

CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

Moderator: Jodie Levin-Epstein
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Operator: Welcome, everyone. Here is your host, Jodie Levin-Epstein from the Center for Law and Social Policy. Please go ahead.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Thank you. Welcome, everyone, to this national audio conference—More Than a Paycheck: A Conversation on Why Job Quality Matters and What We Can Do About It—which is cosponsored by CLASP and Wider Opportunities for Women.

We're here the week after Labor Day to talk about job quality, why it matters, and what we can do about it. We believe that improving job quality is a critical part of the agenda for reducing poverty, supporting families, rewarding effort, and expanding opportunity for all.

I'm going to interview [state] Senator Liz Krueger of New York about her Sustainable Wage Bill. Then we're going to open up the lines and take questions for her.

We'll put your lines back on mute while we talk with Elizabeth Lower-Basch of CLASP and Joan Kuriansky of Wider Opportunities for Women. Then they'll get some questions as well.

Liz—I mean, Senator Krueger...

Senator Krueger: "Liz" is fine.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: How are you? Liz and I go way back, so it's really hard for me to do this "Senator" thing—but so exciting to say it. So I'm going to keep saying it, Liz, if you'll let me.

Senator Krueger, you're up first. Thanks for joining us on the audio conference. To get started, can you tell us what the Sustainable Wage Bill actually would have done?

Senator Krueger:

Well, it was vetoed, unfortunately, by our governor; and I think it was because of misunderstanding of the bill. All the bill would have done was to use the model that's been successful in Kentucky—that encourages welfare departments to give women options for non-traditional employment and other higher-paid jobs when they go through what we call in New York State the employment development process.

So rather than just directing low-income public assistance moms into work experience programs or short-term, low-pay turnaround time jobs—which, statistically, is what we do in New York—it would say, let's make a commitment to try to find higher-paying jobs, particularly in non-traditional employment types of areas—such as trade unions.

And, let's see if we can help move poor women into jobs that pay them 185 percent of poverty and up, because here in New York City, frankly, if you're not earning 185 percent of poverty you're not going to make it anyway.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Could you get us back, Senator Krueger, to a little bit more of the detail of the kinds of programs you had in mind? You mentioned trade-union kinds of positions. What exactly is an illustration or two of the kinds of programs and jobs?

Senator Krueger:

Sure. Here in New York City, we are still going through a construction boom era, even though the housing market in the rest of the country has slowed down, or worse. In New York City, construction companies literally can't find enough workers to build the number of projects that are going on—new buildings, new mass transit options, a Second Avenue subway, infrastructure improvements—they need electrical work and plumbing, and laborers, and construction workers.

And frankly, these are jobs that traditionally pay well but have not been open to women—or to enough people of color. So we were saying there are programs out there that match low-income people with opportunities to get into these kinds of careers.

Right now in New York State, our departments of social services are not using these as options that are available to people when

they are applying for public assistance and being moved through job-experience or job-placement programs.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Why aren't they?

Senator Krueger: It's a great frustration to me, because it seems to me that it's common sense that you would want to maximize the options available to low-income people needing public assistance until they can find a good-paying job. So why won't we allow social service agencies to look into these options and approve them for that population of people where this is a good match?

We thought we needed legislation to move down that road. And—amazingly for us here in New York, because it takes us so long to ever accomplish anything in both houses—we passed the same bill in both the Assembly and the Senate, and were fairly confident that our new governor would sign it.

But after the mayor of New York City urged him to veto the bill, he did veto it—although his people say he has a commitment to try to address some of this through regulation rather than through legislation.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: So what created the big misunderstanding that you think is the crux of Governor Spitzer's veto?

Senator Krueger: I read the letter that Mayor Bloomberg—the New York City mayor—wrote to the governor. I think his people misinformed him about the bill, because his letter said we can't possibly get every public assistance adult into a job that pays at least 185 percent of poverty, so this will tie our hands.

Now, this bill didn't say you had to only look into jobs that paid 185 percent of poverty. It didn't say it was the only kind of program you could refer people to. All the bill says is that it should be an option within the employment placement programs in social services to encourage public assistance recipients to move into higher-wage, non-traditional employment opportunities.

So we think at a certain level this was all intentional—or unintentional—misunderstanding of the bill and the purpose of the bill.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Senator Krueger, let me step back a second. Why is a bill even necessary to encourage this kind of option on the part of the

welfare agency? Why couldn't this just have happened on its own? Why were you trying to put this into law?

