand what the scope and breadth of those opportunities are. So part of our focus is we take that our research and say, what can we do to move forward on that? We did a deeper dive in infrastructure to really say how can we make these workforce opportunities become real? And we work with the National Association of State Energy Officers and the Center for Transportation to produce a report on state strategies to advance job quality and build inclusive workforces in infrastructure. This report outlines actions that states need to take, including deepening collaborations across workforce and infrastructure agencies, using the flexibilities in the funding in these bills to actually commit some of that to workforce. So they have the people that are needed to turn these infrastructure projects into reality and embedding equitable workforce policies into procurement practices so that we can create a way for workers, particularly women, black and Latino workers, who've been excluded from higher paying roles in these sectors and haven't been able to access them to capture this next wave of investment. Our work with Nicol and her team is really focused on supporting their deep dive in the broadband sector, which is a critical investment arena. This work is part of a broader Markel Foundation Research Consortium on Technology Policy and Good Jobs, which was formed to gain a better understanding of the issues and potential pathways forward to connect workers to good job. This consortium is looking at questions such as what systems and policies must be in place for new technologies to create good jobs, advance labor market equity and ensure shared prosperity. What skills and competencies are needed to make sure that these technologies become engines of broad economic participation? And I think the lessons we'll hear about from the panel today about the broadband sector are a great way to start to look specifically at actions that can be taken and programs that are underway and new opportunities to really move forward. So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Nicol with a big thank you to her and her team and the folks who are here for the work we've done together. And an encouragement for all of you who are listening to please see this fantastic panel, your questions and really think about the actions that you can take in your industry, in your community to move forward on some of these ideas so we can make the difference and have all these investments play out in a way that really delivers against their potential. Again, thanks to Nicol and everyone at Brookings and delighted to hear the discussion that follows.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Thank you so much, Beth. We appreciate you and we appreciate this Markel Foundation initiative, particularly what we talk about these good jobs that I think we all of us

who have worked in this space for quite some time, it has a different meaning for everybody. Just share a quick story. I became really interested in this space after seeing many, many, many years ago. Listen, I write about in my book. It's coming out in January. You all have to buy it. But years ago, I used to find folks with just a GED that could actually get network certification, A-plus certification. When I was in the Community Technology Center movement, it was more than 30 years ago when we saw that. So I believe that there's a promise to this. The key thing is understanding the landscape and how we're going to get there. So I can't be more excited about this panel. May I ask Kevin Integrity to join me on this one? Because I think that these are really smart people that will be in conversation with, too, because all of you have joined us and are going to give us questions, events at Brookings that you or if you're tweeting good broadband jobs is the hashtag on Twitter good broadband jobs. So let me introduce our panel and then I'm going to jump right in for the remainder of our time. Before we go to Q&A. We're joined today by Ryan Luby. Ryan, just wait my hand with these. We've got our Zoom dedicated to all our all over the place in terms of my introduction. Ryan is an associate partner at McKinsey and Company, a leader of the McKinsey Global Institute. Ryan MGI is applied research on macroeconomics in North America, and his recent work includes a dynamic view of economic sentiment via American Opportunity Survey, with an eye towards understanding the impact on most vulnerable populations. He understands the landscape and hopefully we'll hear a little bit more from him on what the state of play is today. We're also joined by my good friend that I've known for quite some time, the Urban League. Kevin Ly is the Did I say that wrong? Kevin again? Kevin Ly.

KEVIN LY: Kevin Ly. You got it.

NICOL TURNER LEE: I'm a I I y. So I knew we were kinfolk. As the director of Special Populations for the Workforce Development Department of the National Urban League. In that role, he serves as the project lead and subject matter expert working with justice involved youth reentry, adults and the long term unemployed individuals. And he oversees the job training and employment program that also include urban reentry jobs programs in the urban apprenticeship jobs program as well. And then last but not least, my new friend Ernie Pacheo is a rank and file worker at the Communication Workers Association. Local 9412 The CWA District nine environmental programs Coordinator. He's the California Broadband Lead and a 25 year telecoms slicing technician. He's also the lead organizer of District Nine's campaign around labor, environmental justice, and most recently ending the digital divide. He'll talk a little bit about the broadband game that CWA is also putting together that thought was pertinent to this conversation. So first and foremost, thank you, everybody, for joining us. Ryan, I want to jump right to you because I think we need to do some landscaping on where we are when it comes to jobs in general. So I thought I would kick off with you just to give us some prospects. I mean, as it's been mentioned, you have this huge appropriation and as part of the statute of the infrastructure investment and jobs, that there is a workforce requirement. So I'm curious to hear from you. What are those prospects, particularly in a space where we're dealing with a good portion of money out of NTIA, right, When it comes to billions of dollars allocated to either expanding or investing in new broadband networks? Who's going to do the work?

