CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

KEYNOTE SPEECH: WILLIAM SPRIGGS

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KATE GORDON: Folks, want to take your seats? We have a great panel, last big panel of the day before the moderated conversation at the end of the day, and I think a really important one. A lot of the day has been focused on sort of what the economy looks like and where we are going. In just about every conversation we have had today, somebody has brought up the need to make sure that we have the workforce that can do all this and then sort of put that aside as something to think about as we are crafting policy.

This panel is really going to look into the workforce question. And before we get to the panel itself, we are very honored to have with us today Dr. Bill Spriggs from the Department of Labor, who is sort of a combination of a lot of the things we have talked about today being essential and important to the mix of how we create policy for good clean energy economy and a good clean energy future.

He is an economist. Dr. Spriggs, you missed it when Thea Lee from the AFL was calling all economists zombies earlier today. But he is a zombie, you know; he is an economist. He is, of course, part of the government, part of the DOL and has worked in various government positions, including under Clinton at the National Commission for Employment Policy and the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration.

So an economist with government experience, also a lot of experience working in the community. Right now Dr. Spriggs is assistant secretary for policy at the Department of Labor. Worked really as an advocate for working families and low-income communities for, you know, his career, including a stint at the health-care trust for the UAW on the Labor side and including a stint as the National Urban League's Institute for Opportunity and Equality executive director.

So community, government, labor, economist, I think all of the necessary elements to really creating a vibrant and sustainable economy. So we are very excited to have him here. Dr. Spriggs, do you want to come up and say a few words about your priorities? Thank you. (Applause.)

WILLIAM SPRIGGS: Thank you very much. And thanks for the opportunity of having the Department of Labor here. This is going to be an excellent panel. I know everybody on the panel, so I can say that with all sincerity and honesty. And I won't be contradicted because I know it is true.

So I want to bring you greetings from Secretary Solis. It is wonderful to work for her on this specific topic, on every topic, but on this one specifically because her legislation on green jobs is the foundation for a lot of what we are doing. So we have been implementing her vision.

So in the department, not only do we have someone who was an early leader on environmental justice topics, one of the – well, actually the first woman to win the Profile in Courage award, but someone who has always been there on the side of clean jobs, good jobs and

putting them together and understanding how they connected. So it isn't a heavy lift at the Department of Labor to sort of make this happen.

You are going to hear from the panelists some ideas about some of the vision. I want to talk more about the specifics because we have already started to implement the vision of training people for those good jobs and to give you a sense of what the activities are that we are doing. I am preaching to the choir, so you know that these are jobs that are going to be real jobs. The economic imperative is there. Whether you believe in global warming or not, you have to believe that we cannot have a growing and continuing to grow trade deficit.

The United States already lived through a financial crisis brought on in large part because lots of our trade deficit dollars flowed back to create an investment bubble in our housing sector. That is not sustainable. Somehow or another, we have to close that trade gap. The most logical way to do that, the easy way to do that is to make sure that we close our demand for energy that we are bringing in from overseas.

Second, the worldwide is developing. So China is now the largest automobile market in the world. India is developing. It clearly cannot be the case that a fixed resource like gasoline in the face of mushrooming demand can stay at a low price. So whether you believe in global warming or not and the effects of what all of that means, you have to believe that we can't have this unsustainable trade deficit and you can't believe that somehow or another, we can go on with the model where the whole world is going to have more and more automobiles and we are just going to bid up the price of gasoline.

So somebody has to be the first to figure out what is the clean way to do this. What is the way that we are going to do this to reduce our carbon footprint? So the economic imperative is there. So what has the administration done? Well, it has done some things to immediately respond to the conditions of the labor market. This is the worst we have as a recorded downturn in the economy. Many people have looked in their history books and read about the Great Depression.

What you don't understand is that what we economists are doing with the Great Depression is we know a tree fell, but no one was there to hear it. There were no tape recorders. We are imagining given the size of the tree that fell what it must have sounded like. The Great Depression taught us a lesson about economics and so we created macroeconomic measures as a result of that. So unemployment, GDP, all of that are after the Great Depression. They aren't before the Great Depression. So as a recorded downturn where we actually have the sound equipment, so to speak, in place, this is it. We are living through that moment.

