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OPERATOR: I would like to turn you over to your host, LEVIN-EPSTEIN, deputy director of CLASP and manager of Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity: The Source for News, Ideas and Action.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Welcome, everybody. Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity is delighted to host this national audio conference, Business Leaders Tackle Poverty in Their State: Lessons from Oregon. We're also delighted about how many of you have tuned in. We have over 420 registrants today from all different parts of the country with a wide array of perspectives on poverty.

Traditionally, businesses play a critical role in creating opportunity through good jobs and economic development. Oregon's business community has that traditional role. In addition, the Oregon Business Council has decided to prioritize advocating for policies that tackle poverty in additional ways.

During the state's 2015 legislative session, which we're in right now, OBC, that's the Oregon Business Council's, policy agenda which is based on recommendations from its Poverty Task Force includes expanding the earned income tax credit; expanding and consolidating of federal and state child care credit; further integration of mental and addiction health services into coordinated care organizations; expanding the state's individual development account program; and redesigning TANF to address the "cliff effect" when participants' earnings make them ineligible for other needed services.

My guests today are Duncan Wyse, president of the Oregon Business Council; Dick Withnell, a member of the OBC Poverty Reduction Committee; Beverly Stein, director of Research and Development of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University; and Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. Welcome, everyone.

FEMALE: Thank you.

MALE: Thank you.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I want to begin with a little bit of housekeeping for the audience. You can send your questions in for these panelists at any point in time. It's really simple. Just e-mail your question to audioconference@clasp – that's C-L-A-S-P – dot org.

We're not going to wait until the very end to ask your questions. We're going to ask them as we go along, so send them in. I have to say that, in some of the audio conferences I've moderated earlier, when I open up this address, there are already questions waiting for me before the audio conference starts.

So, everybody, get your fingers tapping. I'm sure you've got something in mind, a question you had as you registered. So don't wait, put your questions up and we'll get through them.

I want to start with some background on the Oregon Business Council and the Poverty Task Force. Duncan, can you just give us a sense of the Oregon Business Council, can – how many members you have, can any business join?

DUNCAN WYSE: Sure. Thanks, Jodie. The business council is a group of about 45 CEOs from companies around the state, typically larger companies. It's a membership organization by invitation only. We look for folks who want to contribute to the quality of life across a variety (ph) of our state and really – well, obviously (ph), to work on some of the big gnarly challenges facing our community.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Now, I know though too you, like, recently had a council annual meeting and you have lots and lots of people, right?

WYSE: Sure.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: You have annual meeting that brings in others?

WYSE: Yes. Well, along with our core membership, we run a – the Oregon Business Plan, which is a state economic strategy and we typically bring over a thousand people together to work on that business plan and it includes partners from our other business associations and just business leaders from all over the state, as well as many other community partners like Patti (ph). So it's a broad-based effort that we staff as one of our major projects.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. So, poverty – what prompted the council to even pay attention to poverty reduction?

WYSE: Well, if you look at our Oregon Business plan, the state economic strategy, which is widely embraced by Oregon leaders, it has three goals. One is to create jobs. The other is to raise income and the third to reduce poverty.

And as we looked at the data, we aren't doing as well as we need to be on meeting our poverty reduction goals. When Governor Kitzhaber took off, as (ph) he made that a major focus of his attention and he asked us could we examine the root causes and work with him to really try to tackle this issue. We brought it up at one of our annual retreats and there was just a great deal interest in diving more deeply into this topic.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And when you brought it up at the retreat, is there anything that stuck out for you at the retreat that sort of consolidated the interest or really underscored why your members were interested in having this be a priority on that council goal?

WYSE: Well, it was – it was interesting because we had – immediately a lot of people volunteered. It was not a hard – it was one of the members said, "We really need to look at this." And I think

the reason just fundamentally is we know, you know, a strong healthy economy that lifts everyone into, you know, good jobs is going to be important for the – for the whole community, both for, you know, the quality of our families and the community cohesion.

But also, when everyone is doing well, we have the revenues for schools and parts and all the other services we need. So it was not a hard – it's – a hard sell. I mean, frankly, we had lots of people very eager to work on this issue.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Dick, you own a motor company and you serve on the OBC Poverty Reduction Committee. Why did you want to serve? And, you know, by the way, Dick, it's totally OK to say someone twisted your arm because I know it's your birthday, so you can get away with a lot today.

DICK WITHNELL: Yes. You don't know Duncan Wyse very well. (INAUDIBLE). Actually, it was the leadership of Duncan and what he just(ph) – that's really attracted the – here in my local area, I'm about 45 miles south of Portland and Salem, Oregon. And our community – I sold my business to my son and so I'm in semi-retirement and we had a real methamphetamine problem here in Marion County.

And by peeling the onion on getting that handled then came the unintended consequence of these kids and then we had the foster care issues. And then, the root cause was this poverty thing that was going on; the lack of jobs and people not have been able to work.

And so, that – that's really what, like, got me involved and getting other people of like-mindedness to come alongside of Duncan's leadership and then, also, with the Governor. And then, also at the time, Cylvia Hayes was also – was a girl thrust into addressing the poverty and bringing it to the forefront of people to address.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So are you also involved at the same time as you were doing the council task force work – project work in Salem itself on tackling poverty?

WITHNELL: Yes. You know, it's a – it's a – it's a basket. Poverty is a basket. I mean, I'm involved with re-entry – I'm on the state commissions for re-entry. So you have – you have the people coming out of prison, you've got the foster care, you've got the Department of Human Services, you've got the single parents. You have all – you have all of these – all of these different entities in this poverty issue.

