

Transcript of Building a Resilient Workforce Program

Trey Johnson: Good afternoon and welcome to the Cleveland Fed’s virtual program on Building a Resilient Workforce. My name is Trey Johnson and I’m a regional outreach manager in the Community Development Department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. We are delighted to be joined by Federal Reserve Chair, Jerome Powell, and an excellent lineup of speakers from Youngstown, Ohio today, who will talk to us about the challenges they faced and the barriers they’ve had to overcome to keep the region’s economy afloat in good times and in bad. Certainly these are among the most challenging times in the Youngstown region’s history. So the insights from our panelists today will be particularly informative as communities across the country figure out ways to move forward during the era of COVID-19.

To get us started, it is my privilege to introduce Loretta J Mester, President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. I know from working directly with Loretta that she is a strong supporter of the Fed’s community development function and has a keen interest in understanding the factors that make certain individuals and communities better able to recover from economic setbacks and how can those factors be promoted more broadly. So I am very happy today that Loretta will be moderating today’s discussion. With that, President Mester, I ask you to unmute your microphone and begin the program.

Loretta Mester: Thank you very much, Trey. And thanks everyone for joining us. I really appreciate the willingness of Mayor Brown, President Tressel, Ms. Boyarko and Ms. Borza, Mr. Chretien, and Ms. Williams to serve on the panel today. And I’m really pleased to be here with Federal Reserve Chairman, Jay Powell, to listen and learn from all of you.

The information we collect from community and business sources is really crucial to us as we set monetary policy, and especially as we look at our tools and how we can use them to set the stage for a robust and inclusive economic recovery. Some of the early data suggests that we may have seen the worst of the damage from the economic shutdown triggered by the coronavirus. There’s some positives in the data. The May’s job report for example, was a positive. But I think the way to look at this is that you have to think in terms of levels, and we certainly have a very long way to go.

Now, some parts of the country, including Ohio are starting to reopen. They’re resuming broader economic activity. And I think it’s very much worth thinking about how workforces, how the labor force and how communities that the workforce supports can better withstand and recover from economic shocks. The idea of resiliency is very salient, I think right now. So what can be done to make the workforce more resilient in the face of the economy’s inevitable ups and downs? This is especially important for racial minorities and people in low- and moderate-income areas where the gains of the 11-year economic expansion

then ended with the COVID-19 pandemic were realized later, and to a lesser degree than across the economy as a whole.

The pandemic has deeply wounded the US economy because of the need to shut down or curtail operations in many businesses. And that has been a very widespread and intense level of pain. But it's also important to note that that pain has been unevenly distributed.

It's being felt disproportionately by people with the fewest financial resources, including many of the same groups who gained only a late and partial benefit from the economic expansion. So that's particularly distressing.

If we're all going to share fully in the bounty of a recovering US economy, it's important to learn how to improve the resiliency of the workforce. And few regions have been called on to be resilient as often as Youngstown has been. After the well documented decline of the steel industry in the 1970s and 1980s, the General Motors Lordstown Assembly Plant, and the area businesses that supplied it, became more important drivers of regional growth. From 2017 until it closed in March, 2019, the Lordstown Plant lost about 4,300 jobs, with an additional 3,300 jobs lost among local suppliers, businesses, and governments. And almost exactly a year later, the coronavirus struck and the Youngstown region has been among the hardest hit in the state.

I serve on Governor Mike DeWine's Ohio Economic Business Recovery Advisory Board on the pandemic. And I can tell you more about the information that we're covering today—it's really exactly the kind of information we need to help guide the relief efforts in the state and to inform how that reopening is going.

I'm hoping that today's conversation is going to help us build on what we already know about building resilience as we think about using our policy tools for the benefit of all Americans. And I think a conversation like this is especially important now because the kind of shock that we're all enduring is unprecedented. We don't really have experience in something like this to help guide our thinking.

Now, before I introduce Chairman Powell, I want to note that today is June 19th, Juneteenth, a day that commemorates the end of slavery in America by celebrating the date in 1865, when slaves in Texas learned they were free.

Much time has passed since then, but the journey to equality is a journey we're still on. The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody and the social unrest that's followed in cities across the country, as well as the pandemic's disproportionate toll among black Americans, highlight racial and economic disparities that must be addressed.

At the Cleveland Fed, inclusion is a core value. It's something that is front and center in how we do business every day. We always strive to treat everyone

with dignity and respect. Our bank represents a diverse constituency and what we learned from listening to them in events like this informs our policy making. Our goal and our hope is to have all Americans share fully in the promise and economic opportunity of our country. And I know, personally, that this is something that Chair Powell and all my other Fed colleagues also feel very strongly about.

Chair Jay Powell took office as the Chair of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors in February, 2018 after serving as a member of the Fed Board since 2012. Now one of his jobs as Chair is to oversee the Federal Open Market Committee, or what's commonly referred to as the FOMC -- not the Fruit of the Month Club -- the Federal Open Market Committee. That's the committee that sets interest rates and other aspects of monetary policy.

When we meet there are 19 seats at the table, most of them are filled with people with strong views on the economy and monetary policy and an eagerness to discuss them. And the great thing about the committee is that we work toward a consensus.

And I think Jay Powell has been particularly very skilled at doing that. He lets everyone have their say and he guides us toward a consensus view. He hasn't allowed the Fed to get distracted by outside criticism. He always is guarding the institution's independence in setting monetary policy by keeping it focused on our congressionally mandated goals of maximum employment and stable prices. And he also is very committed and understands the value of hearing from our constituents about their experience of the US economy, especially in tough times, like the ones that we're going through now. With that, let me turn it over to Jay Powell to present some remarks. Jay?

Jerome Powell:

Thank you. Thank you very much, Loretta, and also Treye. And thanks to everyone for being here today. As Loretta suggested I'm here to listen and learn today. So I'll keep these remarks pretty short. Conversations like this are incredibly valuable to us because they give context to the reams of data and definition to this huge and complex United States economy that we have. And they also help us solve problems on a practical level. So for example, feedback from our Investing in America's Workforce Initiative found a pronounced need for workforce and economic development programs to more closely align. In addition, employers' input has influenced work across the Federal Reserve System, including at the Cleveland Fed, as they look at how skills on the lower end of the pay scale can transfer to higher earning jobs. So for me and my colleagues, thanks for your time today and for your ongoing help and insight.

As Loretta noted, we are meeting on Juneteenth today, amid a renewed reckoning of racial injustice. The pandemic has again exposed a range of troubling inequalities, most of them of long standing. As this national discussion continues, it's critical to remember that equity includes access to education, to work and to economic opportunity. I was reminded this morning that Dr. King

actually delivered his, I Have a Dream Speech, just a few blocks from our headquarters in Washington, DC at a rally, the full title of which was the March for Jobs and Freedom.

We meet today amidst immense hardship and suffering from the coronavirus. Lives and livelihoods have been lost and uncertainty looms large. We're all grateful to our frontline healthcare workers who put themselves in harm's way every day and to the essential workers, the many essential workers who help us meet our needs every day.