Senator Krueger:

You are right, it doesn't need legislation. But we're more than a decade into welfare reform, and New York State hadn't been using that option.

Granted, we had a change in governor just this year. In the previous 12-year administration of Governor Pataki, his agencies absolutely refused to consider these kinds of options under public assistance.

So we had started to move legislation—and the previous administration had never passed it—where we felt that there was no opportunities for regulation, to just get this done.

In fact, we continued our efforts to move the legislation and were successful up to the veto this year. But it is true—the local agencies could do this at their option.

We have county-based social services in New York State. The state, through its regulation, could be more insistent about the counties trying this option. And to be frank, I am quasi-optimistic that we will make changes in the regulation at the state level under the Eliot Spitzer administration to do exactly that.

So there were different roads to go down in our frustration over the failure of the previous administration to do it through regulation. We tried legislation. We got stopped part way down the road. I'm hoping we will take the next steps through regulation.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Senator Krueger, you mentioned earlier a target of jobs at 185 percent of poverty—again, as an option for the welfare agency. How did you zero in at 185?

Senator Krueger:

Actually, we were looking at the models that had been used somewhat successfully in other states around the country. Also, if you know what the costs of living are in New York State—and particularly New York City—frankly, there is no concept of “living wage” unless you're talking at least 185 percent of poverty for a family with a child or children in New York City.

We have some of the most expensive costs of living in the country; and those are, of course, not reflected in the national poverty level—which I would argue is out of date for *anywhere* in this

country. So we had just decided that that 185 percent of poverty is used as a cutoff in a variety of other federal benefit programs. And that that made sense as our baseline.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Senator Krueger, you mentioned as well that the bill passed the New York State legislature, and apparently you got a unanimous amount of support for a Sustainable Wage Bill.

Were you kind of surprised? Were there themes that resonated with your colleagues? Play it out for us a little bit, so folks in the audience can learn about how to appeal to state legislators on this issue of sustainable wages.

Senator Krueger:

Well in the Assembly—which is, for the moment, a Democratically controlled house—it wasn't that difficult to move the bill. Joan Millman, the assemblywoman who was the lead sponsor in the Assembly did a solid job of educating her colleagues about why this was so important for poor families in the state of New York.

In the Senate—where in fact the bill was lead-sponsored by my dear colleague Senator Velmanette Montgomery from Brooklyn, who is our ranker on the Social Services Committee—again, I serve in a Republican-controlled Senate. It really was a yeoman's job by Senator Montgomery to convince enough of our Republican colleagues that this actually wasn't a bill that “would do harm” ideologically from their perspective.

We weren't saying there were no work responsibilities or obligations. We weren't trying to reverse any of the existing mandates on welfare-to-work under state law, and obviously we *can't* under federal law.

To be quite blunt, this was hardly a radical bill. It was simply saying, we've got a whole infrastructure in place in each county to attempt to move low-income families into jobs. Let's make that extra effort to try to move them into jobs that will actually provide them with sustainable wages for themselves and their families.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

And the infrastructure is the existing workforce infrastructure in New York?

Senator Krueger:

Well, in the sense that in every county we have welfare-to-work programs – both operated through the local social service agencies

and/or contracted to the not-for-profit sector, and in some places to the for-profit sector.

We also have overlapping programs working with the Department of Labor, federal and state. So we have, as I assume pretty much every state does at this point, a fairly significant infrastructure to try to help low-income families move into jobs and off of public benefits.

All we were saying in this legislation is, let's try to shoot a little higher for these people. Let's see if there are any programs out there that can help these families move out of poverty and into living wages. And if we can find those programs and those options, let's highlight them and make sure that when they're moving through these infrastructure programs—and these mandates—that any option like that is made available.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Senator Krueger, I'm going to ask Vanessa, our operator, to tell the audience how to call in now to ask you a question. And as folks are queuing up, I'm going to ask you one more. Vanessa?

Operator: If you would like to pose a question, press star then the number 1 on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press the pound key.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: And let me encourage you to ask Senator Krueger anything about this bill and, potentially, about what life is like in the state legislature—having once been an advocate in food and nutrition issues. Is that fair, Senator Krueger, to do that to you?

Senator Krueger: Well, I like to think I'm *still* an advocate...

Jodie Levin-Epstein: There you go...