So in order to respond to this downturn, the recovery act gave to the Department of Labor a number of charges. One of those was to expand unemployment benefits. This was a huge expansion undertaken to both modernize and increase benefits and to give workers for the first time COBRA benefits so that they could continue their health coverage. It allowed us to create summer jobs.

And one of the big things is it gave us some money to pay attention to when we come out of this, what are we going to employ people? What are they going to be doing? And Secretary Solis has zeroed in on two major initiatives. One of those, which was that $500 million worth of – the bulk of her money went to green job training.

So I want to talk about that because we are going to hear from everyone, the need, and what people can do and give you some more vision. But some of this is already in place, so this is no longer pipe dreams. The secretary was very quick about getting the panels diversified so that we could serve a broad range of workers, not just the set of workers that might fall through our normal process. But so that we could target this, we would have diverse panels for the first time.

The secretary went in and reengineered the folks who would choose the winners of the grants so that we would have people who knew how to do job delivery at the community-based level so that instead of looking at the nice, polished, this-is-done-by-a-grant-writer application, that we would have people who know no, I do job training and it looks pretty on paper, but let's get real. This is not somebody who knows what they are doing. So we were able to give it to a lot of community-based organizations that hadn't gotten it before. As a result, there was a massive increase in money that went to YouthBuilds or serving more minority youth. We are getting them ready for this effort.

We had to define what was a good job. And part of making sure that we were preparing people for green jobs was also thinking about preparing them for good green jobs. So what is a good job? Well, a good job is something that can support a family by increasing incomes. It is a safe job. It is a secure job. It gives people voice at the workplace. And it is going to be something that is sustainable, something that they can have for some time and something that is going to help us rebuild the middle class.

So when it came time for weatherization or whether it came time for the other green jobs, the Department of Labor was very concerned that labor standards would be in place so we can ensure that these would be good jobs. So now what do those grants look like – the $500 million that we let out? Well, we wanted to make sure that there was going to be sound recruitment and referral strategies to the targeted populations that we wanted to benefit from these programs. We made sure that they were going to be diverse workers being trained.

This is good jobs for everyone. So we wanted to make sure that there was going to be that kind of recruitment effort in place. We wanted to make sure that there was going to be basic skills integrated with work readiness and the occupational skills training. So we didn't want to just see a bunch of book learning. We wanted to make sure that this was going to lead to specific skills.

We wanted to make sure that the grant was looking at the wraparound services that would be necessary so that they would provide or at least have thought through issues of childcare, transportation and other services that would need to support the workers in their effort. And we wanted to make sure that because we were targeting the dollars to make sure we could reach

communities that normally were being left out of the process, that the training would be at convenient times, that they would be in convenient locations. So that is what we asked.

We asked further that we are going to take people who have lost their job and move them into green jobs, so we are providing them with the solution of where we are going forward. So we wanted to make sure that they were targeting unemployed individuals, that they were going to help lift those who were more difficult to lift, that they had some outreach to those who had some known barrier to employment, either dropouts or people who might have a criminal record or some other disadvantage because they lived in a high-poverty level.

So with those categories in mind, we came up with a set of grantees that I think – and I think when you look at who won the grants – ended up being – looking inclusive, looking like the American workforce, looking with the diversity that the secretary can say these are going to be good jobs for everyone.

I want to just talk about a few of them so you can get a sense of what we considered to be a winning grant. So I want to talk about one that we did with Jobs for the Future, which was done in partnership with the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute. So these went to help five disadvantaged cities. The cities were Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee and Philadelphia.

This grant hopefully is going to end up serving over 1100 people. There should be a group who are going to get basic education services, about 870 of those. And then we are going to have another 723 who are getting the supportive services that I talked about, the childcare and the other wraparound services.

The grants had to be tied to a job and so, you know, a lot of people want to say what is a green job or this is training for squishy forever nothingness. But these had to be tied to a job. So this $500 million did not go as simply training, but as being the bridge for those who are disadvantaged and left out, the bridge to the new green economy. So this is the meeting the table, being put on the plate.