And so, you – I look at it as kind of a figure eight. The part of – top part of the figure eight is the poverty issue and then the bottom part is the people coming out of poverty, but with a – the challenge, and Duncan is – and we're addressing this with his leadership – is the connection, the transformation, the – in between these two circles. And that's where Bev and Patti are really encouraging the whole community.

It's significant to get the whole community to be engaged in this and make it a concern for the whole community, whether it's the business community, whether it's the education part of the

community, the retirement part, the face community. Everyone, you know, addressing that this needs to be addressed.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: But, Dick, you were talking about the whole community. Let me ask you more specifically whether or not it's your view that this type of issue or this issue of poverty itself and poverty reduction should, in fact, be one which bridges between Democrats and Republicans and that they need to work together. How do you respond to that?

WITHNELL: I smile when you say that because I think I voted for Barry Goldwater for that point (ph). And my best dialogue (ph) is in the best people who I've worked with or maybe on the other side of the isle.

I don't look at that at all. I look at high tide raises all boats. And, believe me – I mean, and that – you just have that visual effect. You have the little rowboat and you have the big fancy yacht and they're all being raised by high tide. If we can dilute poverty, then, we – we're raising the community's economic wellbeing to a higher point.

There's a great synopsis about what really I'm talking about by Jim Clifton. He's the CEO of Gallup. And he wrote a book – it sounds controversial, but it's really not – *The Coming Jobs War*. And there's one chapter in there, chapter six, when he talks about local tribal leaders. And these are people who aren't elected officials, who aren't – they're just people who have lived in the community who really have a desire for the community to be better.

And they're the ones who have the rolodex. They are the ones who can get the Kroc Center to come to town. They are the ones that can get the YMCA built. They are the ones that know – they're not necessarily people of wealth, but they are some of those too.

But if you can get – if you can stir up those leaders, and he calls them tribal leaders; if you get those stirred up and say, "Hey, this is an issue that would better our community," then, that's significant. And that's what we've tried to – tried to do locally and then, of course, Duncan and the leadership of Beverly and Patti are doing this state-wide.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Well, this is great. And I suspect there are many in the audience who are running a mile a minute with ideas about how can we do something similar in our state or locality. And so, I'd like to turn to process questions.

OBC got its arms around poverty first through some analysis, came up with a business plan and is now moving forward on its 2015 agenda and we're going to dig into that agenda later. But you're – and you're also working on ideas for the future all at the same time. So take us back a little bit, Duncan, and help us understand this process so folks can think about whether this kind of model works for them.

In 2013, OBC created a poverty task force. What are some tips of them getting this off the ground that you think other business leaders should note? First of all, were businesses – were business people surprised that you proposed what you proposed outside of the council?

WYSE: Not really. I don't believe so. I mean, again, people – the big surprise I think came from other communities who were surprised that business was interested. I'm – the business community – if you listen to Dick, you'd get the idea. There are a lot of business people who are very interested and they see (ph) the extraordinary leader as you can tell.

But, no. Again, as I mentioned, the – it came out of our own retreat and people wanted to do the work. And so, in terms of putting it together and what makes this tick, the first thing is you need to find a group of people like Dick was now. Imagine Dick with about eight of his peers in a room and you can imagine what that room is like.

You need a really good share and we found one, Dave Underminer, from Providence Health and then – who can, you know, keep the meetings flowing and keep the conversation going and keep us focused. And then, you need to find a really great staff and we had that with Beverly and the folks at ECONorthwest to really provide high-quality information, ideas, analysis to support the work.

And then, in terms of how we do this is we start with a white paper and a strategy and then we go to work on specific initiatives and then we come back and review the strategy and we just keep cycling. And I find that to be a good process. It's very important to get your facts straight at the beginning and to make sure you got a good piece of analysis and go from there.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And the first big piece of analysis was a report called Path to Prosperity.

WYSE: That's right.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Because it provided state-specific data. Can you fill us in on some aspects of that report and its goal-setting and how that helps move the conversation?

WYSE: Sure. The – I mean, again, the Path to Prosperity report connection within larger Oregon business plan, which I mentioned earlier – the state economic strategy. And again, the three goals that were enunciated were to create 2,500 jobs per year through 2020; raise our personal income levels back to above – to above national average and then reduce poverty from about 16 – 7 percent to 10 percent by 2020. So those are the three goals. And that report specifically focus on that third goal – what is it going take to reduce poverty in a reasonable amount of time.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And you mentioned in – just a moment ago – that you utilize the services of a nonprofit research think tank in the state.

WYSE: Well, it wasn't a – it wasn't a – it's not a nonprofit. It was a...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I'm sorry. I apologize.

WYSE: Yes. But we hire the best consultants we can find as I mentioned and they're really, really good and they did a wonderful job and they have been(ph) continue to work with us along with Beverly.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So that's another useful process point for other groups thinking of doing the same thing is to ...

WYSE: Sure.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: ...have some sort of entity that can crunch the numbers and make it state-specific or local-specific.

WYSE: And provide really good analysis.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Yes. And, you know, as a member of the task force and in your work on the OBC effort, what, so far, has most excited you about what you've been able to accomplish to date?

WYSE: Is this to Dick or to me?

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Dick. I'm sorry. Dick.

WITHNELL: OK. Yes. Well, just – the exciting part about it is the awareness of it. I mean, with what it – what it has stimulated the conversation throughout the – throughout the state and just by having that leadership of the group in Portland and with WYSE and the other leadership of the other members addressing it that it's created a kind of like an IPO that people want to really get in line and to engage with.