Senator Krueger: I just happen to serve in a different capacity. But I'm happy to answer anyone's questions.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Wonderful. We have advocates and policymakers from all over the country. And for those that are both policymakers and advocates—like yourself—listening to this audio conference, what advice would you give to someone from another state who either wanted to pass a similar bill or move something through the executive branch, as you're going to try and have happen now?

Senator Krueger: How would I recommend others go down this road?

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Exactly.

Senator Krueger: I would start off by working in coalition with the advocates and the employment programs and providers in your communities, because in fact they tend to be the experts on what's happening out in communities—what's working and what's not working. Try to work in coalition to target the legislators of the legislative bodies that you know can make changes—either through legislation or through regulation. I never see these as either/or. It's figuring out what your goal is and then using the best tools to get to your goal.

I suspect if you look at the data from your locality or your county or your state you're going to find what we found here in New York, which is that while we have reduced our public assistance case load over the last decade—in some cases, dramatically—the number of families actually leaving poverty has not changed significantly or may be worse. The types of jobs that people are getting may, in fact, be leaving them—even while working—as poor or poorer than they were when they were on public benefits.

And so I find that it is fairly easy to start discussions—even with people who are on the other side of the spectrum from you—to say let's think this through folks. We move people off of public assistance, but we flunk the test of actually increasing their income—or moving them out of poverty.

It's a decade into the changes in federal law. We have to rethink what we're doing. We have to recognize that the assignment has to be to move families out of poverty.

And if we're talking about mandates for work, we have to take responsibility for helping make sure that they get the kinds of jobs that will pay them sustainable living wages for themselves and their families. That's part of the assignment, from my perspective as an elected official.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Vanessa, do we have any questions lined up?

Operator: There appears to be no questions at this time.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Senator Krueger, I need to ask you another one.

Senator Krueger: Certainly.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: You framed a lot of the mission of sustainable wages in the context of lesson planning and passing tests and assignments. What would you do as an advocate in, let's say, a progressive organization, reaching out to what you were calling the other side of the spectrum.

How do you begin that conversation with someone who might not otherwise be with you politically, to take on sustainable wages?

Senator Krueger: Well first, I would find constituents from their district to go and talk to them directly...

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Ever the advocate, aren't you?

Senator Krueger: Yes, because one thing about elected officials—we all like our jobs and want to keep them. And, to keep it very simple, we want to be in touch with what's going on in our communities and our constituents. So I would bring constituents to the district office of the elected official I was trying to reach out to, for them to sit down and talk about what is going on, what has worked and what hasn't worked.

I would also frame this in the perspective of family policy and policy for children, because of course when we're talking about low-income families and public assistance in this country today, we are statistically talking about women and young children. Probably everyone on this phone call—but not necessarily every elected official—understands the direct correlation between poverty and problems for children in their schools, in their communities—the future generations of what happens in any given community.

I would also talk to elected officials about the dollars-and-cents facts. If we move a family off of public assistance but they continue to live in poverty, there is a domino effect of increased cost on government—now and into the future. If...

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Let me interrupt you there.

Senator Krueger: Please.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Do you think people really hear that factoid? It's something we've tried to be talking about to folks, and I'm not sure we've framed it so that people actually internalize what you're saying about the cost of poverty.

Senator Krueger:

Again, it's important to be able to isolate that and use actual examples with elected officials. Here in New York City, for example, where the number one issue of any elected official, regardless of their party, is the lack of affordable housing and the crisis in communities from people's inability to afford their housing. If you talk about poverty and families in the context of being at risk of eviction, being at risk of losing their homes and ending up having to move somewhere else or go into a crisis situation where their children might actually be taken by the child welfare agencies. If you talk about the context of inability to pay their rent bills, their utility bills, their food costs as an economic impact on the entire community, I think you do start to get legislators' attention. Because, to keep it simple, we all look locally.

It's thinking through—when you are talking to an elected official—what's going on in their communities, and what do they care about.

In upstate New York, there's enormous poverty in specific areas where a lot of conservative Republican legislators are representing. But they know they have problems of poverty at home. They might not be ideologically friendly to the concept of welfare policy or public assistance. They do grasp what the impact is on their local communities when people don't have enough money to pay their property taxes or their school taxes, or there are new costs at the local level because of the populations on Medicaid instead of getting health insurance through their jobs—whether there are increased social service costs because of growing rates of poverty.

So I do think we should all think through how you frame this at the local level, from that elected [official]'s home perspective.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Senator Krueger, that's quite useful for all of us. If a person listening to this audio conference is a state legislator or is working with a state legislator, can they get in touch with you directly to get some peer-to-peer advice?