While we're all affected, the burden has fallen disproportionately on those least able to bear it. Before that virus swept the globe, the American economy was in a good place. We were experiencing the longest expansion on record and unemployment had reached historic 50-year lows. However, that's a national average and it's a very large country and that glosses over stark realities. The economic good fortune had eluded pockets across the country, including to significant extent Youngstown. A particular cruelty of the pandemic has been its disproportionate impact on many areas that were already suffering. We will make our way back from this, I'm confident of that, but it will take time and it's going to take work. Some of the most valuable information we get from these discussions is how people are working together to create growth, to get back. Your feedback can be an invaluable example for other communities with similar challenges.

The Lordstown closure served as a reminder of how interconnected local economies can be and other areas have experienced similar losses. Your work on diversifying the economy, on skills development, on small business support programs and so many other things can serve as models for others to replicate. The path ahead is going to be a challenging one, but given the opportunity, my colleagues and I will always bet on the American people and on the community resolve and dedication that you've shown here in Youngstown, and that we're going to hear about today. So I'm looking forward to your insight and hearing more about how you've been working to revitalize Youngstown's economy. Thank you very much. And thanks for all you do.

Loretta Mester:

Thank you Chair Powell. And let's get the conversation started. So we really can't have a conversation about Youngstown and workforce resiliency without talking about the Lordstown GM plant. The shutdown of that plant 15 months ago had a significant negative impact when Youngstown and the rest of the Mahoning Valley for both workers and small businesses. So my first questions are going to be about the aftermath of that Lordstown GM plant closing. More specifically, what did we learn about the closing of the plant? How did organizations change to respond to the needs of workers and businesses and what steps were taken to help the community build up its resiliency to this type of shock? And for this question, I'd like to start out with the mayor, Mayor Jamael Tito Brown. Mayor Brown was elected the 51st mayor of the City of

Youngstown in November, 2017. And I really appreciate, and thank you for joining us today for this discussion.

So Mayor Brown, the Lordstown plant used to be described as an economic lifeline to the region, but when GM announced that the Lordstown plant would close, you said, and I'm going to quote you, "Northeast Ohio, more specifically Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, we're competitive. We will take on any challenge that you give us. And we're up to the challenge. This place, the people here, we have that grit." End quote. So, Mayor, can you tell us how the Youngstown community has responded to the need of workers and businesses in the aftermath of the Lordstown GM closure?

Jamael Tito Brown:

I can. First of all, I want to say thank you to President Mester and Chairman Powell and Treye for your thinking about Youngstown and having this conversation. I think it's just one of the first steps to get us moving in the right direction. Youngstown has that grit, the Mahoning Valley has the grit where we've come across challenges before. The first thing that we had to realize that we need to come up with a workforce. And if I could put my sports analogy together, we needed a bench. We needed to make sure that the workforce was ready for industry if they were looking for a place to land that we could say we had the workforce that's ready to go. And that's only because we had a great university and a great community college that made sure the workforce were ready and moving in the right direction for us.

So that's one piece that we've been able to sustain from the closing of Lordstown. It was not just the plant that affected the regional economy. It was the supply line. Many people look at Lordstown is just a one economic piece of it, but the supply line, now the individuals who were making the different parts were coming from various parts of the area. So it was more of a regional impact. And for me as mayor of Youngstown, the plant is not located in the city, but it's been a very good economic boost for many of the residents that I work for in the City of Youngstown.

And the last thing I'll say, and just for opening conversation, now we've got to get to the point where we have that one stop shop with individuals where we match up with the employer, with the employee, with those skill sets that they need to move in the economy that we're talking about. And that's going to happen with our universities, with our community college, but also the piece that I love more than anything, we've become a team. We've put our side our differences. I'm working with the Chamber, the Port Authority, WRTA, YSU, East Gate Regional Government. We've come together as what I call a team of rivals. We've looked at one voice and one ask in the valley, and I think that's how we're going to be successful.

Loretta Mester:

Okay. Thank you, Mayor Brown. I actually want to point out that actually the research that's being done says that approach is actually very successful. So I commend you on taking that collaborative approach. So next I'd like to hear

from Sarah Boyarko. Sarah is the COO and Senior VP of Workforce Development for the Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber. And thank you, Sarah for joining us today. So back in 2018, even before the Lordstown plant closure was announced, you said that, and I'm going to quote you, "The region would be able to support the individuals who lose their jobs at the plant." And you attributed this to the business expansion work that the Chamber and others have done in recent years to diversify the economy. So, Sarah, can you talk a little about some of those efforts that your organization has been engaged in to support businesses in the region?

Sarah Boyarko:

Sure. Thank you, President Mester and also Chairman Powell for inviting us to participate today, we're happy to be here. As you mentioned earlier, I think as a result of the experience that we had with the downturn and eventual decline of the steel industry, as well as a result of the slow, but ongoing reduction of the workforce at the assembly plant over a significant period of time. I think that one thing that helped us is the fact that valley companies, political leaders, economic development professionals, have all worked collectively to diversify the community and our driver industries relative to their investment, the job opportunities, as well as the overall payroll to ensure that all of our residents have an employment opportunity. Because of this, had General Motors closed 20 years ago, let's say, the impact could have been much more significant to the automotive supply chain, as well as service providers.

Many of the companies have diversified their own products within that industry, as well as the companies that they sell to or work with, so their customer base over the years. So certainly we experienced a slow down in many of those companies as a result of General Motors' announcement, but not necessarily a full closure for many of them. With the layoff of the second shift at the assembly plant occurring in the summer of 2018, when I am quite certain, I was interviewed for that statement, the third shift ending prior to that, the future of the facility was certainly unknown at that time. And since the closure, the dislocated workforce has had a variety of options that included retirement for those folks that were able to do so, taking advantage of transfer options that General Motors administration offer to all of their workforce in Lordstown, as well as seeking local employment elsewhere, in addition to the retraining that we're talking about today.

I can say that in the immediate aftermath, the Regional Chamber worked with our colleagues in the chamber world and economic development throughout Northeast, Ohio, and Western Pennsylvania to create a list of over 100 companies that had open positions at that time, as well as conducted outreach directly to our organization and our peer organizations seeking access to the General Motors workforce and the impacted supply chain. So they were ready and willing to hire those individuals. This list also included resources for education and training providers, as well as the Small Business Development Center and the Minority Business Center for those workers that maybe had an interest in starting their own business. There was also a significant community

response during this time. Many of which my peers on the call here, I'm sure, recall. For example, we had a local retail developer that presented gift cards to all impacted workers and a variety of companies, businesses in the region, that offered discounts as well as a variety of services and other purchases that they were able to take advantage of.

I think that one additional unique offering that we would need to certainly share this morning, with a significant number of the dislocated workers, looking at certificate and associate degrees, Eastern Gateway Community College during that time announced a free tuition program for all workers relative to the assembly plant and the corresponding supply chain and service provider. So that was available to all of the impacted workers and their family members.

Loretta Mester: Wow. That's significant. Thanks for noting that.

Jerome Powell: Was that tuition free? Was there support for that?

Sarah Boyarko: There was. So Eastern Gateway Community College offered that through one of their programs. So that was rolled out not too long after the closure. So any of those individual people that were employed at General Motors or the suppliers or any service providers in our market that were directly impacted by a job loss and/or their family members were all able to take advantage of that.

Loretta Mester: Wow.

Jerome Powell: Yeah. That's great.

Loretta Mester: That's great. Are people tracking to see the outcomes? To see whether the people completed the degrees and whether they found jobs after that?