RYAN LUBY: And I appreciate the warm words and introduction just to provide a little bit of orienting context for those listening. I serve clients along the construction value chain, so set of federal, state, local clients that are both disbursing and then responsible for putting dollars out the door. And then I also work with developers, lenders, investors that are actually driving some of the construction as well. And then I my final segment of work is with investors who are interested in taking advantage of being thoughtful about how to drive increases and productivity increases in labor supply and unlocking value. With that overarching context, I think the. At the highest level. What I think we need to anchor on as a society and in conversations at the financial press and elsewhere, they're really focused on sort of near-term resilience and uncertainty. Is there a recession? Isn't there a recession? When will there be a recession? Will there be a recession? I think we need to focus on the longer term structural context, informed by aging demographics and limited immigration, where supply constrained. From a labor perspective, moving forward. It's a combination of aging, which I mentioned core constraints on social infrastructure, physical, mental

health care, child care, elder care, and limited immigration. So the supply side is constrained and we've now just had a huge slug of demand come through, which isn't technical. You've got public sector CapEx which is coming through and then you've got a bunch of private sector commitments which feel a lot less cyclical than historical flows. If you if you look at sort of like a pre 2008 sense, when we take the slug of private sector CapEx that's flowing through and we estimate and at the risk of arousing the interests of economists in the audience, when we when we look at the year of peak demand, peak job creation, we estimate about 70,000 jobs will be created along the construction value chain in the year of peak demand relative to the momentum. And we include all the way upstream architects, designers through manufacturing, distribution and then down to the job site as well. But roughly 50% of that 40% of that is at the job site and then about 40% of it is manufacturing distribution and 10% of it is engineering and design, too small and small, absolute number in terms of engineering and design. But that can actually be quite bottlenecking. You can't actually kick off a project until it's architected and engineered. So I think that's the that's the overarching context. What I would say is we're supply constrained moving forward. We've got a lot of jobs along the entire construction value chain, not just at job site that owners see and have the most visibility to. So this is a really multifaceted problem which is going to call for. And I think other panelists will speak to this a diverse, multi-stakeholder, multi-stakeholder solution that isn't going to be one where we can just close our eyes and wait until it's over.

NICOL TURNER LEE: So I love what you're talking about. So in the last blog that we wrote about this, it's available on the Tech Tank blog site. We actually tried to figure out ways to align certain skill competency with some of these industries that you're talking about, Ryan, that are not clearly defined like engineering, software, architecture, etc.. And, you know, there are a lot of folks that are probably on this call know it's taking a long time to get a national classification of these jobs. And so in our recent piece, we had to think about what are some of the skills behind construction, manufacturing, customer service, cloud storage support, and how do you transfer that to a sector that, like you said, is a burgeoning sector with opportunities, but it's below the radar, right, when it comes to many people. So I would love for you to hold that thought, because I think that idea of being supply constrained also has a lot to do with whether or not people in the marketplace know that these jobs also exist. Kevin, that leads me to you, right? Because you deal with populations that are not supply constrained, right, from a particular standpoint. They don't know the domain. They don't know the supply. And they're not often in demand, right? Because they're special populations for whatever reason who are out of the workplace. So speak to us a little bit about how you're addressing these issues in your role of the National Urban League and more importantly, what you see as a way to sort of engage dislocated workers, workers without college degrees, ex-offenders, you know, people with disabilities, intersectional qualities that people have to get plugged into these 70,000 below jobs because, as Ryan said, some of them may be slated for something else. But just curious of your thoughts on that.

KEVIN LY: Thank you, Dr. Turner Lee. So my name is Kevin Ly. I serve as the director of Special populations at a new. Well, really, We. We work on. The urban the urban apprenticeship jobs program. And this program is a program where we where where we have partnered with the multicultural media and telecom, telecom and Internet council in the broadband sector. We also work with the North American Building Trades Union and the construction industry, as well as with the Center for Energy Workforce Development in the clean energy space. I also work on and lead our urban reentry jobs program, and that's where we work with some of our most vulnerable populations, some of our special populations that include the justice impacted, the formerly incarcerated, their reentry adjacent and family members. And so we're very well versed in the. And what it takes and and what the support of what supportive services are needed to help overcome the barriers to to employment and entry and to and to career training. The National Urban League, we are a historic civil rights organization founded in 1910. We're headquartered in New York City. And, you know, I. I'm an Asian American and I pronouns are he and him. But I consider myself as an ally and and as an ally who works really hard to become a better ally each day to support the mission of the National Urban League, which is to fight what? To stand side by side and assist and to support the civil rights leader who are working to help African-Americans and other disadvantaged communities said she is their highest human potential. And so that has to include