Senator Krueger:

Of course they can. My district office number is (212) 490-9535. I also have a Web site—it's the 21st century—lizkrueger.com. They can see some of the work I've been doing on that Web site or e-mail directly there.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: That's wonderful—I really appreciate that. We know that you need to run. We thank you very much not only for your time today, but for all your work on this and other issues. And I'll have to drop into calling you Liz again for a second.

Senator Krueger: Please.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Liz, I'll give you a ring about my trip to the Big Apple in October. Maybe we can get together?

Senator Krueger: That'd be wonderful. Thank you for inviting me out. I really appreciate it. Take care.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Okay, Liz. Thanks a lot.

Senator Krueger: Bye, everyone.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Bye. We're now turning to Elizabeth Lower-Basch of CLASP. Elizabeth, how are you?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Hello.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: My first question for you—which is no big surprise—is why did you decide to write that fabulous, engaging publication that you just issued, called *Opportunity at Work: Improving Job Quality*? What made you do it?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Well, if you read the newspapers, there's a lot of what I call hand-wringing about job quality and the global economy. A lot of people believe the only way to compete with China or India is to lower wages and lower job quality standards.

And we certainly know that's what some companies are doing. But there's also companies in the same industries that are making very different choices that pay living wages, that invest in their workers.

And so what we wanted to say in this paper is that government shouldn't be neutral between these options, if you care about poverty and all these things that you and Liz have just been talking about.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I happen to know that you responded to one such company that did a lot of firing not so very long ago—an electrical company. What company was that that used the argument of this kind of competition?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: It was Circuit City.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: What happened there?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: This is a really frustrating story. They just decided that the way that they needed to cut costs was they took everyone who was paid more than a certain amount, and they fired them.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: This is just classic, this whole notion that we can't afford folks because we've got this competition from India and China, so we're just going to slash anybody over a certain wage, right?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Right. And that means they've cut the people who've been there the longest and so have the most experience—and got wage increases over time—as well as anyone who might have gotten any merit increases for doing a good job. So it just was an amazingly counterproductive thing for them to do.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I've been racing ahead here—let's take a step back. When you say job quality, just so we're all on the same page here, what do you mean? What's the definition of job quality, low-wage jobs?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Well, one of the points that I wanted to make is that wages are an important part of job quality, but they're not the whole story. And there was this big minimum wage increase last year, which was terrific.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: But not big enough.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Not big enough. And so far, only a tiny, tiny piece of it's been implemented—it's going to be phased in. But all these stories have this line about how when this is slowly phased in, minimum wage workers will make about \$14,500 if they work year round, full-time. But that sentence is really misleading, because very few low-wage workers are able to work full-time year round because...

Jodie Levin-Epstein: What do you mean, "able to work full-time"?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: The jobs are temporary or seasonal—or part-time.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I see.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: A lot of times they'll only call you to come in for 12 hours this week and maybe 20 hours next week. And then at Christmas they

want you to work 70 hours a week. But it's hard to put together a full-time job that way.

So our working definition of job quality includes wages and earnings but also benefits, job security, advancement opportunities, work schedule, health and safety, and fairness and worker voice.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: So what's the picture right now? Is job quality getting worse than it used to be? Is it getting better? What's happening?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: It depends what jobs you're looking at and who you're talking to. There has been a real polarization of the labor market. Lots of people know that earnings inequality has gotten larger in recent years.

But what isn't as well known is that if you use a broader measure of job quality that captures all these other things like benefits and advancement opportunity, there's over twice as much inequality as if you just look at wages—because low-wage workers are far less likely to get benefits like health insurance or pension plans. They're less likely to be able to control what hours they work. A lot of times they just get their schedule a week in advance—as opposed to someone who is in a professional job who might be able to use flex time or work from home.

Low-income workers often have jobs that are dirty, dangerous, and repetitive. And there's not a whole lot of advancement opportunity, especially for workers who only have a high school degree or less.

So I think there's a big story about what's happening at the top versus what's happening at the bottom. But even from middle class workers, I think a lot of people worry about job quality because people worry about things like insecurity due to outsourcing. They worry if they lose their job. Will they ever be able to get a good one again? And they also worry about things like preserving family time in the face of a 24/7 economy.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Elizabeth, this does sound kind of worrisome in terms of getting good-quality jobs. But it's the employer who creates the job, and isn't it up to the employer to, in fact, make job quality better?