Sarah Boyarko: I'm certain that Eastern Gateway is tracking all of that information. We would probably have to get direct input from them for some specific numbers. We have received positive feedback from our peers, as well as the individual companies that they have brought folks on. We naturally don't have any of their personal information as an individual, names, and so forth, but they have hired folks. I think it's probably important to mention as well that some of those companies actually were UAW companies. So a lot of those people were able to go there directly. In addition to one of the firms that unfortunately did close in our market at that time was Falcon Transport, and those individuals with the access to the CDL were able to get picked up very quickly.

Loretta Mester: Great. Thanks for that information. Very interesting. So now I'm going to turn to Jessica Borza, who on my screen is right next to Sarah. She's an executive director of the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition. And Jessica, you're also a strategic advisor at Thomas P. Miller and Associates, a consulting firm that's focused on workforce and economic development.

So back in December 2018, you spoke about the local labor market needing to get comfortable with the idea of lifelong learning to stay competitive. And we were just talking about education, so this is a great segue. At the time, the coalition was working with local training centers to design programs to help workers who weren't quite ready to transition from GM to another plant. Can you speak about the efforts to help displaced workers who needed some training to find other employment?

Jessica Borza:

Sure, absolutely. Thanks for having us. Yeah, so I'd echo what Sarah commented about as far as we did have a variety of our manufacturing companies who were willing and eager to take on some of the most skilled workers that were affected by the GM layoffs. The reality in our labor market is that it continues to be a very high demand for those skilled positions. And so they were able to transition relatively easily, and I've heard anecdotally from our members that they brought individuals on who were able to make an immediate impact within their companies.

And in other cases, they were able to take advantage of some of our earn-and-learn programs. We've done quite a bit of work in the Valley around apprenticeship and other innovative earn-and-learn programs. And so they were able to bring them on, so there was no disruption in their wages.

But then the company continued to support their advanced skill acquisition through sending them to additional training so that they could continue to get the skills that were needed to be successful in those jobs and to continue to advance.

For us, one of the challenges that presented itself is, because we know that there's such a high demand for these manufacturing workers, which is exacerbated by retirements that we're seeing now and in the near future, the headlines that come out of such an event like the GM closure became a real headwind for us. So as we're trying to get the word out in the community about the good jobs and career pathways that exist in manufacturing, it's difficult to compete against the reality that we did have some significant job loss there within those companies.

So our focus was on really that big question though, that you asked, which how do you help those employees that didn't have as high of a skillset? And that's really been the focus of our group, the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition, over time. So we represent a group of manufacturers who have organized really solely for the purpose of making sure that there's a really good connection between the demand that exists within our manufacturing base locally and our partners in education and training.

So we've been working with our career and technical centers, Eastern Gateway Community College, Youngstown State University, and others to build a system of education and training programs that are really in tune with the

competencies that are needed by our manufacturers locally, so that we really have high quality programs that also complement one another. So they're organized in such a way that somebody can get the skills that they need in a relatively short amount of time to enter into these jobs, but then also can continue their education and skill acquisition, that lifelong learning that you mentioned, and build skills over time. So that they're also building their earning potential and kind of stacking those credentials on one another.

And that's really what's necessary, what we're hearing from our manufacturers in order for them to remain competitive and to stay strong and grow. And so that's our continued focus. But the good news for the GM workers was that many of those programs were already in place. And so they were able to take advantage of them along with some of the resources that Sarah mentioned through Eastern Gateway and other training providers.

Jerome Powell:

It's interesting and a little bit unusual I think that there's that much additional demand for high skilled manufacturing workers. In a lot of parts of the country manufacturing has dwindled and is no longer a major force. And it sounds like in the Mahoning Valley, you've actually got ongoing demand, which is a great thing because manufacturing jobs are a really important. They're very high value added. They tend to generate jobs downstream. I'm telling you this. You know this better than I do.

But I guess the question is there enough demand? If the schools, the two major schools and the other programs can create the skills in those people, is there enough demand for those people or are some of them having to move on into different industries? And are those industries also in present in your region?

Jessica Borza:

We're really seeing demand sufficient enough. Those students that are coming out of either the high school career and technical center programs or post secondary are really sought after. And so, it more becomes part of the role that we play as a sector partnership in our community is providing those connections and making sure that manufacturers know how to access those students and that the students also are getting some early work experience to gain those connections with industry to kind of take some of the friction out of the labor market so that it's seamless and they're able to have a pretty steady pipeline. So yes, there has been.

And we make sure that we are serving as a feedback loop between our education partners and our workforce partners in an industry to make sure that supply and demand is balanced out. So there actually was a time, this has been several years ago, but we saw a little bit of an oversupply of welders. And so we gave that feedback to our institutions to make sure that they were informing the career guidance that they were giving to their students to make sure that we weren't making promises and therefore having students need to move out of the area or whatever. So it really works both ways.

Loretta Mester: Well that's really fascinating. I mean, one of the research programs here at the Cleveland Fed and some of the other Reserve Banks is on this opportunity occupations work, which is I think also trying to get the word out about these jobs that actually pay above the median that are good jobs, but I think people don't realize it all the time. So it's sort of on the same theme about, are people really understanding that there's demand for some of those jobs? So thank you.

So we have this theme developing about training and education. So I think it's a good time to turn to Jim Tressel, who is the president of Youngstown State University. He has been president there since 2014. So a 2018 study commissioned by the state of Ohio looked at the overall impact of colleges and universities on their regions and beyond the economic and jobs impact YSU's civic collaborations were also highlighted. You have 12 industry partners, which is a very high number, 21 universities, and 75 other partners.

So President Tressel, can you speak to us about your thoughts on Youngstown State's role in helping to move the regional workforce forward? And in particular you have an excellence training center, which I'd like to know more about. It sounds like a program designed to tailor worker skills to the immediate needs of the local employers, which we've been talking about. And it is consistent with this research that the Fed is doing under the about opportunity occupations. Can you tell us about the center and other ways that Youngstown State partners with the community to promote workforce development and resiliency in the region?

Jim Tressel: Thanks so much President Mester. It's truly an honor to represent Youngstown State. As you mentioned in that study, we have a real desire to be an impactful group here in the Mahoning Valley. And our faculty work extremely hard. Our staff work hard. Our economic development folks work hard. And so I'm just kind of representing them today because I probably do less of the work than any of them. And I'll try to do my best with that.

And Chairman Powell, thanks so much for your steady hand during these times. It's probably the most challenging times I've seen in my life and I've lived a long time and so certainly appreciate all that you're doing.

And I think the theme that you're seeing is the collaboration we have here in our region. You heard it all the way from Tito, through Jessica, and Sarah. And I think that is the key to what we're trying to do.

We've worked extremely hard because we've been appreciative of the assistance we've gotten from the federal government, from state governments. Now, we've been given opportunities and we really think that we're not going to be short on opportunities. We're going to need to make sure we do our part to execute.

And so that excellence training center that you're talking about, president Mester, really began about five years ago as an idea. And it was really Jessica and the Manufacturers Coalition that got together with some of our faculty and talked about some of the needs, some of the opportunities, some of the research, and some of the things that maybe we could get together to work on. And then as we thought about all of the various partners in the area, we thought we had a great opportunity to put together something special.