There's been a lot of extra things that's happened from – in my area here, we – by looking at poverty, we have reduced reciticism (ph). An average in our state is around 30 percent. We've reduced it in our country here to 14.5 percent. I mean, that's huge and it's by getting mentors, getting the community to address these obstacles of people being successful which, in turn, dilutes the poverty effects.

So, I mean, it's just – it's just the public awareness has been significant because Duncan said it – it's people that really – you know, when you have your nose down and you're meeting payrolls, the business community is very busy on, you know, being – just trying to be successful. But when they see that there is a – there is a betterment for the whole community going back to that cliché almost that high tide raises all boats, then they become engaged.

And I think that's been very significant is the – is the education piece throughout the state and that – and that – that's where Bev and Patti really – have really helped to make the awareness because they're traveling throughout the whole state all the time.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And I want to you ask you a follow-up question. I think what you're saying is that the work of the council in this area have helped foster a conversation amongst the public. Do you think that the cache of it coming from business is really vital to boosting that conversation; sparking it; you know, like, if the business community is worried about our economy, it brings it to another for those in the community who are hearing this and reporters and everybody else?

WITHNELL: That's an absolute bull's eye. It really is. And it – and it's people who have earned the right to be able to speak. I mean, they're – the – they're – the people that Duncan represents are successful people who have given back to whether – whatever area they're working at in the – in the state of Oregon.

And so, they have earned the right – they have the authenticity to say, “Hey, we need to address this.” And that's where you drop the Ds and the Rs and the X, Y, Zs. This is where – this is where the sense of camaraderie ship, if you want to call it that – all the corny stuff, you know; all the coming (ph) stuff that works; you know, the – getting the community to get behind something.

And, I mean – I mean, I can go on. You know, the dying (ph) itself. I mean, honestly, if that is what – I mean, you can start the national anthem if you want to (ph). I'm telling you that's what this is all about and this is what the awareness has done.

And when you have the vanguard of the – of the – of the leadership of the – of the business community and Oregon saying, “Hey, this is important. We are going to address it.”

Then, how do you go about it? Instead of just yacking about it, then you dig deep and that's where – that's where getting the economic data and get the things that you can – and that's why this lab experiment that Bev does is so important because there are some things that don't work; there are some things that do work. And all sizes doesn't fit all. I mean, Portland is certainly not Salem and Salem is not Terry Orient (ph). I mean, so you have all of that.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So I want to remind the audience to e-mail in your questions to audioconference@clasp – that's C-L-A-S-P – dot org. And I want to thank the folks who are already e-mailing and tell the rest of you to catch up.

So, Duncan, you mentioned the specific goals that have been set which is to reduce Oregon poverty down to at least 10 percent by 2020 and I'll repeat as well that in 2013 you were at 15.7 percent, so that's a significant amount to accomplish in the next five years. Can you fill us in just broadly on the strategies that are setting the stage for the 2015 agenda? Not the details; we'll be getting into that later.

WYSE: Sure. Yes. Well, the original report is the guide that we have been following and it had four broad strategies. The first one is to recognize the diversity of poverty that it's not one thing that the issues of rural poverty, for example, are very different from some of the inter-generational challenges we face in urban areas and that we have to look at poverty demographically and with real care and customize solutions to different – to different challenges.

The second we came very clear was the connection of education and workforce initiatives to the poverty reduction agenda. As we've gone around our state, we've come to realize that there are jobs that are going unfilled that could be filled if we had better education and trainings systems that really responded to the economic opportunities that are out there.

The third is growing jobs in the economy, of course, which we believe very strongly in. And, in particular, in the rural communities, the natural resource industries in Oregon are being under-

utilized today and we could create a lot of jobs that are good jobs by rebuilding those industries. And also, manufacturing, again, offer real opportunities for good-quality jobs. And so, we have proposals in that area.

Finally, we spend a lot of time in our report and since this on this issue of – that what we call the benefit cliff where, as folks are moving out of poverty, their benefits evaporate and we actually – people have a very hard time making gains as they gain an income. And so, a lot of the work we're doing on TANFs and earned income tax credit is trying to create a system where people are rewarded by doing hard work and moving forward. And so, we had a series of recommendations and proposals in that area.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And I want to let – go ahead.

WYSE: Go ahead. No, that's it. Go ahead.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I just want to let everybody know in the audience that you will be receiving the link to the OBC site which provides all of this rich material to you. So if you're furiously taking notes, you need not. But feel free to if you want to. But you will be getting the link of materials directly to you. Duncan, did you want to add anything?

WYSE: Well, the only thing I would say is how this plays is on three levels. One is in the community and I think Beverly will talk with you just in a minute. But a number of our members are actively involved in their communities like Dick in doing – making changes that are making a difference consistent with the strategy at the community level.

We then have a state policy agenda in the near term and then we have a long-term work to continue to analyze this and come up with additional ideas as we move forward, so we're operating the strategy on three levels.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Well, thank you. That turns us to Bev. Because you're working on collecting ideas for the business council on possible future policy and practice, so, you know, all of these things are moving at the same time. So can you fill us in briefly ...

STEIN: Sure.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: ...about those efforts, Bev?

BEVERLY STEIN: Sure. The Poverty Task Force at OBC decided to pursue a short-term and long-term agenda. So the short term, which we'll be talking about a little later is really the agenda items for the 2015 legislative session that we're in the middle of right now here in Oregon. And the long term was to be generated through a process that we call a design lab which, Jodie, we were glad to have you be a participant in that, where we...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And I thank you for the invite.