social parity, economic self-reliance, power and civil rights. And, you know. And I'll segway into just to to to, to why we're here today, which is. Removing the barrier of being able to access good jobs when you do not have a college degree is a huge one. And it's incredibly significant because. It's it's we have arrived at a place in America where we are finally recognizing the significance of the high school diploma. It's cultural rite of passage from, you know I'm going to take everyone's our memory lane like in your heart in your senior year when you know you're going to prom. Going. Getting your high school diploma. Being at the graduation ceremony where your your mom and your dad and your grandparents and your guardian are there to celebrate what you. I remember my high school graduation more than I remember my college, my college graduation, you know, And after after the ceremony, you know, you're young, you got the family. You you might be going out for lunch or dinner. There's balloons. I absolutely love it. And more importantly, I believe that when it comes to working with opportunity, youth and and we define it from ages 16 to 24, but especially for your young adults, adults who are ages 18, 19, 20, who have worked so hard to get their high school diploma, or if they didn't finish high school, worked so hard to get there. Kids are high set. They absolutely deserve a chance to. And turn it into different, different pathways for your adult life where you can go to college, you can go to an HBCU, or you can be placed in a practice through a partnership program. And in that register apprenticeship program similar to college, you're going to be mentored. You'll be taken under the wing of somebody who has who's a journeyman, who's who's experienced, who can train you because you're you're at this at the stage of your life where you're learning. And that's okay. That's what we expect of our young people, of our young adults who are age, you know, who are 18, 19, 20, 21, and and the opportunities that are that are going to open up. I believe that they will be limited, limitless in terms of of of just working with vulnerable populations and just preparing the future for good jobs and good opportunities.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah. You know, Kevin, I appreciate you saying that because not often do we hear in the Beltway here in D.C., you know, the type of passion and conviction that you have because you work closely with people who have the lived experiences of who we're talking about today. And I want people to sort of hear a couple of things that I've heard so far as I pivots are already, you know, one, we have these supply constraints. And Kevin sort of like alerted me to this idea, and we have this new reevaluation of the high school diploma, right? Because in many respects, if you recall historically as a sociologist, we sort of devalued having a high school diploma for a really long time. And now we're finding opportunities for people to plug into the labor force at all entries. So that's a lot of what I think this conversation has to be about, because we're not going to be able to fill these jobs at the rate in which we're going. So, Ernie, I'm coming to you. I know in your job, your role, you think a lot about these things. I want to know two things to get a started about this broadband brigade that the union is really committed to. And if you recall from our piece, we really think that unions offer, you know, not only an opportunity for impacted workers to have more sustainability and longer longevity in this marketplace, but they also allow for, I think, improved conditions when it comes to work. So just curious to hear a little bit more about the broadband brigade and what you're doing there in terms of closing the divide and getting people to these roles.

ERNIE PACHECO: Sure. So I'll speak on the broadband brigade, which kind of envelopes or is around our apprenticeship program and other training programs. I want a little more detail on that. I think later when you ask some other questions. And I also want to say the caveat that you made me some pretty fancy when you were introducing me. I think the role of whoever has the longest title is like the least important person in the room. So it's a little bit like that. I will be in my bucket truck working tomorrow, but I'm really glad to be here. So the broadband brigade, the broadband brigade is part of a national campaign by CWA. It's composed, it's a large group, over 100 of frontline broadband workers all across the country. Most of the members of the broadband brigade, like myself, have decades of working in the broadband industry. 25 years myself. And we are leading CWA advocacy on addressing the digital divide and ensuring broadband for all. And we want to make sure that as this enormous amount of public funding to address this long, long standing problem as we build up these systems, that we do it right. Right now, the brigade's focus is heavily on state level advocacy. We are focused now on probably everyone on this call knows