I know you call for government action, but could you please illuminate for all of us what kinds of things you think are appropriate for government, since the creator of the job is the private sector?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: There are a lot of things that government can do even if government isn't directly the employer. And just like there's a floor under pay, with the minimum wage, we can set standards for other aspects of job quality.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Okay, I like that.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Like—I know you've worked on this a whole lot—the expectation that all employees should get paid sick days that they can use when they're sick or when a family member is sick. And there are things like health and safety regulations that are already on the book, but our government hasn't been doing a very good job of enforcing them these days.

There's also a range of other types of things that governments can do. We support businesses through a range of programs—things like economic development subsidies, job training programs, contracts. And whenever we spend public money, we should be thinking about what the impact is on job quality—and supporting good employers.

There's also various training and technical assistance that government can provide. I'd be happy to talk with people more about any of these specific approaches. But frankly, this paper doesn't actually get into that much detail on them.

The point that we'd like people to take away from the paper is that we can do something about job quality. It's not the weather. We can do something about it.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: What about unions? Do they get to put some sunshine on all of this?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Unions can definitely make a big difference in hotel quality. As you might know, hotels in Las Vegas are heavily unionized.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I thought you said *heavenly* unionized.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: I did start to...

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Keep going.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch:

It means that someone who works in housekeeping or as a busboy can actually have a decent middle class life on their salary. And that's just not true any place where those jobs are not union.

Also, some of the best sectoral strategies to improve job training and improve job quality very much involve unions. One of the reasons that job quality is so bad at the low end of the labor market is that there's been a very long decline in unionization in this country. And that's not because workers aren't interested in unions. The problem is that our labor laws have been interpreted in recent years to make it hard for workers to get organized and be represented by unions.

When companies break the law and fire workers who are active in union organizing, the penalties for that are pretty trivial. So we need to level the playing field for unions.

But, while I think unions are really important, given that it's less than 10 percent of the private sector workforce that's currently unionized, I don't think it should be the only approach we take to improving job quality.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

What about that scary thing in the back of everybody's mind—China, India—if we put U.S. companies through the hoops and regulate job quality, won't those companies be at a disadvantage? What's the line back on that, Elizabeth, that's most persuasive?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch:

I'm going to quote Jim Sinegal, who is the CEO of Costco. He was interviewed in the *Wall Street Journal* a couple of weeks ago, and his answer was just so perfect.

What he said was, "we think you get what you pay for. If you hire good people, pay them good wages and provides good jobs and careers, good things will happen in your business. We think that's proven true in our case. We are the low cost provider of merchandise and we pay the highest wages. Wouldn't that suggest we're getting better productivity?"

Basically, the issue is that we can't compete with China on the basis of cost, and we shouldn't try. They're always going to be able to undercut us when a Chinese worker makes less in a week than a U.S. worker makes in an hour or a day.

So going a low-road, low-cost strategy may buy a company a year or two more, but it's doomed in the long run. If we're going to

compete, it needs to be on the basis of quality and productivity—and not on cost cutting.

That was what was so incredibly frustrating about that Circuit City story. Some of our most productive and competitive companies are also the best places to work. They know that their workers are an important asset, and they treat them like one. They invest in people through training; and then they provide them with the wages, benefits, working conditions that keep them around. That's what we refer to when we talk about high-road strategies.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Elizabeth, I get this question, so I'm going to throw it at you. If the Costcos of the world are profitable, and the high road is profitable, why don't more companies do it themselves? Why do we need to intervene with any kind of regulation or any kind of government action?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Part of the problem is just inertia. Companies have been doing things one way for a long time, and it's hard for them to shift gears. And there's also some evidence that there's a lot of different pieces to taking the high road, and if you don't get all the pieces in place, you don't really see the payoff from any one of them. So if you spend a lot of money on investing and training for your workers but you still have lousy wages and inflexible schedules, the workers probably won't be able to stay on the job long enough for you to see the payoff from that training. Or, if your first-line supervisor still acts like they have all the answers, you won't get the same payoff as if you empower workers to use their judgment, now that they have this additional training.

So some of what can happen is to help companies get all their balls lined up and make the transition to the high road.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I'm going to encourage the audience to hold onto your questions for Elizabeth. We're going to move to Joan Kuriansky of Wider Opportunity for Women. And then, when Joan's finished, we'll open up for questions— for both Elizabeth and Joan.

Joan, welcome. How are you today?