STEIN: Where we use techniques that are used in both business and government to generate innovative ideas that need to be tried that are not the usual kind of approaches. But to prepare for that, we went out to the citizens because citizen engagement is really important here that people really recognize what the issues are around poverty.

So with the support of the first lady and the governor's office, Oregon Business Council went to eight communities around the state and we had presentations that presented both the brainstorm ideas for the 2015 legislative session to ask people what they thought were the most important ideas.

So we had lots of ideas and that's what resulted in our list of eight is from that. That input helps define that and also to inform people about the idea of the design lab which is – separates stakeholder input from design – the design process.

And in the design lab we just wanted to focus on five segments of people in poverty. We didn't want people to focus on looking at programs. We wanted to look at what is the impact on specific groups of people in poverty and we selected five groups that make up about 60 percent of the people in poverty in Oregon. So I don't know if you want any more on that right, but I know we have lots to cover. But, of course, I could talk about this forever.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And it was very exciting to be there and I'm sure we'll be able to try and weave some – answer the questions from the audience as well. And we'll get to you, Bev, and hopefully, there'll be a chance to catch up on other elements to.

But I wanted to ask Duncan a really elephant-in-the-room kind of question. We've been talking about your process and I think a lot of folks in the audience really want to get a grip on how this can work process-wise in terms of lifting up poverty issues through a business council at the state level.

But process can get political and, in this case, you have a new Governor, Kate Brown, who took over after Governor Kitzhaber who was a key supporter of the OBC prosperity initiative and who recently resigned. Often, initiatives tagged to one political figure, they just don't stay sticky on the agenda of a successor in the process. Are you worried about this?

WYSE: Honestly, not really. Again, as I mentioned, this is part of the Oregon business plan. We met with the governor on her first day in office, the business plan chairs, and she has been to every leadership summit we have over the last 12 years and she's fully onboard with the business plan and, of course, this is part of the plan.

What I really think is exciting about Oregon is we've created a structure where we can work together on issues across party lines as Dick mentioned and between business community leaders and elected leaders and we're going to continue to work on this. And I'm confident that, you know, the governor will be supportive.

She will obviously put her own imprint on all these issues, but reducing poverty is something we all need to work on and I'm sure she will engage in different ways, but I have no doubt that she will stay very engaged on this issue because it's important for Oregon.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I've got a bunch of questions here. I'm going to start reading a few different ones. Have you – and, Duncan, can you take this one? I believe you've touched on this but this person, Bonnie Gordon, who's in Durham, North Carolina with MDC would like you to speak to what you believe the business case is for reducing poverty versus the right thing to do. I think – or the moral case. And I think you've been touching on that, but I think she wants a sort of concentrated elevator statement so that she can really hear it loud and clear.

WYSE: OK. Well, what is – what can the state do to improve the business climate to make it a better place for business? We need to have really strong education systems. We need to have a great quality of life. We need to have good infrastructure and good regulatory systems. We have to be innovative.

And in all those areas, reducing poverty supports all of those in – by reducing the cost of poverty, by creating folks who have more resources to spend in the community. So from the economy's point of view, just growing businesses, reducing poverty allows us to spend more on the vital services we need by employing more people and creating more resources for the community as a whole.

So it's a win for the economy. But, again, I would come back. We're concerned about the total health of the community and not just for the economy and it's important for both reasons.

And another one for you, Duncan. This comes from Gary Garland who's with Lakeview Pantry in Chicago, Illinois and he asks, how successful have you been and how do you measure such success in having your plan and goals accepted by the general community, not just the business world?

WYSE: Well, the business plan itself that we talked about and the goals in it have been widely endorsed in our state – the governor and legislative leaders and others. I mean, I think there's wide acceptance of the goals. And I think, again, we work together on the strategies across a lot of lines in our community. So I think, you know, at the leadership level, it's been widely embraced.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. OK. So, Duncan, we're going to now turn to the 2015 OBC policy recommendations and actions for the legislative agenda.

WYSE: Yes.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And all of our listeners should have that agenda as part of the resources they were sent and we will be resending it after this call as well. But briefly, and I'll repeat a little bit of what we said earlier, the list includes tax credit proposals; a redesign of the welfare programs to address the cliff effect which you mentioned earlier; integration of mental and addiction health services into coordinated care organizations and more. When you're pitching these proposals, how do you explain why these became the priorities for the business council?

WYSE: Well, Beverly can speak more to this, but as she mentioned, we first created a list through the task force and then we went out and reviewed that list with community meetings around the state and came back to generate the final proposals, then took them to the business plan's steering committee and adopted them.

So these have been well vetted as items that we think we can make a difference on that – and get done right away and we'll make a difference on these goals. So I think they were – they have been carefully crafted. And again, our message is if we do these things, we're – this will – these will be important steps to advance the goal of reducing poverty in Oregon.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And when you say you took them out to the community, this is the community at large, not just ...

WYSE: At large.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: ...the broader community of businesses? It's the at-large community.

WYSE: Yes. We had eight meetings that Beverly organized in the fall this year after the task force had come up with an initial list. But then, we asked folks to add to the list and we refined the list of proposals and we also asked each community – at each community meeting we had folks prioritize and vote on what they thought the top priorities should be.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So, Bev, turning to you, for each of the policy proposals or strategy or a process that you were deploying, is that a business council policy task force member is working with an advocate partner to move the policy forward. Can you fill us in on why this bridge has been built and your early sense of how well it is or isn't working?