So it began as the Mahoning Valley Innovation Commercialization Consortium. It was a group coming together to see if we could meet the needs across the continuum. Of course, we had the educational groups at Youngstown State University, Eastern Gateway Community College. We had our career and tech centers from Mahoning County, Trumbull County, Columbiana County involved. Of course, our city was involved. Our Youngstown Business Incubator was involved. America Makes is right here, right downtown across the street from the mayor's office. And we had our Manufacturers Coalition. And so, we had that whole group come together to talk about creating this training center.

And so it has evolved to being in a consortium, working on all of these opportunities. And then specifically we just began construction on the excellence training center after really getting great support from the state of Ohio, from a funding standpoint, EDA, the Appalachian Region Commission all stepped up.

We had a philanthropic work through YSU's foundation. And so the renovation on an existing building that we happened to get from the county. So there was another partner involved in this. And then the new-build shovel is in the ground. And in a year from now, our dreams will come true that we'll have this center that will be focused on workforce, will be focused on research, and it will be focused on commercialization and prototyping, and some low volume manufacturing, and so forth.

And so, the center itself is going to be 55,000 square feet. We were dreaming about 75,000 square feet, but we didn't quite raise enough money to get there. But I think they're building one floor so that we can add another floor and think about the future. And we have various areas in that excellence training center.

For instance, Eastern Gateway Community College will have an area that we'll be able to train in CNC machining. It will be focused in on some of the things that they're doing. And that there'll be a lot of shared spaces. And I had to write them down here because again I'm not the expert like the folks working on it every day, but manual machining, sheet metal stamping and cutting, CNC wood shop, industrial maintenance, will be ones that we'll be able to share and utilize. And whether it be utilized to get young people interested and you see this beautiful facility and say, "Hey, here's the opportunities," or for companies to help train, or maybe even our faculty who are outstanding in the research fields. So there'll be some shared areas.

And then there'll be some areas that are really focused where we think we have that great connectivity with America Makes and the Youngstown Business Incubator and the whole area of additive manufacturing because our folks are fortunate to have all of those ties. We have some amazing faculty from that standpoint. So a lot of the 3D sand printing, the metrology and CT scanning, binder jetting, automation, robotics. We'll have a foundry in there. And so, what we're trying to create is the whole continuum.

And our real goal is to see if we can get our young people excited about what's right here at Youngstown State or Eastern Gateway Community College, what's exciting about going to one of the career and tech centers. What are those opportunities that can grow from that? And again, it's really the outcome will be based upon how well we can collaborate, how well we can bring people in, let them know the opportunities. We really do believe that we've been afforded wonderful opportunities. And we think this excellence training center can be a great catalyst for us in the future.

Loretta Mester: Well, that's great President Tressel. I can't wait to go see it. You said in about a year, it'll be ready?

Jim Tressel: Yeah, absolutely.

Loretta Mester: Excellent.

Jim Tressel: We'll bring you out for the ribbon cutting.

Loretta Mester: I want to be there.

Jim Tressel: We like ribbon cuttings here.

Loretta Mester: I want to be there.

Okay. So I think it's time to segue into another set of questions. I want to bring the conversation back to the present and not to bring us down, but we're going to talk about COVID-19, the pandemic. We're three months into it. States are starting to reopen. They're all doing it in different ways and on different time tables. There's a great deal of uncertainty obviously about how the pandemic will play out and how it will be affecting and changing our lives.

We do know of course that some businesses and industries are going to be impacted significantly. And I'd like to hear a little about the changes your organization has made because of the pandemic. Have you shifted delivery of your services? What barriers have you been forced to address to serve your clients? And what's really happened in terms of your ability to serve your clients positive or negatively?

And so for this next round, I'd like to start with Carmella Williams. Carmella is the director of diversity inclusion at Youngstown Business Incubator. And she's also the owner and kitchen chemist of Carmella Marie Incorporated, a natural hair products company founded in June 2013.

So Carmella, we all know that small businesses have been greatly affected by COVID-19. And they're going to be and are already adapting to the pandemic. Could you please tell us about the impact on COVID from a small business perspective, both the companies you serve, but also you have your own experience that you can share with us.

Carmella Williams:

Yes. Thank you for having me. From what we've seen when COVID hit from being a business owner, as well as counseling businesses, we found oftentimes with minority, specifically black-owned businesses that the customer base was not diversified enough to be supported outside of their community. So with there being a lot of individuals who were laid off, income's not coming in, those businesses were actually feeling that essential workers who were underpaid that they weren't getting what they were used to getting as far as clientele.

And so with that what we wanted to do, because since COVID hit all of the large events were also canceled, which put a lot of small businesses under great stress. Because, for instance, my business 60% of the income was reliant upon actual in person face to face expos and conferences where people would vend at, especially consumer packaged goods companies.

So at the Incubator we actually started to create opportunities to train those individuals to learn how to pivot from going from brick and mortar to streamlining their actual how they were getting access to their clientele and going online. So a lot of the times we saw that there wasn't a website or they didn't have digital media presence. So we help them to do that.

Also, what we were able to do was provide cross marketing opportunities to businesses who might not have had a predominantly white customer base outside of the black and brown communities. So by doing that, more of the community became aware of them and as a result could support them by purchasing.

So one particular business that we did an actual simple Facebook live, I went to on my day off, was an all-in-one beauty supply store. And we did a Facebook live and just touted the new ownership of this black-owned business. And what she said immediately happened was that she saw an influx in her client base. New clients became aware that she was there and that it was a locally owned store. So we saw a lot. We saw that and that was excellent.

So we also know that small businesses do not have access to capital to be able to pay for marketing, which they don't deem an essential piece. Which it is an

essential piece, right? So we wanted to make sure that we showed them how to do that and tell them and show them that it was actually possible.

Now, with that said, we continue to do actual training with our small businesses one-on-one so that we can customize a plan for them to be able to pivot into ways of making money outside of face-to-face so that they can actually sustain themselves through this time.

Loretta Mester: So there's some positives there in terms of marketing and learning how to expand your customer base, but overall, the pandemic must be a very big burden on the small businesses in the region.

Carmella Williams: It is. And a lot of the times,...incomes got shut down. So now we were trying to help them apply for the EIDL loan and the PPP and for some unemployment. So it became extremely hard. It became very furious. And as the counselors at YBI, we got in the trenches with people. We were literally trying to do all that we could weekends, nights, to make sure that they were getting that handheld experience because a lot of times they were not familiar with how to even do the process. So they had several questions.

It wasn't just send them a link and here you go. We were actually there. So we did as much as we humanly could with the staff that we have. We do have a lot of certified business counselors at the Business Incubator. So yeah, it was hard. Extremely hard at first. It is still hard now because we're still trying to navigate those terrains.

Jerome Powell: Carmella, your businesses is obviously one that was very directly affected given your selling through those events. And you've been very creative in working around that and in helping others do so, too. I'd be interested in two things. One is Youngstown generally, was there a pretty big shutdown? Were all the businesses shut down? And our things now opening up? And how's that going? That's one thing. And I'd just be curious about that.