Joan Kuriansky: Thank you. Good, thanks.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Excellent. From the Wider Opportunity for Women perspective, can you parse the whole issue of job quality and pull out for us the aspects of job quality that are of particular importance to women?

Joan Kuriansky:

There are several. I'll suggest four. One does relate to the wage question and ensuring that women can earn wages equal or comparable to that earned by men for either the same or comparable work—and that they have the same kind of opportunities to advance in their careers.

A second factor has to do with the issue of occupational segregation and the fact that often women are not in jobs that give them the same kind of exposure to well-paying jobs with good benefits.

The third has to do with the issue that we began talking about relating to part-time work, because such a large percentage of part-time workers are women.

And lastly is addressing the role of workers in a context that considers their role in society and as family caregivers, not just as an individual worker. It is only in the workforce system that we don't tend to think of the family when developing policy.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Joan, on the wage part, Wider Opportunities for Women is well known for promoting what's called the self-sufficiency standard. Could you tell us what the concept is behind the self-sufficiency standard, before we get into the actual calculation of the standard?

Joan Kuriansky:

Sure. The concept is fairly simple. Workers should earn enough to meet the daily cost of living for themselves and their families. The origin of the term in the workforce arena was actually found in the Workforce Investment Act, which uses the term "self-sufficiency" to address eligibility criteria for access to services offered through the one-stop system.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

In a nutshell, how did you translate that concept into a standard with numerical value?

Joan Kuriansky:

The standard is a family budget, and it's broken down into seven cost categories—particularly those that have an impact on working families. They include costs like child care, transportation, and taxes.

It's based on a national methodology, but it's tailored to each state and county within the state. And it goes even further to look at the number of children and the ages of children in the family relevant to the caregiving costs. So we actually have the standards broken

down by 70 different household types in each of the counties—in each of the 35 states, and the District of Columbia, where we have developed the self-sufficiency standard.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: If someone wanted to learn more about how to develop such a standard for themselves, they could just go on the WOW Web site and find out how to get in touch with you about this?

Joan Kuriansky: That's right—wowonline.org.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Excellent. Now—how can employers and policymakers use this concept of self-sufficiency to contribute to job quality?

Joan Kuriansky: I think that's what you call multi-tasking.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Exactly. So at any rate, the question is, how do employers and policymakers get to use self-sufficiency to contribute to job quality?

Joan Kuriansky: Actually, we have quite a few examples of that. There are a significant number of local and state workforce boards around the country which are already using this concept of self-sufficiency to affect their workforce system to meet the needs not only of employees, but relative to employers and the labor market. And the standard has been used to set eligibility guidelines, funding priorities, as a counseling tool—and as an overall goal for a workforce agency.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Can you explain what you mean by that, “as an overall goal”?

Joan Kuriansky: Sure.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: How do you use the standard as a goal?

Joan Kuriansky: For instance, in Seattle, the King County workforce council set as an overall goal that they wanted to see the job seekers who use their one-stop system be counseled to be prepared for jobs that would pay a self-sufficiency wage, as determined by the self-sufficiency standard. So the council trained their one-stop staff in the concept of self-sufficiency, as defined by their state standard. And then, over 18 months [the council] was able to measure the impact of how that kind of counseling and referrals—job placement, et cetera—got folks closer to self-sufficiency.

In the study that they just did, they looked at an 18-month timeline. And for all of the job seekers who came to their one-stop system who were being monitored, of those who were unemployed or who had so little of a level of self-sufficiency, less than 30 percent were found to actually have been able to move to self-sufficiency within that 18-month period.

So that's an example of how you integrate the concept into the full fabric of the agency.

In Sacramento, they used the California self-sufficiency standard in their labor market analysis to identify growth industries and where there are jobs with career ladders and occupations that pay self-sufficiency wages.

I do want to note that it is important to think about self-sufficiency as a goal and to look at benchmarks to get there. We don't assume that everyone is going to be able to earn self-sufficiency wages right off the bat. But there needs to be a career-advancement plan in jobs, so that people can move towards self-sufficiency.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

I want to talk more about career paths. In the context of occupational segregation—which, as you pointed out, Joan, in the outset, is one of the four areas that are of particular interest for women vis-à-vis job quality. We know that occupational segregation is a huge issue: 80 percent of women are in only 20 jobs of the 440 occupations that are currently labeled by the government. And it turns out—wouldn't you know it—that those 20 jobs where 80 percent of the women are employed are basically lower-wage, lower-quality jobs.