STEIN: Yes. What we found as we started to get into this, even though the – I think members of the business council individually have been involved with the issues for many years, the whole Oregon Business Council getting involved as an advocate on poverty issue did raise some suspicion within the general sort of advocate community.

And I think these – I think probably a legitimate concern that they have been working on these issues for many, many, many, many years and it appeared that the business council was sort of a new player on the block which isn't entirely true, but I think that was the perception.

And so, what we came up with was to recognize too that the members of the Oregon Business Council Poverty Task Force are not experts in these areas. They run businesses and this is not their area of expertise.

So we thought it'd be valuable to pair up a business council poverty task force member with an advocate on each of our eight items so that they could work together, make sure that the business council person was well-briefed on what these issues really mean and the implications and also a way to organize ourselves so that we can make sure that we were – and it's the right committee at the right time with (ph) testimony as appropriate.

And so, we've worked with Patti and she'll talk a bit about that on a number of the issues. Children First for Oregon, we've – we're working with them on a number of issues and with the neighborhood partnership organization on a couple of issues.

So we are – this is the first time we've done this. I think it's working really well. It's a good way to keep ourselves organized and focused and we've submitted a testimony I think in – for three of these issues already. And...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So when you submit the testimony for any of these – one of the eight – is the testimony submitted jointly by the business group and its partner?

STEIN: No.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Or are they...

STEIN: It is – it...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I'm sorry?

STEIN: No. The business council presents their testimony, you know, signed by Duncan and other members of the task force that people may know. And, no. This is an informal arrangement – this is an informal – this is an informal arrangement to keep communications going and to make sure that we all know when it's appropriate to step in. And so, we look to the advocates to signal us when it's time to step in.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So, Patti, you're one of those advocates. Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon is – you know, the term you guys used is “advocate partner” and you're taking a lead on partnering on two policy proposals – two of the eight. Can you give us some more detail from your perspective about the TANF wealth (ph) of your proposal and then your thoughts about how partnering with OBC and moving it has or has not made a difference?

WHITNEY-WISE: I'm happy to do so and I just want to process it by just a bit more history about how this came about because I think, for people on the phone, this might be helpful. So Dick did mention Cylvia Hayes who was the first lady with Governor John Kitzhaber and a business woman herself.

And she pulled together – worked with us and pulled together a prosperity initiative that included business leaders, state agencies and advocates from the community. And they worked for three years together. And during that time, we helped develop a white paper of our own that was used as a framework to help inform the groundbreaking OBC leadership summit paper that came out.

So there was a lot of behind-the-scenes work that I think is important to recognize and we built those trusting relationships early on, so Dick Withnell has been at the table since the beginning as have I and others. And I think that made a really huge difference.

Duncan did mention the cliff effect which part of the work has been to work with ECONorthwest on what happens with the various benefit programs for people as they move the wage ladder. There are a number of cliff benefits and one of the biggest ones is in the TANF program.

There's a couple of things about TANF for our listeners who may not know the program very well. It's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. And it was block (ph) rented back in the early '90s so that the amount of money the government gives to states has remained the same. And, in many states, the amount – the eligibility and the grant levels have remained the same. So they have eroded over the last 20 years.

What happens today here in Oregon is that a family has to be almost homeless before they get assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program and the benefit is pretty low. So we have a lot of work to do. But one of the things we did recognize is that here, in Oregon, if a family – if a family member works 16 hours a week at minimum wage, they're cut off of TANF because now they're making too much money. Yet it's not enough money to live on.

And this is one area where we've been able to come together with the business community and promote some reinvestments in the TANF program during this legislative session. It's a \$30 million package.

It includes money to help provide more intent services for families who are coming close to their 60-month lifetime limit so that they can move into the workforce successfully and it includes that slope at the backend. So instead of being cut off at 16 hours a week working, your benefit will continue to slope down as you make more money until your much higher income and then it goes away all together.

So we recognize this as the first step forward in helping families be successful and that there are other steps we'll need to take in the future. I'm very excited about having the business community at the table with us. Not only have we partnered, but now we're at a point where we've begun to make plans to go in to meet with legislative leadership together, the business community and the TANF alliance, which is a group of advocates that we hope to convene. And we're also going to be testifying together on this \$30 million reinvestment package next week.

We're at a place in our economy where things are improving but there are still a lot of services that need to be restored. So the business community's partnership will, I think, help legislative leaders take more notice. It's us together. Us, the state, and the business community all together supporting the same policies and I think that's really a great thing to have in Oregon.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Patti, I think you've answered a question here that comes from Arizona about TANF, but I want to give you a chance to expand on the point you're just making right now, from Angie Rogers, who's president and CEO of Association of Arizona Food Banks.

She writes, "I am thrilled to hear about the business community's interest in TANF and the safety net. In Arizona, our state legislature has chosen to limit TANF benefits to 12 months starting in 2016. Can you talk a little bit about why the business approach has been to help soften the cliff rather than just penalize folks by cutting off benefits?" You were speaking to how engagement of

the business community just made people listen more. Are there other tips that you want to give Angie?

WHITNEY-WISE: Well, I think really our business community is on the right track. The – you've heard it several times today. When we lift people at the low end of the income spectrum, we lift all boats.

If we give people the opportunity to be more stable and better off and have more income over the – their pathway out of poverty, that helps local businesses as well. They have more money to spend back in the local community on basic needs. They're more stable, there's less stress, kids are doing better in school.

