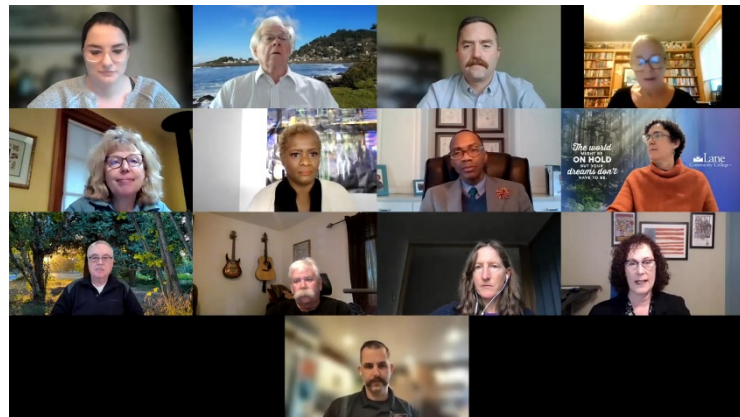


The COVID pandemic has created a massive disruption in the labor market. As workers were forced to leave their jobs, if they could not be done remotely, they have had an enforced opportunity to sit back and think about what their options were. Now that conditions are returning to a new normal, the economy sees a situation where there are jobs available but not people qualified to fill them, according to Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle, the Director of the State's Bureau of Labor and Industries. She led a panel which told a City Club audience on October 7 there are college graduates fighting for \$15 an hour jobs, while there are many openings for jobs paying six figures. One of the solutions for this mismatch between qualifications and job needs is expanded use of apprenticeships, she said.

We need to expand our thinking that apprenticeship programs are just for the building and construction trades, she said. Half of the job openings in Oregon, she said, are in categories where more training is needed, but do not require a full college education. Behavioral health, medical support, and the cannabis industry are all areas where apprenticeship can be a lead-in to a solid career.



Recently, she added, the Legislature approved the use of apprenticeship programs for professional firefighters. Already the Tualatin Valley Fire District and the Eugene/Springfield Fire Department are planning to use apprenticeship programs to alleviate staffing shortages. Mike Caven, the President of Local 851 of the International Association of Firefighters, and a Battalion Chief in the Eugene Springfield Fire Department, added that they have expanded the use of staff trained in basic life support to supplement the firefighters and paramedics whose training is in advanced life support.

Kail Zuschlag, Assistant Business Manager for Local 280 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, added that apprenticeship opportunities are not a second-rate option for those who are not comfortable in a college environment. In fact, he added, the five-year IBEW apprenticeship program includes full days of classroom instruction in addition to on the job, hands on, training.

The panel agreed that expanded use of apprenticeship programs is also a way to diversify the workforce making it possible to hire more women and people of color to industries that historically have not included them.

This point was emphasized by Battalion Chief Caven and by Lisa Ransom, the Director of the Apprenticeship and Training Division of BOLI. Her focus will be to implement the vision of Commissioner Hoyle to take BOLI beyond its historical role as a regulator and to make it more responsive to the needs of both employees and industry. One critical area Ms. Ransom is focusing on is a veteran's transition program, which now serves over 700 service members who face the challenge of reintegrating into the civilian workforce after long service in the military. The goal of the program is to reach every Oregon veteran and offer support for their return to civilian work.

One challenge that Commissioner Hoyle described is the “siloeing” of many apprenticeship and pre apprenticeship programs. BOLI, The State Employment Department and the Oregon Workforce Partnership all run apprenticeship programs, but there is little coordination between them. Schools and community colleges run pre-apprenticeship programs, but there is little coordination between these education system based programs and the apprenticeship programs they are designed to support. She Hopes that NOLI will be successful in breaking down those silos to improved coordination and make all the programs more effective. Lee Kounovsky, who teaches both in the Springfield School District and at LCC agreed. Both organizations run pre-apprenticeship programs that do not effectively connect to follow up apprenticeship programs.

During the question and answer period, Commissioner Hoyle was asked about the reasons that people are reluctant to return to work as the pandemic may be easing. She pointed to several factors, particularly the need to provide for childcare and care for the elderly, as well as underlying conditions that make people reluctant to risk returning to a workplace. She said that there seems to be no real relationship between the extraordinary pandemic unemployment support and reluctance to return to work. In those state where that emergency assistance has ended, there is little difference in how many people return to work compared to states where it continues.

When asked about programs to support the unhoused, Commissioner Hoyle said that apprenticeship programs are a challenge because it is hard for the houseless person. She pointed to the efforts of the Lane County Board of Commissioners to focus on a housing first model for addressing the crisis of homelessness. The solution, she said, is to get people housed so that they can have enough stability to be able to show up to work on time.