So what strategies have you been able to develop to enhance career paths by reducing this occupational segregation? Can you tell us what you're able to do?

Joan Kuriansky:

Well, I think there are two strategies under the umbrella of sector initiatives. And the concept of developing sector projects—where you look at industries that are growing in a particular community and that offer the promise ultimately of well-paying jobs—is one that's gaining a lot of currency in workforce policy.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Can I interrupt you there, for those who are not steeped—is “sector” equivalent to “industry,” or does sector mean something different?

Joan Kuriansky:

Industry is a sufficient comparable term—you could say that for this discussion.

You look at particular industries that are growing in a community and then look at what the access is for low-skilled workers to begin to move up career ladders. One of the problems for women is that even as you're looking at jobs for the future, a good number of those jobs in the growing sectors have historically not been ones that have included women in large numbers.

So what we suggest is that either you look at a sector where there is already opportunity for growth—the kinds of non-traditional jobs that the senator was speaking about, which are defined actually as where less than 25 percent of the workforce are women and which do not typically require a four-year college degree. You begin to figure out how to recruit, train, and maintain women in those kinds of jobs.

The second approach would be to look at where women are congregated, the kinds of jobs in the clerical or service area where they don't typically have quality benefits or attributes. And then try to develop career ladders—either within that sector or across sectors—so that you can ultimately increase the economic well-being of these workers.

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

Can you give us some concrete examples—some stories—of where this has happened in sectors?

Joan Kuriansky:

Sure. It was interesting listening to the senator, because I think some of the things that she was suggesting for New York we see played out in other parts of the country.

For instance, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, their workforce development board made a commitment to moving women into non-traditional occupations and away from low-wage jobs.

And so what they did was not only provide special outreach tools to these women, but they offered training to case managers to educate—to help them educate women about jobs like those in construction or healthcare or advanced manufacturing.

And the WIB at the same time instituted a policy that required WIB funds...

Jodie Levin-Epstein:

WIB? What's a WIB?

Joan Kuriansky: Sorry—workforce investment board.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Thank you.

Joan Kuriansky: [The policy] required WIB funds only support growth occupations that pay higher wages.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Is there another example?

Joan Kuriansky: Yeah. We can look in Sebring, Florida. Their workforce agency is called the Heartland Workforce Agency. They actually use the statewide initiative called Florida Rebuild to open construction training to women. And in the first year, the average starting wage was \$9 to \$15 per hour for those graduating from the program.

And lastly, in DC, we've started to engage in a program to increase opportunities for women in what's called the Protective Services area, which has to do with police, firefighting, transportation security, et cetera.

Those are jobs where women don't traditionally find themselves but where there are great opportunities for career advancement.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I love any success story coming out of DC. As a resident, it's just always a thrill to be a model for the nation. Thank you so much for your work in that area.

I do want to leave us enough time though, Joan, and I'm going to jump right to part-time work, because I know it's an issue of keen interest to Wider Opportunities for Women as well.

In the U.S. —unlike in Europe—there is no requirement that part-time jobs be treated the same as full-time jobs, but just on a pro rata basis. Why is the issue of part-time jobs particularly important to women? We all know it in our gut. We see women working part-time jobs. But could you give us a little bit of flesh on the bones of the statistics and so forth?

Joan Kuriansky: Well I think the statistics are pretty illustrative—77 percent of all part-time workers are women. And that is reflected by the fact that there are millions of women who are parents of young children. There are older women. There are older workers. They are nearing retirement. They're full-time students, displaced homemakers who would like to work part-time.

Some of the major challenges are the challenges that we've already heard about—these jobs typically include few or no benefits, lower wages, and diminished job security.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: But doesn't it have to be this way? That's what you get when you have a part-time job—it's by definition, right?

Joan Kuriansky: Well, I think Elizabeth made a good case that demonstrated that it also benefits employers sometimes to have part-time workers. Both employers and employees can benefit by policies that treat part-time workers as full-time workers as it relates to pro-rated benefits, as it relates to access to unemployment insurance, as it relates to wages.

The question is, how do you do it in such a way that you pro-rate benefits according to the percentage that someone is working without also undermining the base that would make them productive and able to do the work that they're being asked to do?

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Joan, play that out a little bit more for us. That sounds theoretical. What do you mean in terms of practice and in terms of particular initiatives that could really make part-time work more viable, more fair?