that there's federal guidance for the bid program, for bid moneys that are coming out. But each state is developing its own plan for implementation. And so we are doing what we can to try to have our vision incorporated in the state level plans for us. You know, well, here in California where I'm at, we have a long history of working with the legislature and the CPC, and we're continuing to do that on this. But we also recognize that we have to work in coalition with other community partners. And so we've been doing a lot of reaching out to them to hear what are their priorities, what are their vision about this expansion. I was really resonating with Kevin, Say said we haven't yet reached out to you, but I definitely want to follow up with you, Kevin, on some of this. So we want to hear what other people's visions and priorities are and share what what ours is our two primary priorities around the expansion that's coming out of the bid. First of all is we want future proof fiber networks for all. No community being left behind. Secondly, we want some labor language attached to ensure that as we build out these systems, it's well-trained workers doing this work in good shape. We're a union. We like people to have good jobs. On that first piece of no one being left behind, looking at being left behind. We want to make sure again that these are future proofed and scalable. And we know from experience that the only technology that does that is fiber. We know from our experience there's a lot of analysis out there that talks about the digital divide, breaks down what the problems, and tries to quantify some of the scope of it. So we know from that. But we also know from our daily work experience, we hear from community members, I won't call them customers because broadband, we believe, as a utility, should be regulated and treated as such. We hear from our community members, I don't have the bandwidth for my kid to do their distance learning, which was a huge problem during COVID. I don't have the bandwidth in my connection to work from home as I need to and keep my job. We also so so we're hearing it daily from community members. We also, because we're the people that build and maintain the communication systems, we in essence, know where the bodies are buried. We know what communities don't have connection, you know, whether it's a neighborhood or a group of neighborhoods, whether it's entire towns or string of towns in California, which I think we're actually better than some other states. We have enormous areas where there is no connection, where people don't have access to to what they need. So we're working to make sure that no one gets left behind and that everyone has a fiber connection. And on the second front, on labor standards or labor conditions. We want to again ensure that a well-trained workforce working in good jobs does this work. And we have this position in the in the context of where the industry is at today. The telecommunications industry is like a lot of other industries. Maybe most we've seen significant downward slides in work conditions. We've seen wage stagnation due to deregulation due to outsourcing. Rampant subcontracting union density in the industry has significantly decreased. And when that happens in an industry, it lowers all boats. It's just the way it works with unions and density in an industry. So we're trying to address those things. A serious part of the problem for us in this industry is that a lot of companies have been not only subcontracting or subclan subcontracting incredibly, but they're doing it in layers. So a subcontractor, a subcontractor and low wages and lack of training is a huge problem in the industry. And as we try to organize these companies, it's very difficult because of the layering of the subcontracting and because of very aggressive anti-union tactics that are often employed. Additionally, part of why we're asking for labor standards is not everyone might know this. There's no reason that everyone would. But there are significant safety risks for the worker and for the public in this work being done wrong. Our infrastructure is usually side by side with other utilities infrastructure. So I'm constantly up on a call or gown and ventilated manhole doing work. And there are hazards not just for the worker but for the public when it's when it's not done right. When I as a union technician started years ago, I was given weeks of training on safety protocols and how to use our safety equipment properly and how to make sure that I came home safe and that no one, no members of the public that hurt. Besides the classes, I was mentored for months by more experienced technicians until I really understood how to do the job safely. And it's an ongoing education and high road employers. It's ongoing education with safety. Unfortunately, we don't see that in the low road employers. They cut costs and training for them. Safety training for them can be something as simple as Here's your climbing gaps. Don't fall off the pole or grab the pole if you start to fall. Okay, completely inadequate there. Additionally, when we have low road contractors doing this work, it also affects service quality. When you install your lines, whether underground or overhead improperly, they tend not to last so long or they tend to work in a degraded manner. And so we have to go out and either replace them

or we have to spend an inordinate amount of time and money to maintain and repair that which degrades the entire network and which increases the cost of operating the network. So. Also going to our four priorities that we're actually trying to get implemented in each safety plan. We're looking for four things primarily.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Now, Ernie--.

ERNIE PACHECO: Yeah.

NICOL TURNER LEE: And you can tell me a little bit more about that a little later in terms of safety, things like that. I got some questions percolating for for you. Based on what you said, though.

ERNIE PACHECO: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we have yeah, binders. I can speak for an hour about the problems, but yeah.

NICOL TURNER LEE: So yeah, no, actually, I like what you're talking about. And one of the reasons why we really want to make sure people are listening, why union representation is important. One of things we found out in our first paper, particularly for one of the participants, is that particularly among vulnerable populations, they don't have the type of union entry as we've seen in other industries. And so it's really important as we actually go through this process. And Beth and I were talking about to go about creating not only good jobs in terms of this down payment, but also creating pathways to good jobs and what that looks like for all populations where they have some type of sustainable pathway to go from here to there. Now, already I'm a bring you up on another panel about this fiber thing. I'm just going to tell you we I have no money for work, so we put it all to fiber but that's a whole nother story to the battle that you would like to talk about. But I want to go back to Ryan because I think we're starting to connect the dots, my friends. Right. One, we have the supply shortage, too. We have to figure out how we re about. We revalue a high school diploma. And I think what Ernie is really getting at, how we create working conditions that are sustainable in long term and give workers protections, particularly safety. I was talking to somebody today. They said, hey, if all the real money is in a lot of the beat, money's going to rural black people going to get there, how are they going to work those jobs? Right. We got to make sure whatever we do, that we're protecting the workers that are actually taking on those jobs and giving them sustainable benefits. Ryan, when you hear this conversation and as an economist, I mean, does it line up? Is it too large in terms of really meeting the supply constraint, or is it driving a new conversation on how we make these jobs much more sustainable and much more valuable to the national economy?