Carmella Williams: When everything shut down, I went from just, my company went from probably about six different events back to back in one month, let's say the month of April, to zero, which comprised of 60% of my sales on a normal year. So now I know that 60% of my sales are out the door, right? The first month was very rough. As you know, now I had to create and think of ways to generate capital, to pay the base bills that I already had in place from month-to-month. And that's when I just sat and I went back to the basics and began implementing plans with touching my clients through email, through phone calls, through text messages. Sometimes you think it just has to be other ways. I started doing that. And I did see that kind of turn around.

Now as we progress to now, there are some things that are actually happening, for instance, in the black community Juneteenth celebration, there is an actual event on Saturday in Youngstown, as well as another black business expo next

week in Warren. So I am seeing a lot of black businesses, actually, they're signed up as vendors to be there. So that's something that was not there initially on my calendar. And with the state opening up, I think we're going to see more rallying behind that where more businesses are being supported, specifically black-owned businesses due to what we are experiencing now in today's climate.

So I've been seeing a lot of that and a lot of people being intentional about talking about black-owned businesses and intentionally supporting black-owned businesses in ways that I've never seen before. So as a result with Carmella Marie, my sales are up on a month-to-month basis. And even as I talked to my clientele, their sales are up on a week to week basis. Now that we are more aware of how inequality does exist, how racism affects all. And I know that we will continue to see those numbers in those awareness pickup overtime.

Jerome Powell: Thank you.

Carmella Williams: You're welcome.

Loretta Mester: That's great to hear Carmella. Thank you for that. So next, let me turn to Nick Chretien. So you're the program manager for the Economic Action Group, which is a nonprofit organization focused on developing the urban cores and corridors of the cities of Youngstown and Warren. Much like the small businesses you typically serve, the pandemic has forced your organization to shift its operations a bit. Can you share with us about how you've approached that and what the Economic Action Group has been doing since the onset of the virus, what you've learned through your new efforts and how the commercial redevelopment sector's outlook is? I think that's going to be interesting for us to hear about, and also whether programs like the Paycheck Protection Program and other relief programs, how that's impacting the businesses that you serve.

Nick Chretien (KREE-SHUN):

Absolutely. Thank you for having me today. Presently, we do see the demand for space slowly but surely starting to go back up. At the beginning of the crisis, we realized that it was a very tough time to actually go looking for businesses to locate, to expand or make large scale investments in our communities. So, we realized that it really was necessary to kind of pivot where we were focused in terms of our work plan as an organization. We realized we still possessed organizations that related to small businesses and could also be deployed at this point in time to assist. Those skills, being outreach and engagement, also being able to manage data and then we were also a part of the local COVID task force, which took many of the partners on the call today and others regionally to weekly meetings via Zoom, where we discussed the priorities and the gaps in service, where we kind of found our place to deploy our skillset.

Doing that, we worked with both the cities of Youngstown and Warren locally in the Mahoning Valley to do this outreach service, to make small businesses

aware of the federal resources available through the cares act and any resources that eventually became available through the city's block grant allocation. This effort was also assisted by the local foundations who created the Mahoning Valley Community Response Fund, which was huge in the local response. But our efforts were really targeted at getting these resources out to the businesses, supporting the ongoing operations in support of the essential workers that were working through the pandemic and then track the data at the local level and use it for a targeted recovery as we come to the end of it. The results of our efforts, personally, our team has quadrupled in size. We've made thousands of calls and reached out to over 1800 businesses in the Mahoning Valley, 720 responses, more than 720.

And we've certainly seen the impact of these programs, making a positive impact on the region. We've seen it from the very early onset of the pandemic, being in the very low percentages, 1 in 2%, ticking up. I think we're near 15% of the businesses that we've had contact with have actually received resources with even more still interested, still applying and still going for additional resources as the reopening process starts. Having this data at our disposal, I think we're in a very good position in terms of being able to target our recovery and we're going to be continuing on this path for as long as possible, even as our commercial redevelopment efforts start to ramp back up. We're going to be continuing to use the data to see who we did not reach, who was the most impacted, were any sectors disproportionately impacted locally, and then continue to work with the cities, Mayor Brown, Mayor Franklin in Warren, to see what type of full-time programming, not only during the pandemic, can we implement to assist these businesses during normal times to foster a more inclusive ecosystem for entrepreneurship in the Mahoning Valley.

Jerome Powell: Nick, just to be clear if I caught that, the 15%, those were a percentage of the companies that had gotten PPP loans?

Nick Chretien: PPP or EIDL, yeah.

Jerome Powell: Or EIDL? So that's good.

Nick Chretien: You group them together. Yeah, it was the first few weeks when we were doing this, it was down 1, 2% and then we've seen that progression, both in terms of sheer numbers and proportionally of who we've reached out to progressed to that 15% right now and we anticipate to be even higher as we progress, but we don't have our final numbers as we're still doing that second round of outreach to all the businesses locally.

Jerome Powell: And of the ones who applied, did they almost all get it?

Nick Chretien: Yeah. Yeah. I think there's only a couple that we've received responses from that were rejected, but we made it a point to reach out proactively just because they may not have that kind of capacity, whether it's legal, whether it's

accounting to know about it, where just getting that little extra push allowed them to receive these funds that kept the business operations going.

Jerome Powell: That's good to hear. A difficult program that had a challenging start, but is really reaching a lot of people and a lot of small businesses now, which is great. The other one that I'd be curious for any of you, as we go around is the enhanced unemployment insurance of the extra \$600 per week that the federal government added to existing unemployment insurance that runs out in July. And I don't know if Nick, if you have something on that, but I'd be interested to hear how that money is going to support households and keep them together at a time when they may not be getting paid and they may be employed. I don't know if that's over your plate or someone else's, but I'd be curious.

Nick Chretien: We did not see too much in regards to the unemployment...that was coming in. We will be getting more information as the reopening process continues and we hear back from the businesses and they can report back more on that.

Loretta Mester: Mayor Brown.

Jamael Tito Brown: Just in regards to that dollar, it was significant for the city. As you know, across the nation, cities had loss of revenues as well and we had to look at how to reduce our costs and we had what we call volunteer furloughs, and that was a significant help to individuals and many of those who took the volunteer furlough, it was an added incentive. It's given us a help as a city, so I really commend the federal and the state government for doing that because it offered another piece where families were probably at some point benefiting more at home than they were staying at work. So as a city, we looked forward to it and it worked well for us.

Jerome Powell: Thank you. Thanks very much.

Loretta Mester: Thanks for that. So I'm going to turn back to Sarah and Jessica. So part of what Nick was talking about is making sure that people get access to the available resources that are out there, the relief, whether it's the financial relief, but also technical support. We've heard that from a number of businesses that we call, that some of them would like to take advantage of some of the help, but they just don't have the technical ability to do that. I know Sarah and Jessica, both of your organizations are working to provide businesses with that kind of information and support.

Can you tell us about changes that your organization has made in response to the pandemic and the way you're serving your clients so that they can access the relief that's out there? Is there limitations in the kinds of services that are out there? Is that part of what the issue is, that people just can't access the funding that's out there or is it something broader? I'd really be interested in knowing more about what the issue is, because as you know, there's still money

available in the PPP program and yet some businesses don't seem to be able to access it. Sarah, if you want to go first.