Joan Kuriansky: In fact there are a lot of pieces pending in Congress which do the things that we're talking about. Some that speak to treating part-time workers in the same way for access to health insurance or retirement savings. There are others that look specifically at unemployment compensation.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: To do what with respect to unemployment compensation?

Joan Kuriansky: Within the concept of unemployment compensation, what we are hoping to see in the passage of the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act is to provide incentives to states to extend benefits to those who are looking for less than full-time work.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: So this is a bill that's actually been introduced?

Joan Kuriansky: Yes, it has been introduced. There's another bill that's important to us, the Balancing Act—sponsored by Representative Woolsey—which addresses both the health and retirement for part-time workers and temporary workers.

And there's yet another one that looks at issues relating to pensions and retirement saving under the Women's Secure Retirement Act by Senators Smith and Conrad.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: This is really excellent. Lots of developments to stay tuned and learn about. Let me ask Vanessa, our operator, again to quickly tell the audience how to call in and ask questions of either Joan or Elizabeth. And as you do that, I'll then ask another question myself. Vanessa?

Operator: Once again, to pose your question, press star 1. To withdraw your question, press the pound key.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Joan, could you tell us what the priority is for Wider Opportunity for Women with respect to this part-time arena? You were able to give us a whole set of legislative developments. Do you have any program work that you're doing in this area, or are you focused in on some legislative fixes? What's your priority right now?

Joan Kuriansky: Right now we want to address the issue of part-time work in two ways. One is through advocating for policy change.

The second—which we hope to embark on soon—is actually working with individual employers who have developed positive models for flexibility and part-time work, and highlight those as best practices that can be embraced voluntarily by employers while we work for legislative change.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Terrific. Vanessa, do we have any questioners?

Operator: Your first question is coming from Dan Neal. Please go ahead.

Dan Neal: Hi. Say, I'm very interested in this part-time strategy.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Dan, can you tell us what organization you're with?

Dan Neal: Sure. I'm with the Equality State Policy Center, and we're located in Casper, Wyoming.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Thank you.

Dan Neal: I'd like to hear more about this unemployment compensation bill—specifically, what things are in the national bill. And, is there an opportunity to push similar incentives at the state level, to work in the opposite direction?

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I'm going to let my guests answer that question. But before they do, I also want to suggest that we will circulate some materials to every registrant in this conference that will link you with a variety of organizations that are working on this bill and have prepared summaries of where it's at.

Joan, you want to take this one?

Joan Kuriansky: Sure. I urge the reader to look up information about the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act. It's HR 2233 or Senate Bill 1871.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: And again, we'll circulate materials that'll remind you of those numbers. Go ahead.

Joan Kuriansky: In general, it provides benefits to workers who are only available for part-time work. It also enables workers who must leave jobs for compelling family reasons to qualify for unemployment insurance. And it has another interesting provision relating to considering a worker's most recent work history when determining eligibility.

And overall, we're particularly interested in it because we do believe that it will help families with children, because it encourages states to boost weekly benefits for unemployed workers who are caring for children or other dependents.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Thank you very much. Vanessa, any more questions?

Operator: There appears to be no further questions at this time.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Okay. I have a last one for both of our guests today. Elizabeth and Joan, I would like you to offer the audience a single take-away message from the work you're involved in right now related to this audio conference call.

What's the take away folks should have? Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: I think the take away is—as I said before—that job quality can be improved, that we don't just accept that it's the way it is and only thing about, “what can we do to pick up the pieces around it?” That we need to think about what are the choices that we're making about our government and our economy and how jobs are structured.

We can make different choices if we decide as a society it's important—and I think we should.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: It's a choice. I like that. And Joan?

Joan Kuriansky: Taking a word from our colleague at Costco, quality jobs mean quality for all of us. And I would further refine that by defining quality jobs as those that really enable families in the United States to be able to meet their daily needs of living.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: I want to thank each of my guests today—Liz Krueger, New York state Senator, Elizabeth Lower-Basch at the Center for Law and Social Policy, and Joan Kuriansky at Wider Opportunities for Women.

I want to thank also everyone in the audience today. If you found this audio conference helpful, we hope that you will circulate it to your colleagues. We will be sending you a link to it, and we urge you to just send it on to everybody.

Have a great day, and thank you very much, Elizabeth and Joan. Bye everybody.

Joan Kuriansky: Thanks.

Elizabeth Lower-Basch: Bye.

Jodie Levin-Epstein: Bye.

Operator: This concludes today's conference call. You may now disconnect.

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