For all of those reasons, you know, the business community wants us to be successful with our education funding and work too and we all recognize that. If families are in stress and unstable, it's harder for those kids to make progress in school.

So I think what's really amazing about this dialogue over the last four years and where we're going with this is a true partnership on these issues where we recognize that helping people at the bottom end of the spectrum helps everybody in the state and it's most people who are on TANF want to work.

Our state recognizes that and we hear that over and over again from families who are in poverty. They want to work in good jobs. They want to be able to provide for their families and we, as a state, want to help them be successful in moving along that pathway.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So, Patti, you're also taking the lead has the advocate partner on a state-wide expansion of EITC. Can you give us a little bit of detail on the proposal and also here reflect on the significance of the partnership with OBC?

WHITNEY-WISE: Yes. This is a really interesting one. The earned income tax credit federally is refundable and a number of years ago we had instituted a state-refundable tax credit as well recognizing that many people in low-wage jobs have a hard time meeting their basic needs.

And it's – Oregon is one of a few states where we tax people's wages that are below poverty. And the earned income tax credit here in Oregon helps lift some of those families above the poverty level before they have to pay state taxes.

We've long advocated for moving that benefit up here in Oregon and we were able to boost it a couple of percentage points back in 2013. So we didn't have it on our legislative agenda originally. But when it came out on the business community's agenda, we quickly added it back in.

It's something we've always advocated for and I thought I just chuckled that the business community had us going on that one which I thought was really great. There's a really interesting proposal this session that besides the TANF work group and the work around reinvesting there, there's been some really great work done around both child care and earned income tax credits and this is where the partnership has been really helpful.

My partner is John Tapogna at ECONorthwest. And I was able to get him involved in the tax credit workgroup with legislators and advocates and he was really helpful to them. And the proposal that is emerging isn't targeted earned income tax credit increase for families with young children because it's shown that those early years of a – of a child are the most expensive for families, think child care and other expenses that come along.

And so, we're excited to see this proposal coming out next week. There'll be a hearing on the 13th. And again, at that table as well as at the TANF of table, there will be business leaders testifying alongside advocates.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Patti, turning to the minimum wage, in February, the Portland Oregon City Council voted unanimously to increase the minimum wage for city workers and contractors to \$15 an hour and you got a lot of national press. Currently, the highest minimum wage anywhere in the country. You're an advocate, yet the OBC agenda is silent on the minimum wage. As an advocate, how do you approach this difference?

WHITNEY-WISE: There's a couple of answers to that. One is that our organization, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon was founded to help support the work of the Oregon Hunger Task Force. This was a legislatively created bipartisan body and continues to weigh these complex issues from all sides of the debate.

And when we entered into the partnership with the business community, we entered with that spirit in mind. We've worked in many similar partnerships over the years on issues of common importance recognizing that we may not always be in agreement on every front.

In the minimum wage discussion, we've really recognized there are many dimensions. We've been exploring the pros and cons of various proposals here in Oregon to raise the minimum wage. We do advocate for gradual increase to mitigate potential challenges not only to some businesses but some nonprofits.

And while our nonprofit is pledged to meet the \$15 as a base for new staff at the entry level, we also know that many service providers who rely on state and government contracts are bound by contractual agreements that could make it difficult to fulfill without contracts allowing for the higher wages.

So that being said, it is a complex issue, but we will be testifying in support of the minimum wage next Monday and we will point out at least one area that has had little discussion. The fact that, as minimum wage increases, less families will need to tap into government support for services and they will also be paying more taxes. Two, these families will be spending more at local businesses that they have more income which will boost local economies. And I think those are outcomes that many can get behind.

And we will continue to partner wherever we can with the business community to help create a thriving Oregon. We'll recognize, as with many other issues, we're not always going to agree on every issue, but where we agree, we are developing those strong partnerships.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So, Duncan, let's slip it and bring it to your perspective as a business leader. How do you approach the policy differences your organization might have with any partner advocate, Patti or otherwise?

WYSE: I think Patti covered it really well. I mean, we're – we – I look for areas where we agree on. Patti's comments and Beverly's I think do – I want to reinforce the points they made. We are relatively new to this issue and having partners like Patti and others to help us understand some of the key issues is just very, very important. And we really appreciate all the work she's done and others in bringing the community together over the years.

But again, to the question on policy differences, yes, we aren't going to agree on everything. But what we need to do is stick to the goal of reducing poverty and identify the areas where we think we can agree on and work together on. And again, I think there's a lot of commonality.

I mean, I think we all agree that we need to revamp education and training systems to give people the skills to earn higher wages. I think we all agree that we need to create more high-quality jobs and manufacturing it and in the natural resource (ph) industries. I mean, they're – and certainly, we all agree we need to deal with the benefit cliffs questions. So I think there's a lot to work on together and we may not agree on everything and that's the nature of politics and that's...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. And Bev, you're concentrating on a proposal that's described as a community leverage fund. Can you fill us in on what that would do and how it's being received?

STEIN: Yes. And let me start back a little bit about where our support for this came from – couple sort of threads. One is that one thing that hasn't been mentioned that has been really helpful is the Northwest Area Foundation provided a grant to the Oregon Business Council to allow us to work in communities. And they contract with my program at Portland State to do this to bring together cross-sector collaborations in communities around very specific issues.

One, for instance, in Malheur County which is one of the poorest counties in Oregon, we did a project to bring together business advocates; community leaders together around a career technical education program which is just thriving now.