Sarah Boyarko:

Sure. So, I think that just like any other company in the Mahoning Valley, the chamber certainly experienced some direct changes throughout this time. Obviously we're working remotely. Some of our staff is furloughed on the events side. Carmella talked about so many in person events being canceled and I know some of my peers have had those same experiences internally with regard to the furloughing and possible pay cuts just as the companies have and I think when we look at their specific needs in responding to your most recent question, I think because of this sort of coming out very quickly and having a rapid response, there was a lot of confusion as to who can qualify for such loans. Would they be forgivable and how do people access those? So for the chamber though, we are not obviously hosting our larger events right now.

We've continued with the service to our customers, through our business services, as well as economic development and advocacy. We have not seen the demand for resources or assistance, COVID or other, change or decrease I should say, naturally we have an additional issue because of COVID-19, but for a lot of companies it has been business as usual or exploring additional opportunities right now, while things are a little bit slower. I think that, like I said, the initial outreach and inquiries that we received directly through our business retention expansion efforts, where we have been talking with anywhere from 50 to 75 businesses locally a week, again, confusion, there's so much out there and how do they navigate all of that system. For us as a result of that, we actually partnered with our board of directors and the businesses that are a part of our board and our executive staff to create our Emerge program, where we're offering one-on-one assistance to the business community as they come across these specific challenges and or have questions on how to navigate the system.

We've created eight specific categories that are relative to daily business and just to give you that list of categories, there's an individual designated to offering assistance for financial, accounting, insurance, healthcare, legal, general business inquiries, government affairs, and anything on the marketing side as well. In addition to those one-on-one conversations that we've had throughout this time and making sure people get to the right individual or the right organization providing the service, just last week, we had pushed out some additional activity or some additional resources through a partnership with the Mahoning and Trumbull County CVBs, where, as things reopen, companies are looking for a way that they can express that they're following the rules of the department of health and individuals using their services are looking for opportunities or looking for a reassurance that these individuals are following those rules.

So giving them a greater level of comfort. So any companies that might be listening today, if they have an interest in making sure that their customers are

comfortable, they can go to any one of our websites and print out that pledge, which can be signed and presented or posted in an area that's visual for those companies and displayed in their location.

Loretta Mester: That's an interesting idea.

Jerome Powell: Yeah.

Loretta Mester: Because I think that's true. It's not only if there're restrictions, it's the comfort level that customers have of going back into the establishment. So I think that's an intriguing idea.

Jerome Powell: Yeah, cool idea.

Sarah Boyarko: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Jerome Powell: Go ahead.

Sarah Boyarko: I was just going to say, I think that all of us as individuals and we've all talked to our peers and or family members that the level of comfort, it truly is something of importance right now, as not only the city of Youngstown, but the remainder of Ohio reopens.

Loretta Mester: Right, exactly. And Jessica, do you want to add something to this conversation about kind of how the organizations are trying to get the kind of technical support out and relief to the relief efforts?

Jessica Borza: Sure. Yeah. So, sector partnerships like ours, the Mahoney Valley Manufacturers Coalition are really all about providing those opportunities to share information and so the way that we typically work, first of all, we typically only look through the lens of workforce and so that's kind of our sole purpose. But, we certainly shifted that during the crisis to really help our manufacturers to address those things that were top of mind for them, we knew that they weren't going to be able to focus on workforce and training if they didn't have the right safety protocols in place, if they weren't surviving because they weren't tapping into things like PPP. So, we organized a number of virtual manufacturing round tables where our manufacturers could come together and talk about these issues that were top of mind for them and so it was really fascinating to watch that work.

And we started, our first one was around safety protocols and there was a ton of information sharing. We had manufacturers who are competitors, mind you, sharing their standard operating procedures and sharing the things that they had already figured out and so that was really interesting to watch. We did another one about PPP loan forgiveness and invited one of our local accounting firms in to help kind of walk through the intricacies if you will, of that process and so, our sector partnerships have a pretty powerful public private

partnership and having the manufacturers come together is one thing that went one step further when we then invited our education and training providers to a Zoom forum with our manufacturers because they were facing this same thing. They're trying to figure out, how do we open our labs safely and invite students back in? What we were able to have is the manufacturers talk about their industry practices with education and training providers, which just created some efficiencies, everybody wasn't recreating the wheel and so that was really useful.

The last thing that I'll mention about this is, our model of this, of manufacturers working with their education and workforce and economic development partners in a sector partnership has now been replicated across the state of Ohio and the Ohio Manufacturers Association has networked us all together and worked in places in Ohio where there wasn't such a partnership to grow those. So now we have a statewide collaboration that was really optimized for purposes of COVID. So the manufacturer's association along with the hospital association created the repurposing project where they identified the needs for personal protective equipment, identified the supply chains that could be repurposed in manufacturing and worked with our manufacturing extension partnerships to actually help these companies re-engineer themselves, so that they could address the most critical needs for Ohio when it came to safety and health measures. And so we really think that's a powerful example of how we can have this kind of agility by all working together and can mobilize and we really think looking toward the future, it will help us position for future opportunities for other reassuring and other opportunities that might come down the pike.

Loretta Mester: Yeah, Jessica, I think that's a really good way of looking at this. There's going to be a lot of things that we've learned through this that hopefully can inform us as we go forward and we can take some of the practices that actually worked and use them for a method of going forward in other situations that can actually be useful in terms of productivity and collaboration. So I really appreciate that. So, Mayor Brown, if you don't mind, I'm going to go to you to close out this question. So we've been talking a lot about small businesses, but as mayor of the city of Youngstown, you have a much broader view of things. Could you talk a little bit about some of the other issues that workers have faced during the epidemic?

Jamael Tito Brown: Yes. You know, when the shutdown happened, there were individuals deemed as essential and nonessential and one of the things that just came out blaring that we learned during this COVID-19 and we're still learning more about is that those who are vulnerable, we learned the health disparities in the minority community. If you look at those who were deemed essential, were in long-term care facilities through grocery stores. How do they get the work? They get on public transportation. Now they're all getting on the bus to go to the same location. So those were some of the barriers that they faced, that we really didn't pay attention to until COVID-19 came about and then the underlining

health issues that came about. So it really spotlighted what we knew to some degree, but it just opened our eyes wider now and not just in Youngstown or the state of Ohio, but across the nation.

Loretta Mester: Yeah, I think that you're right in the sense that there are a lot of these disparities that were existing, the pandemic has shined a bright light on them.

Jamael Tito Brown: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Loretta Mester: And hopefully we can work towards better outcomes once the pandemic is gone, we can still focus on some of these differences, inequalities, experience and ability to engage in the economy...

Jerome Powell: Yes, for sure.

Loretta Mester: So at this point, I'd like to move to the next questions for the group and we've been talking about the past and current, now let's look forward. We already sort of started to talk about that and I know everyone has in their mind, sort of a view of what the new normal is going to look like. We're all thinking about it personally, in terms of our own lives. What lessons are we learning from the experience? How do we think about the way we do our work? How do we continue to prepare people for the future when we know the future is uncertain? What kind of training will people need? What kind of jobs will be out there? What kind of changes in policies or practices do you think will be most helpful for those who haven't really had the full opportunity to engage in the economy and what can we do to help them really engage in the new world that'll come post-pandemic.