RYAN LUBY: Just like to offer one correction there to the question, I listened first as a human and then as an economist.

NICOL TURNER LEE: And so I apologize for that.

RYAN LUBY: So I think I think about these in terms of sort of course, that's barriers first and then opportunities in the conversation really has changed on both sets of barriers, but in a qualitative sense around the second set. So the first set of barriers is around the core. So what I think about a social infrastructure barriers and these disproportionately pre-pandemic, disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations and those gaps have only widened despite income based fiscal policy during the pandemic. And so these are ones that everyone knows physical health care, mental health care, child care, elder care. These are really core constraints that disproportionately impact the ability of vulnerable populations to be present in the workforce from sort of like a formal U3 versus U6 definition, being in being unemployed or actively looking for work, but also being present and engaged while at work, which directly affects productivity, income, wages and ability to grow within organizations. That the social infrastructure barriers have always been part of the conversation. I think what's changed of late has been conversation around solutions, around the skills based and credentials based artificial barriers in the job market. And so historically, we've

had really strong what I think about as artificial supply side constraints from the paper ceiling and what's been most exciting. Nicol, you mentioned in your introduction you're doing awesome work on this with Brookings Beth Marker Foundation, Reskilling America Alliance are just doing fantastic stuff, looking at skill based proximity transitions, thinking about sort of mobility, you know, jobs that take you from origin to really that are that take in vulnerable individuals to higher income, resilient, really meaningful pathways. And I think that's probably the most exciting dimension sort of for which the conversation has changed. I think I would just offer is that. There's a reason that we rely so heavily on credentials, and that's because it's easy. And it's like doing doing skill based mapping, skill based hiring. It's really difficult and it's not the norm. And it requires a pretty it requires both fantastic data. Nicol Which you, Merkel, Others are gathering, putting together. We do some of that at McKinsey as well, but then having a perspective and then integrating that into a very local ground game and historically sort of resistant to transformation sector. So I think that's a little bit of the lay of the land of the conversation that's changing.

NICOL TURNER LEE: And Kevin, I want to go to you because the social infrastructure part that Ernie, I want to come back to you because I think there's another track that we're missing, which I've been so excited about hearing from CWA. But you think about another part of the jobs was when you think about that social infrastructure and how it matches to this hard staple of opportunity. Kevin. I'm curious to see when it comes to skills. You've spoken a lot about the social infrastructure side of your earlier comments. How do we move people into the skill based environment? Is it apprenticeships? Is it experiential learning? Is it community college engagement? Help us think through how we make that leap, particularly in this sector.

KEVIN LY: So it's going to be all of the above because it's honestly will take a village. And the National Urban League, as you know, we are very much invested and an ecosystem building. And so our partnerships, you know, while we have 92, 93 Urban League affiliates across the country and 36 states and D.C., both nationally and locally, we build out ecosystems with HBCU's community colleges, industry associations and employers and. And, you know, with the skills development. It's not going. We have to get away from this linear, linear path from now where from high school we go directly and into college, and that's the Holy Grail, where you hear from even like four year private universities say to their college applicants that sometimes it's good to take a gap year. So sometimes it's good to also to start your career early on and be able to go back to school, you know? You know, for me, I it's almost a false choice sometimes whether, you know, to go to college or go to work and you can do one or the other. I think that what's important is that we create multiple pathways. And you know what Ryan was talking about just regarding the credentials, we have our participants. They take pride in the credentials that they earn in the trades there. They're also safety training credentials. And when I say that. I really want to illustrate this because we have we the population that we work, what they will carry their credentials with them in their jacket as they go from job to job site. Like it's different from a college diploma, right? You know, we like we would hang it up on the wall. But for the population that we work with, it's it's it's skills building. It's being able to stack those credentials and being able to take that back to their community, that to their families, to employers to show that they're ready, willing and able to work. But underlying skills attainment and skills building is also the need for supportive services. And I think it's so important to get to, you know, what Ryan was talking about like that the the need for transportation funds for child care when you're working with vulnerable, vulnerable individuals and their families, having that emergency fund that's not afforded to them. You know, if you know, that's afforded to, you know, maybe families who are more privileged when your car breaks down. So I'll leave it there.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Well, I like what you're talking about. And again, for those of you that are watching us, I've got a question coming in through Twitter, um, that I'm going to ask that another question that we're going to ask. Please send your questions to events at Brookings that edu or tweeted to hashtag good broadband jobs because I'm looking and I will ask it. I mean, I think listen in already. I want to bring you in. I think we're actually seeing I like what you're talking about, Kevin, in terms of multiple pathways. Right. This is something that we're going to be putting out in our next stage of research. You know, one pathway technically are people who don't even know