So we are doing that kind of work in local communities with that grant. At the same time, when we did the design lab, one of the things that really emerged from the 40 or so smart thinkers we had who were working on that was that you have to address poverty on the individual level.

And a lot of the initiatives we've been talking about have to do with individual support, EITC, TANF, et cetera, but it's also really important to focus on communities of concentrated poverty. That in these communities where there's concentrated poverty, even if you're not poor yourself, you're going to have poor outcomes and others and other communities.

So we kind of launched – latched on to this idea of the community leverage fund which was being proposed by the governor as a way of addressing this issue of communities of concentrated poverty

and to take advantage of what we're learning about how to do cross-sector collaborations and communities to address poverty.

The community leverage fund is a proposal for \$20 million to provide to individual communities to stimulate their work on the community level in these communities of concentrated poverty. This proposal did have a hearing last week and one of the members of the poverty task force from OBC did testify there. We don't know how far this is going to get. We're at that point now in the legislative session where things will start to sort out, but we don't know where we are yet.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. And let me understand, is this mostly that people will submit ideas to the community leverage fund? It will be the winning ideas?

STEIN: No. This would actually be – it might (ph) be distributed on a regional basis so that communities would come together within a region and decide what would be the best thing that they could do to address the issues of community development and poverty and also to leverage the community efforts that are – that we've started in Oregon that are very community-based.

We have early learning hubs, we have regional achievement collaboratives for education, we have workforce investment boards, we have the coordinated care organizations for health care. So part of the idea here is how can you work with all these different entities to leverage their work on a community agenda and to have some money to invest in trying to improve the results that would come from these community collaboratives.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And is the notion as well to attach some kind of evaluation to see the efficacy of spent monies through the community leverage fund?

STEIN: Yes. One of the other aspects would be there would be a small staff that would be supporting this effort to provide the technical assistance to support communities in doing this because in very – especially in poor communities, there's not a lot of capacity – infrastructure capacity – and that would also include evaluation to figure out what works and to be able to learn from each other to improve the work that's already being done and to take those learnings and expand the work that's being done.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So, Duncan, clearly, a really full play for your 2015 policy agenda and the legislatures front and center, but they're going to go out of session in July. What's the focus then?

WYSE: Well, we will take stock after the legislature adjourns. But I think I can predict a couple of things. One is what Beverly talked about, the community based work that she's been leading again with very generous support from the Northwest Area Foundation.

I think it's very, very promising. And whatever happens on that Sunday (ph) I suspect we're going to continue to do that work because people like Dick Withnell and others are out in the communities where the action is. And I think we need to keep building partnerships at the community level to make a difference for the folks in those communities, so I suspect that will continue in some form or another.

And then, as we've talked, Beverly led the design lab last year which was our longer-term effort to think about what's next, what are some of the fundamental issues we need to work on to address poverty and I may want Bev to speak to it. She put together a really good summary, but we have a number of big ideas that I suspect we will, you know, go back to and look at, including ideas.

We want to look at the poverty measure itself and try to come up with a better definition. I don't know Bev, if you want to walk through this or I can. But she – they're big ideas that I think we'll be examining and thinking about how we could make more operational and – as we move forward.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Well, you've teased us and I think I want Bev to tease us a little bit further if, you don't mind, Bev, by just ...

STEIN: Sure.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: ...sort of maybe enumerating and very briefly not all of them but a couple of the ideas so folks have a sense as to the outcome of what the design lab was and the plan.

STEIN: Right. And so, one of the four big ideas had to do with these areas of community of concentrated poverty and I've mentioned that this is a cross-over. So from the design lab, this has worked its way in to the 2015 legislative agenda. But the – another one that's on our legislative agenda is the definition of poverty as Duncan indicated.

And one other I would mention – one of our big ideas is quite exciting is the idea of how the sharing economy could support low income people to overcome isolation and increase – these people to take advantage of resources that they can share or share with people who have more resources.

And we have a student – a student group at the Pacific Northwest College of Art actually and Collaborative Design that is doing some interviews with members of the Black Parent Initiative to find out what would these parents take advantage of in terms of using their smartphones which is what – most phones – people do have smartphones – to take advantage of the sharing economy which is a whole area that some of you may be familiar with and others are not. But you can look at the OBC web site to get more information or contact me.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Awesome. So we have a question here and, Duncan, I think it might be for you. It's from Victor Jaminiani (ph) and he actually asked a question that I think is about business associations. He asked whether any national trade association is working with you.

WYSE: No. It's that simple (ph).

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK.

WYSE: No. We – the support we've got – we've had great support from the Northwest Area Foundation and the KC Foundation. And – but as far as national business groups, we haven't – we have not worked with any.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. And this is also a question for you, Duncan. A writer states, obviously lots of great success take us behind the scenes and share from your experience potential pitfalls, those of us who want to go down a similar path should watch out for. Duncan, I'm going to ask you to answer that and then Bev as well.

WYSE: Well, I guess the main piece is be genuine. I mean, the reason I think – if we're being successful hope we are. I mean, we've got a lot of work to do folks. I mean, we're proud of this but this is – you know, this is a long journey.

But what I guess I find most important is that I – you know, you heard Patti. I do think our folks are genuinely interested in solving a problem. You heard Dick. You get – you know, it doesn't take you long to figure out Dick cares passionately about these issues. And if you can't – you have to be genuine and if you're not, you will be – you will be very clear very quickly and it will not succeed.

STEIN: I would add to that – this is Beverly – to be humble, be genuinely humble.

WYSE: Genuine and humble, I agree with that, totally. We can still learn a lot, totally.