We gave an opportunity within that – Jobs for the Future an opportunity for training-related employment. So that one fit the bill as we saw it. We gave a grant to the East Harlem Employment Services. This is going to be some job readiness. It is sector-based skills. There is some GED preparation that will be in place. They are going to serve not only East Harlem, but they are going to do Baltimore, Benton Harbor and Flint. This is going to, again, include education training, supportive services and then we are going to have 881 people placed into employment through that effort.

We have the Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership. This is going to go out to unemployed and dislocated workers. And this is to work on renewable electric power and biofuels. So some people wanted us to think only in terms of weatherization. But we really took in the broad spectrum of what is meant by a green job and the new green energies. Lots of these companies were saying, you know, we are not going to have people ready for this. We don't want to be the bottleneck. We want to make sure that we can fulfill putting people in place.

So that partnership was also done with the Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 out there in Oregon. It was done with the Energy Trust of Oregon and the workforce system. There are six community colleges out there in Oregon that are participating in part of this. There are the economic development partners from the counties who are part of this.

And there are some other unions along with the sheet metal workers who are helping with this. So again, the model was let's make sure that everybody is at the table. We have the business side. We have the community as a leg. We have the education system, the community colleges as the other leg. So we put together this stool on all of the communities and all of these grants.

We have also been doing work. Jonathan Neuss (ph) from my office actually is here today to help us with coordinating what we are doing with our apprenticeship program to make sure that we can tie our apprenticeship program and our Job Corps program into being part of the vehicle for green jobs. We are working with our Veterans Employment and Training Service and with our Women's Bureau and with our Office of Disability Employment Policy to make sure that the grants that went out are, in fact, going to be able to reach out to our different constituency, the folks who face some of these different barriers.

When it is said and done, after this $500 million is all said and done, and it has all been handed out – so again, sort of what the secretary was able to do in a record amount of time – get a diverse panel, get a diverse set of grantees and get the money out of the door. So this is now the end of February, beginning of March. But all of that money is out and now working. And the money is going to be providing us for this year literally thousands of new sets of workers with skills who are going to be able to take advantage of the green job movement.

It is, I think, what people envision. I think it is what you were thinking of, Van. I know it is what you were thinking of, Joel, that this would be an opportunity not just for some workers, but for every set of workers in the country and that people wouldn't have to see this as oh, this is going to be this same old, same old. It is another opportunity that is going to pass us. This is an opportunity that gave us a unique moment and I think the administration has seized it. Once these jobs get going, once people see what the green economy can do, once it sees the jobs that can be provided, we think that we have provided the foundation so that this can be sustainable.

The initiative that the president has put on the table to do the HOME STAR project, which will reach out to middle-class families to let them step up, get their homes weatherized, get the savings put into their pockets so that they can save on energy costs, as well they can be part of the green solution for saving our economy.

Our apprenticeship program can get the people ready for those jobs. We can think about the certification process for that. We have already excited enough people through that grants-making process to think about the certifications that will be needed for the building audits, as well as the certification of the completion of the work.

So these things are already in progress. Communities have already embraced this notion. We only got to fund 20 percent of the applications. So there are many communities out there that thought about all of these pieces already, that have already put in motion putting together labor, education and employers to think about what the green opportunities are. So even though we didn't fund all of them, there are already many people out there who are already in place and ready.

Now, the jobs bill that the president talked about and that the House acted on included an opportunity for us to have more money to go back to some of the grantees' excellent grants that were submitted and fund them because just give us the money and the money is out the door, so that more communities actually will get funding to help them with what they already pieced together.

But the opportunity already created the buzz, the conversation. It is already taking place out in the country. And so this is already well underway. So this isn't a conference about the way future. It is not about Star Wars, Star Trek or any other century that we haven't gotten to. This is a conversation and this panel is about what is happening now and giving us a vision about how we can build on that to go forward. So it is something real.

And so this is a good time to have the conversation. If we can get the extra funding, there are going to be even more people being trained at the end of the year. And that will not be the bottleneck. So hopefully, we won't have people ask questions about, you know, are you sure people can be trained for this? Are you sure that people are interested in getting trained for this? Businesses won't buy into it. Labor won't buy into it. People won't show up. Hopefully, you won't get any of those questions asked in the next panel. They will be answering, where do we go from here? So thank you.

(END)