anything about this industry that need the basic digital literacy skills. But those of you who are listening, if you particularly misstate locality, digital literacy is not just showing people how to turn on a computer and get an email address, they could also be taking some of that support and enveloping it in programs that we're talking about today. Then I think that there's other space which I think all of us have talked about, which are these stacked credentials or experiences that workers may have that can easily transition them into these skills based jobs or apprenticeships, which I hope to get into. Before we go to Q&A. And then, Ernie, you said something earlier that sort of piqued my interest, which is dislocated workers. Right? And Ryan sort of put it in my head pre-pandemic. There were a lot of people also laid off. Right. How do we also think about how to bring those folks into the marketplace? Because I tell you, in our day, I want you to jump in on this. I'm worried that we're going to run out of time and money that we would be trying to still solve a lot of the fractures that we have in social infrastructure and work processes in general to get to a state where we can actually place people who right now are on the brink of poverty themselves just because they lost a job. Go to you.

ERNIE PACHECO: Yeah, no, absolutely. We need to do both. We need to bring in disenfranchised workers that have some industry, have some experience in industry, and develop new pathways for people to enter it. As for workers, they've been on the sideline a little bit of context since 2017. The top four telecoms in the US, AT&T, Verizon, Lumen and Frontier have laid off more than 52,000 front line workers, the majority of them technicians. So we have a huge pool of workers that want to come back to the industry if they can get good jobs in it, which that's the that's the problem. We did a survey of our sideline workers and the technician of our sideline technicians who have been off the payroll from 2017 to now, and three quarters of them, 74%, actually said that they would like to reenter the industry if they could get a good job. Emphasis on the good job. 16% responded that they did find other work in the industry and working full time, 30% that they were currently underemployed in the industry. And what that data tells us or told us is that we have to figure out some tactics to reengage with these sideline workers. And to do that, we're actually doing a couple of things. We created CLB. We created a referral service to put employers in touch with our poll workers that have experience in the industry. Any employers who are on this webinar feel free to reach out to me. We'd love to work with you. Also, we are creating and this will live within our apprenticeship program, a sort of a refresher course and a full recertification program to bring back workers who have been out for a year or two and make sure that they have the most up to date skills and. Fiber optic technology and and to bring them back in.

NICOL TURNER LEE: And that leads me to. And look, I'm coming for you all for your questions. I promise. I just have two more questions I want to ask, and then I'm going to go to the Q&A for our distinguished panel here. We've talked about good jobs, Ryan, what's the wage of a good job? I just caught myself, right? I mean, a good job back then. I kind of think what Kevin talked about for me was McDonald's after, you know, after high school when I was growing up, because if you didn't go to college and you stayed within our community, having a retail service job was a good job. It only paid that time six, \$7 an hour. So what is a good job? Right. From your perspective And then I want to just last Kevin, go to you. Everybody wants to contribute just on the value of apprenticeships. And then I want to go to some of these questions.

RYAN LUBY: Yeah, thanks to. So I think part of what the pandemic has, it's sometimes encouraged us to reexamine as a society is how we think about what a good job is. I think historically it's probably been super focused on some multiplication of wages and hours, which is still important. Wages and hours are still table stakes. But I think there's I think the bargaining and sort of valuation space has expanded as a result of this collective reexamination. So I think there's a whole bunch of non-wage value prop around, meaning flexibility, alignment with management and, you know, sort of like a mission driven purpose as well, which is something that I think infrastructure buildout out in the construction value chain can lean into. You think about it being part of a broader mission of fueling equitable American growth. I think that's a really sort of exciting non-wage value prop sort of lean into. I think the two other pieces, though, that I'd just be thoughtful about from it are we think about sort of a good job. One of the big ones is mobility and the ability to facilitate both economic and household mobility within income quintiles, between