STEIN: That recognizing that these are very complex issues and there are people in communities – in every community, advocates who have been working on this for many, many years and that it's really important to recognize their – what they know and their perspective and to work closely with them.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: In closing – we have to wrap up soon. And, in closing, I want to ask each of you a question. For Bev and Patti, I want you to imagine that you've moved. You're in a new state and the state has a business group but you don't know much about it and you're working with or for or running an advocacy organization.

What are the first steps that you would consider taking if what you wanted to achieve was some iteration of the partnership between the business council and the advocacy community in Oregon? Patti?

PATTI WHITNEY-WISE: Well, if I'm brand new and, first of all, I would probably join an organization at least with some of the same similarities to ours which is a desire to work across lines and for the common good. I would reach out to the director of the business association to have coffee and just sit down and learn a little bit more about what their work is about, maybe bring a little bit of what we've done here in Oregon with me just as an FYI.

But really, in any of these alliances, relationships are everything – building those relationships, having had the prosperity initiative and WITHNELL and other business leaders at the table, help to build those relationships early on. WYSE has worked with OBC and his interest and willingness to work across party lines as well as with advocates has been really helpful. Again, I think relationships make all the difference in the world. So that's where I would start.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. And you, Bev?

STEIN: I have to just agree with Patti. In real estate, it's location, location, location. In this work, it's relationships, relationships, relationships. That's been the fundamental approach that I've taken in everything I've done and that's what I would do if I went to a new place is find out who's who and get to know them.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And is there any first step you would imagine taking after you've built this relationship? There are folks listening to this audio conference sort of going, "OK so what do I do next?"

STEIN: So, for me...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: We've got – we've got the coffee. For some folks, it'll be latte. For some, it'll be, you know – but, OK, after the relationship, what's the first part of this?

WHITNEY-WISE: So this is Patti and so I would – besides the business association, I would be doing the same with leadership within the poverty community advocacy. And also, it – find out if there are one or two state legislators who have addressed these issues before and have passion for them. So I would build a team. That's the way I would do it.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. Yes. And Bev, any add on?

STEIN: Yes. The only thing I would add is the governor's office too. It's really important to have someone from the governor's office as part of that. I think Patti and I totally agree.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK. So Dick and Duncan, I'm going to turn to you now. You both uprooted from Oregon and I know, Dick, that'll be particularly difficult for you. I don't know Duncan if you were born and bred ...

WYSE: Me too.

FEMALE: ...in – both of you? Both of you? OK. So, I mean, something you – just happened and you've moved to another state and you really want to replicate what you've been able to achieve so far with this work around poverty in Oregon, but you're fresh to the state.

What are steps, if we have a listener from around the country who's with a business group, some kind of business-oriented group right now, that you would suggest as after the coffee, what else do you do to really bring these kinds of significant relationships to bare on the issue of reducing poverty in your new state? So, Dick, if you could take it away first?

WITHNELL: Well, personally, you have to deal with the humility of (ph) speaking first. You know, you can't be big hat and no cattle. I mean, you have to earn that right to be a spokesperson and find out who the people are.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Dick, did you say big hat, no cattle?

WITHNELL: Yes. In other words...

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: All right. Well, I love it. I'm an East Coast girl. That's brilliant. I'm going to use that all the time. Sorry, I had to – I had to underscore that one. OK. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

WITHNELL: Well – but, anyway, you'd have to – you have to earn the right – just like what Patti and Bev had said and Duncan you have to earn that right so the people who have earned the right of the community who are actually the leadership who have no hidden agenda other than being – want to be – make their community better to come alongside them and then give them some of your own experiences that we had in this state to their state and it won't be one size doesn't fit all.

Just like Portland doesn't necessarily – the same thing that works, you know, downstate, in our state here in Oregon. Then, I imagine other states you could be – and one – there's 36 – 37 counties in our state and you could be in one county, you've been in one county. And so, everyone is – everyone is different. So you have to earn – you have to earn that right to be a spokesperson to – you know, to come alongside the leadership and then – and then, collaborate.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. And Dick?

WYSE: Or Duncan. Duncan.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Duncan. I'm sorry.

WYSE: I think we're all repeating ourselves. So it's relationships above all. The – every state is different in terms of business associations. I think the key is finding individuals who are passionate in the business community in the community. It's not – I don't think there's any specific recipe other than when – you know – you know them when you see them. And, you know, Dick Withnell or – and how you organize it is going to be – it is in credit (ph) to every state.

But I can almost assure anyone that every state has a group of business leaders who would love to tackle this challenge. I guarantee it. They – you need to find them and I don't know how they would associate themselves in terms of business associations or if there would be an association like that at all. But I know they're out there in every state.

LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Well – and that is the word I think that everyone wants to hear on this call and that is an encouraging word to end this audio conference on. And I want to thank each of you, Duncan Wyse with the Oregon Business Council; Dick Withnell on its Poverty Reduction Committee and with Withnell Motor Company; Bev Stein at Portland State University; and Patti Whitney-Wise, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon.

Thank you each of you for joining this audio conference and sharing your expertise and experience. And I want to say to the audience as well, thank you very much for tuning in.

We hope when you receive the link to this audio conference, you will share it widely with friends, members of your board and others in your community who may be beginning relationships with you to figure out how you might as well move forward with a broader coalition between the business community and the advocacy community on a set of agreed-upon issues, not on everything but on a set of agreed-upon issues. So, everyone, thank you very much.

WHITNEY-WISE: Thank you. You too (ph).

STEIN: Thank you.

END