

Remarks for David Etwiler  
Siemens Foundation CEO  
American Apprenticeship Initiative Grantee National Meeting  
April 25, 2018

Good morning!

Let me start by thanking the Office of Apprenticeship and the Department of Labor for their ongoing commitment to apprenticeships.

I'd also like to thank our partners at the National Governors Association. Not only do they believe in this model but they truly believe in you. We regularly hear about your victories, as well as the challenges you face at home in expanding apprenticeship to new industries, new employers and new populations. Through it all, the NGA team is dedicated to expanding quality apprenticeships in the U.S. and helping you succeed. And, we share that commitment. That's why we at the Siemens Foundation are so proud to partner with them and the Department of Labor in this work.

Finally, I'd like to thank each of you, working with grant projects across the country to make the American Apprenticeship Initiative a reality. Whether you're working with

- states,
- local businesses,
- colleges,
- community-based organizations,
- unions or labor management partnerships,

the public and private partnerships you're building are essential to building the ecosystem necessary to support apprenticeship far beyond the life of these grants, building solid pathways into economic security for many Americans.

As an aside, I'm a fan of Marge Piercy's poem, "To Be of Use," which is really about the joy that comes from work that is real and doing so together. Working with all of you to build hope and opportunity in this country is a joy for us as I'm sure it is for you.

So, thank you for your commitment to America's workers and employers in developing a highly skilled workforce. It's a commitment we share at the Siemens Foundation and why we're investing in this work.

Since we last met in 2017, our nation's economy has continued to improve. We've seen low unemployment rates, getting us closer to what many economists refer to as "full employment." We've seen an uptick in new jobs and labor market participation as the economy improves. There's no doubt these are good milestones. But when you look below the surface, the data demonstrates disturbing trends that should concern us all:

- Low to no wage growth for the everyday working family;
- Stubborn youth unemployment rates; and
- Higher unemployment rates for African Americans and Hispanics, to name a few.

All leading to an increasing gap in America between the economic haves and have nots, and it should be unacceptable to all of us.

I've heard Paul LeBlanc, President of Southern New Hampshire University, say, "We know that talent is equally distributed, but opportunity is not." And that's absolutely the unfortunate case in America today, especially when it comes to accessing high quality education and training that will make a difference not only in the life of the worker but for generations to come.

And, that's why your work to expand quality apprenticeships is so important. Please hear me on this point. I know we can often get lost in the day to day work of running a program, maintaining partnerships and tracking data. So, it's refreshing to take a step back and look at the long-game.

Your work is changing lives today and for the next generation. It's building a highly skilled workforce at home, enabling local businesses to thrive. It's opening the door to postsecondary education and training in fields with promising potential for growth and wages that make the difference between a second job and time with the kids. It's interrupting the skills gap in demanding technical fields that have gone begging for far too long. And, for many, it's interrupting generations of poverty that have plagued too many American families.

I hope this conference has provided you with new tools, resources and relationships to empower your work in your local communities. I know my team and I have learned a lot from each of you and our speakers.

But I also hope you return home with a clear vision of yourselves as an interrupter – an interrupter of poverty and the skills gap – making a sustainable difference in your states and communities.

Again, thank you for your hard work in making American apprenticeship a reality. Your efforts are more important than ever. Thanks for letting us be a part of it.