income quintiles and the ability to really climb the economic ladder. The third piece related to mobility is structural resilience. So part of what's exciting about the infrastructure package is that it's long term non cyclical dollars that are flowing in. And there's a question around sort of resilience, resistance to automation and these kinds of things that we also think about as part of the pivot to skills base is important both for employees as well as what employees will bring to market when current task finishes are their skills rather than a credential.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah, and that's why I think it's a pathway, right? As opposed to how I originally thought started this conversation at Brookings that this is like a matching service of some sort. We're matching people into existing verticals. Okay, listen, I got some good questions coming through. I asked before they come in. Okay. So I want to actually be giving it to all of you. Actually, Ana, I want to pivot this one to you first. Our friend Meghan, Adele, Doug and Adele at New America Chicago Discography. To ask this question how many positions are open for union members? What is the process and why? Why do people need to join the union or do they do an apprenticeship? Sure. First, look for a job. What's this process for people? I think that's a really interesting question. Meghan, you have a lot of points there. We don't have a lot of time, so why don't we stick with that one in terms of is it a linear flow where we should be looking at the application of good jobs from training to union, or is there apprenticeship to union? Would love some clarity on that. Then I have a question for you, Kevin.

ERNIE PACHECO: Sure. So, I mean, there's different models, but generally, and to engage in our apprenticeship program, you have to be employed because our agreement is with the employer. It's a joint apprenticeship program. So as the employers ramp up their hiring, if they're working with us, that's where people will be able to get join the apprenticeship and have a job. Our apprenticeship is shaped as a three year course. If you have experience, you can come in and get credit for over a year of that, but it's usually your journeyman at the end of three years. But yeah, so actually participate in our partnership program. You have to actually have a job with the employer.

NICOL TURNER LEE: So you got to have a path with your pathways. And that's interesting, right? Because that means that we've got to figure out ways and Kevin sort of pivots to you. I think a lot of what we talked about and I think Ryan put it on that hit the nail on the head, the social infrastructure is not there and potentially sort of the expectation infrastructure in where people land, which is. Kevin, your point? So registered apprenticeships and this is coming from our friend Dan Hendrix, we know out there in Colorado is working on this. They are ready to take people. How do we change the misperception and misconception that registered apprenticeships aren't for impacted communities? How do we make sure that history is over? Same way we're talking about unions. Kevin We got to make sure people know a registered apprenticeship is not something that's going to keep you in school, quote unquote, but it's going to actually help you with that path.

KEVIN LY: So the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies recently released a report that was very sobering. It was on black apprenticeships. And here are the findings. Black apprentices are under-represented. They're only making up only 9% of all registered apprentices. Meanwhile, the the larger workforce, it's 12.3%. So that means we need more armed on ramps such as pre apprenticeships and preparatory training as well as supportive services. Black apprentices are least likely to complete programs. So there's the completion challenge that we are trying to address and that is tied in with workplace culture and workplace support and mentorship because it's not your first day on the job. It's the it's the paycheck after paycheck and month after month and the year after year. And black apprentices also have their lowest earners amongst their peer groups. And, you know, compared to other racial and ethnic groups, this just gives us. A lot of concerns, but it also gives us a call to action, because I know while yes, we are ready, but we have to get to what those gaps are and we have to be able to identify what the challenges are that that stop someone who's vulnerable, who's who's under who's who's considered special populations, from being able to just start to progress, to finish and to be successful for for the long term.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Now, that's a sobering fact. And I mean, I used to work at the joint center so, so good always that they do incredible work when it comes to our communities. But, you know, it's dance point. There are so many vacancies in registered apprenticeship programs, and yet we still have to create this match because, listen, there is a progression, right, that can get into a space of the type of social and economic mobility that Ryan spoke about. My friend here on Twitter, homies for homies empowerment. If you listen in, I got your question, he wrote in Oakland and beyond how we support undocumented workers and workers who feel overwhelmed by not feeling qualified and homies empowerment is grassroots organization. Anybody want to comment on that? Because I think that's actually going to be another area we'll have to think about how do we get some of those workers out there? It all depends again, on like I think Ryan said, how we address the immigration problems and any any questions on that?

ERNIE PACHECO: I'll say so in kind of piggybacking on Kevin's point about apprenticeship programs, not if you don't have if you don't have a job with the employer, you can enter the apprenticeship program. But there is a pathway towards that which is wraparound services, which CWA is committed to providing and working with local community institutions that are that can help walk people into the process, get them some soft skills, get them the wraparound services so that they can feel empowered and have some backup as they try to get that job and join the apprenticeship service proper.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Perfect. I have another question this is coming from and I had heard had the name John Roskam, a rep for Miller Capital Strategies Respectability Project. I think how can we better serve job seekers with disabilities? They're also impacted populations, vulnerable populations, anybody in terms of people with disabilities?