So Jessica, I'm going to start with you. Our region is one that has a manufacturing base. How are manufacturers looking towards the future? Are you having to sort of get them to start looking towards the future or have they already started doing that as the state has reopened? And do you see any lasting impacts of this situation will have on the manufacturing sector and how is the manufacturing sector going to adapt?

Jessica Borza: Well, I do continue to think that there is obviously a fair amount of uncertainty that remains. So while we've been staying in tune with our manufacturers and understanding where they are, they're certainly being playful, but there's new information coming at them and it's difficult with the dynamics that are presenting themselves at this point. That said, they have encouraged us to continue the process, the coalition to continue down the path. They know that they're going to be in a position to hire again. They want to make sure that we're not shutting off those workforce pipelines. It's really stressed a couple of things, one is we need to continue making sure that we have really strong workforce training capabilities, but I think we need to be prepared for an acceleration of advanced training or advanced technologies. We anticipate there'll be an acceleration of technologies like automation and robotics for

example, we're already going down that path with our career center in Eastern Gateway Community College and we want to make sure we've got the right instructors, credentials, curriculum, equipment, working with YSU and the excellence training center.

I think that's one piece. The other piece is I think we also need to continue projects that we have underway and continue to expand those who are reaching out to additional residents to make sure that they really see themselves in manufacturing. We know we don't have enough women and people of color in manufacturing, and we want to make sure that we continue to be intentional about that. We have a project going on right now called work advance, where we're partnering with community organizations like Goodwill and Community Action Partnership to extend our reach into the community, to help people understand where the demand is now and where those opportunities will be and packaging up the right set of ingredients and programs and career coaching to not only place them in those jobs, but also position them for advancement. We continue to look forward, our manufacturers encourage us to do that and are optimistic about the future.

Loretta Mester: Carmella, oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Chair Powell.

Jerome Powell: Once upon a time, I spent a lot of time investing in industrial companies, and I'm really curious about this. Just take a regularly, successful industrial company that was doing fine and then it's now shutting down and now reopening, will there need to be typically a lot of rethinking and investment in a workplace that's more pandemic-resistant going forward? Does that present itself a challenge other than just getting back up and running?

Jessica Borza: I think in some ways we're seeing, because of the physical spacing and so forth, companies that are maybe only working one or two shifts now have to expand so that people continue to have the output that their customers looking for, but still having those safety measures. That requires additional utility support and things like that. The companies that had a larger footprint are more easily able to have social distancing, so I think it presents more of a challenge for those physically smaller companies as well. There are definitely some considerations there and probably some additional investments, and one of the reasons why we're actually thinking about automation and robotics even more so.

Jerome Powell: Thank you.

Loretta Mester: Carmella, can I turn to you? You've already spoken about minority and women owned businesses and some of the innovations. Can you talk a little bit more about how you see that playing out in terms of, are we going to be able to actually support those businesses more? Are they going to need a different kind of support than we've had in the past to advance? I'd be really interested in hearing your views on that.

Carmella Williams: Yes. I think from here moving out, I always address mindset and helping them to see that an obstacle can really be an opportunity. With that said, looking at again, different ways they can pivot and like I said previously, we had a client who went from being a printer for dentistry actually shut down altogether with the dentist shutting down. Instead of looking at it as an obstacle, looking at it as helping her to diversify her actual supply chain. She started printing face shields and N95 mask so that was a way for her to actually keep going. In terms of other support, I think I would like to definitely see intentional relationships being formed with women in minority-owned businesses from a banking perspective more so. What I saw on the ground were a lot of the companies who did not have a personal banker did not get any type of response in regards to their PPP application, one.

Two, a lot of the times when even if they did, what I did see is that they were not being accepted or they weren't eligible because a lot of small businesses, minority and women owned businesses, have 1099 and not actual payroll, right? They're not doing a payroll taxation, it's usually just themselves so they do it as an owner's withdrawal. That actually did not, they weren't eligible for PPP. Now they might have been eligible for the EIDL loan, but again, only \$10,000 of that was actually being able to be forgivable. There's a lot of businesses, small businesses, that are missing out on the forgivable PPP that I think could, and that's a lot of the times why they're not applying for it because they can't apply for it because they have 1099 cause they don't have employees. I would like to see that expanded to where it actually is inclusive of businesses who have contractors and not just employees. That would be really, really great.

Also just making sure that we continuously look at diversifying, right? I would like to see more anchor institutions purchased from small businesses, women owned businesses and minority owned businesses, hospitals, universities, cities, that could definitely be an ongoing thing that will really support a sustainable workforce that if we could increase the number of businesses that have just one person getting paid from it to two people, that could be substantial for the Mahoning Valley. We know that small business is the foundation of this Valley and if we can help further strengthen that, we would see very awesome and amazing changes.

Loretta Mester: Mayor Brown, can I turn to you? One of the things that's obvious is that cities are hurting from the pandemic because of the loss of tax revenue. Can you talk a little bit to that and how you view that going forward and what kind of things that you think the city of Youngstown is going to face going forward and some solutions?

Jamael Tito Brown: Well, absolutely. We are like anyone else, we have experienced loss of revenue and you think about when people, you shut down the business, we, we were income tax, sales tax, but also gas tax, casino tax. All those taxes that you don't realize go into a city like Youngstown, the state of Ohio is different than a lot of other states that we depend on income tax and not real estate tax, some states

don't have to worry about that, but we rely on that. When those things go down or go away, then the city suffers from that as well. So we're going to have to, as a city, we're looking like everyone else, we're asking our federal and state legislators to look for us as a loss of revenue. We're not looking for increase, we're just looking for some stability in our loss of revenue. What we want to do as a city, we want to continue to provide a great service to the citizens of Youngstown, but also making sure that our workforce is able to sustain themselves specifically in our safety forces. That's probably our largest area and we want to make sure we maintain our fire, our police, our 911. We don't want to affect those areas but if we were not able to see any, some of those losses there, we've got to start looking down the road and those are really unthinkable decisions that we have to make.

One of the things as a solution, I really want to make sure that we continue to work and have a private and public partnership in our area. We have great investors that invest in the city like Youngstown, I call them the homegrown investors. They'll take the opportunity because they know the potential that's here in the city of Youngstown, but I want to be able to attract others to come into the city of Youngstown. One of the things, when I came in the office, I wanted people to know that Youngstown is open for business. You don't have to pay anybody, you don't have to owe anybody, if you want to benefit Youngstown, we're open for your investment and time. Those are some of the things they're willing to face and I look forward to really nurture those relationships in the future.

Loretta Mester: So Nick, can I turn to you now? You had already said that you're starting to look forward. Can you talk a little bit about what issues you think are coming on the horizon for the businesses that you deal with? The rest of them?

Nick Chretien: We see this as an opportunity for cities locally and municipalities to be very creative and data-driven in terms of the approach that they take to address problems that may be faced at the neighborhood or sector level by businesses. We've already started some of those efforts with Mayor Brown in Youngstown and it's really a good opportunity for cities to reestablish clear paths to communication with businesses, with residents, to establish those public private partnerships, to make sure it goes both ways. Also, a second consideration in the process is the equity. As we go back to analyze our program and the impact we've had, we're looking at it at the neighborhood level and seeing if there were any disparities in terms of responses from one area versus another. We also want our future projects as we begin to come back to some normal programming benefiting the neighborhoods that they're located in. We want the residents, women and minority within the city to be able to benefit from these programs and access them and making sure that our planning takes place along main transit corridors, which are big considerations before a project starts off.

I would say that we want the projects to cashflow, but just in general benefit the city, so whenever we start one of these projects, our intake form has all these check boxes that we start off with just so we do start off on the right foot, benefit the city and the residents of Youngstown in Mahoning Valley.

Loretta Mester: Thanks. Thanks Nick. We started out the conversation talking about education and training so I think it's fitting that our last participant here is going to be Jim Tressel. Can you tell us how you're thinking about what the school is going to be doing to make sure that the programs can train the workforce of the future? How do you see things playing out and what your university is doing to address sort of what the future is going to look like?

Jim Tressel: Yes, the pandemic really hit and our faculty were extraordinary. They pivoted on a dime as our students left to go home and we had to have a safe exit to begin with, our staff was amazing there, our IT department, our academic continuity team, our faculty got together and did a great job the last eight weeks of the semester; as we were getting into that, of course, all of our focus became what are we going to do going forward, especially with we just didn't know what it was going to look like. We put together a group of five focus groups that were tied into the strategic planning that we've been doing the last 18 months, which we call take charge of your future. They had new things to think about though, how could we creatively have the course work knowing that we didn't know for sure how much of it could be face to face, how much of it would be remote? Could it be a hybrid? Our faculty, deans department chairs, our provost, their whole committee, everything we do, we have students involved because we need their input and so forth.

Now we wanted to make sure, and want to continue to make sure, that our communication is ongoing and it's constant because there are fears by students, what's it going to be like? There are fears by faculty, employees. We've been working extremely hard to make sure our communication remains constant. We know we have some financial realities, but again, we think we're very fortunate that we've had great backing from the federal government side and the state governments' working extremely hard with us. When we did need to go to that remote setting, it did have an inordinate impact on some of the folks who didn't have some of the technology, that didn't have some of the situations that were perfect to be taking that last eight semesters, and our people did a great job. We purchased hundreds of laptops for students that didn't have them, we purchased wifi hotspots, we wanted to make sure everyone had that opportunity and 44% of our students at Youngstown State University qualify for the federal financial aid.

The CARES Act was very good to us to help that population who had some financial needs plus many of the other populations that had part time jobs, that were working their way through school and they no longer had those part time jobs. We've been working extremely hard. Right now we're really focused proving that we can come back to campus safely. Our plans are to be back here

with a totally creative way to do it. We have a committee, a focus group, that is solely working on what is the safe return to campus with the social distancing, with all of the various things, making sure our classrooms have less density. Our residence halls have less density. Our dining halls have less density. I didn't know, Chair Powell and President Mester, if you know, but Youngstown State University is the Penguins. I just heard today from one of the people on that committee that our mascot, which is Pete the Penguin, of course, that one of their initiatives is going to be a for Pete's sake initiative. So for Pete's sake, keep your social distancing, for Pete's sake make sure that your hygiene is good and you're taking care of things.

We're fortunate, we have a manufacturer in the area who was one of the largest manufacturers of large trailers for big fairs, like state fairs and rodeos and things like that who pivoted during this COVID and invented a hand washer, which is about a seven foot tall unit with four different stations, socially distanced, no touch for the soap water and the paper towel mobile, so we were able to get our YSU graphics on those and we're going to have 10 of those all over campus, which in every hour, 7,000 people will be able to wash their hands in one hour. Everyone talks about, what's the most important things? Hey, just wash your hands. So for Pete's sake, wash your hands. We want to create an environment so we can get back to work. Because as we said before, we don't think we're short on opportunities. We think we have to make sure we turn out the workforce that will give us the opportunity to take advantage of the opportunities and we need for that to be able to happen for every one of our students. We have to put things in place and our people are working extremely hard on it.

Loretta Mester:

Well, thanks for that, Jim. I think that's one of the things that gives you hope about the future is that everyone has been incredibly innovative in a very difficult situation. That, I think, gives me some sort of hope that we can get through this. We'll be better for it in the end because we'll have learned some things. I think as Chair Powell said, you said this in the beginning, we will get through this. It's going to be hard, but with the attitudes that you all showed today, I think we will definitely do that. I'm not going to ask any more. I think we've had a great conversation today. We're in a couple more minutes to go. I really want to emphasize again the real thing. Thank you very much for all that you have provided us today.

We really are at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and the Federal Reserve System, really wanting to understand the impact of the pandemic on our communities, but also in general, there's a big effort that's throughout the system on really understanding the effects of our policies on low and moderate income area. This work that we're doing, I think is important because it's going to help inform policies, not just monetary policy, but other policy to find real solutions so that everyone can really engage in the economy. I want to thank you for all the information you've provided us today, and I want to send it back

over to Jay Chair Powell, any additional closing remarks you'd like to make before you close?

Jerome Powell: Sure. Thank you. Thank you, Loretta. It's a time of real challenges all across the country. We have COVID and then we have the emergently obvious need for a new era of struggle for racial justice in our country. It's a time of great turbulence and challenging the country and all of that is hitting Youngstown particularly hard. Youngstown's had its challenges, but there are just, there are a lot of strengths here, too. It all really does start with education. You've got an important university and a community college, by the way, Jim, I do know Youngstown State, the best football player in the history of my high school played there. He was a running back in the mid-2000's so I do know the Penguins and I'm sort of a fan. In any case, you've got a history of manufacturing you're right in the heart of the manufacturing belt with a lot of skilled workers, but more to the point you have a lot of smart, dedicated, focused people and organizations around the table, thinking hard about how to make this work.

And that really is the pattern that we've seen in our work and with communities around the country. That's what works, where you're getting federal resources and state resources and private and public and around a strong university and education and in a good workforce. I think there's a lot to look forward to here. You have a lot going for you and we'll be there to work with you in any way that we can so wish you all the best and thanks for the work that you're doing. Back to you, Treye.

Treye Johnson: President Mester and Chairman Powell, I do want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in this event and for keeping the conversation going and making sure it was so engaging. Like President Mester and Chair Powell would like to thank all of our panelists for taking their time to be with us today, as well as everyone who is viewing this events, hopefully you found today's conversation to be valuable. At the same time, we do recognize that this is one of many similar conversations that needs to happen, but it needs to happen in conjunction with real action in order to drive positive change for the workers and businesses in the Mahoning Valley. With that in mind, the Cleveland Fed is working on planning an in person event in Youngstown for later on this year and details about that event are available, we will definitely share them with you. Lastly, before I go, I do want to take a moment from one another Federal Reserve event that may be of interest to those of you who are watching.

The original agenda for this event, when it was still scheduled to be an in person event included a presentation on some research that was done by the Cleveland and Philadelphia Feds around opportunity skills and opportunity occupations. President Mester referenced those reports earlier, and the opportunity occupations report focused on those high paying jobs that did not require a four year degree. The opportunity skills report, which was released earlier this week, highlights those specific skills that people can develop, which will help position

them for high quality, good paying jobs without completing a four year degree program.

If you're interested in learning more about this report, there will be a webinar next Thursday, more information will be shared about that event, along with your post event survey that you receive, if you registered for this event. You can also find more information on our website, Clevelandfed.org. With that, I want to thank everyone again. Thank you very much for joining us and have a great rest of your day. Thank you very much.