RYAN LUBY: This is where I would just be really thoughtful about a set of social infrastructure barriers that any normal excuse me, any existing vulnerable population. But then I think there are going to be an entire other set that additional incremental barriers in terms of access to broadband being one, access to participate in the workplace that just to be thoughtful about with with any population that's going to be differentially impacted. There are a set of and I use social infrastructure like intentional and kind of inclusivity to try to expand the scope of solution beyond like bridge and tunnel. But it also goes beyond like the. Beyond childcare, health care, physical health care, mental health. It also goes to Nicol, your point around the culture and expectations. I mean, there's all this wrap around culture that I think at each stage along the way, we're going to see vulnerable populations impacted. And we need to be really thoughtful as employees, as employers, as jobseekers, as implementing agencies about how those constraints bite.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Right. Anybody else? Because I have a comment that I think, you know, is it this person's question? I think part of what we try to do in our research at Brookings is to think about the plethora of jobs that are available that given the right classification under this sector, would allow us to actually bring in all types of workers. You know, you don't have to climb a ladder if you're doing customer service or cloud storage support. You don't have to necessarily have, you know, the agility and skills of a person who has other mobility facilities is what I want to say, because there are some jobs that do not require that. And we have come so far. My friends, when it comes to closing the digital divide in accessibility. So I'm really sensitive to that question because we often forget that people with disabilities need to be part of this marketplace because we have just like women. And I can say that because I'm the only woman on this panel intentionally, because I couldn't have more than four according to that picture. But part of it is we also have to make sure women are engaged. Right. And people can't do these jobs if they don't have people who look like them and have those experiences. I want to kind of say this. I know we have a lot of questions. I'm so sorry I couldn't get to all of them. Thank you, Lord, that for your note about you can't be which you can't see. Right. And that has a lot of implications based on the statement I just made. But I do want to say to all of you just one thing in the last 2 minutes. This is a time specific period. This money is not going to be here for a long time as well as these jobs. So I'd just like for you to close this really quickly before I get in trouble, cause we got 2 minutes. How are we going to change the narrative from those that are impacted? We're going to be like a Martin Luther King

thing. Why can't they wait and give them all these skills and stuff like that? Meanwhile, they wake up and those jobs would be gone. How do we shift that narrative to bring people into this workplace now? And I'm just curious, it may not happen at the speed that I'd like it to happen, but how do we actually change so we can get people into that workplace now? Now, Ernie, go to you first. We're going to Kevin and Ryan. You'll take us out. Ernie, Now, I got only about 2 minutes. I'll just tell you that to make sure.

ERNIE PACHECO: Yeah. No, I mean, so like I mentioned earlier, working directly with community institutions in the community that know their population, that already have connections there and like literally walking them into it, I think there has to be a lot of on the ground outreach and that's what we're engaged in.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Love it. And as you also opened up, your sales, people can reach out to you if they want more information. So thank you for that. And I assume they go to your website. Kevin, what about you?

KEVIN LY: I hear a lot about how someone's not good enough, how we're not good enough. I want to say that we are good enough. We are enough and we we can get there just in spite of any of the challenges.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Right? Ryan, I'm not letting you pass this one. I know we got just 30 seconds as the human economists on the webinar. Any final words and how we're going to get there to meet this supply constraint.

RYAN LUBY: Is holistic and inclusive as we're thinking about the social infrastructure barriers that constrain us as individuals, as an economy as possible, and then be thoughtful about the solutions as a result of that moving forward.

NICOL TURNER LEE: You know what? Thank you, everyone, for participating. I cannot say enough how important this work is that you all spoke to. How many more questions that we actually have to solve, but more importantly, how sensitive we have to be to the fact that we've got to match some of these existing conditions, particularly those constraints that some of you in the workforce face actually experience today, like having to some of these important opportunities that actually are on the pathway forward. If we don't do that within this time and that's why we recommend you going to see it in our upcoming blogpost, Digital literacy is not just email and turning on a computer, folks, those of you thinking about the money, it could be actually impacting some of these workforce programs to make a difference. Thank you to Beth, who started this conversation off. Thank you to Ernie. Kevin, Ryan. Thank you to all of you for joining us for this hour. Thank you to all your questions. Keep the conversation going on Twitter. I am Dr. Nicol Turner Lee at the Brookings Institution, and I'm glad we were able to have you with us today. Thank you so much.