

# Transcription

Eloy: Hi, everyone. I'm Eloy Ortiz Oakley and welcome back to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office podcast. It's great to be with you again. And today, I have a very special guest, Mr. Jim Mayer, who's the President of California Forward. And he's coming right off a very successful California Economic Summit. First, Jim, welcome.

Jim: Thank you.

Eloy: Great to have you.

Jim: Glad to be here.

Eloy: You are, as we speak, wrapping up the California Economic Summit down here in San Diego, California, beautiful weather by the way. And can you explain to us and our listeners what is the origins of the summit and what are you trying to accomplish through the California Economic Summit?

Jim: So the summit started six years ago when a group of our regional partners realized that we were several years into an economic recovery in which most people were not recovering, and there was a high-level of frustration among the regions that their needs were not necessarily being met by the state of California. That they have distinct needs in their regional economies, especially around the areas of workforce and infrastructure and housing and community development. And they literally were developing economic strategies that didn't have any action items for the state because they didn't think the state would respond. And so the Economic Summit was created as a venue to identify what the priorities were at a regional level for prosperity, and then to try to harmonize state action.

And what we found was that, while they all had distinct needs, they all had a couple of priorities that were in common and workforce was at the top of it, almost everybody's list. And this was important for capturing all kinds of job growth, but it was most important to their goals to lift people

out of poverty. And there clearly was in the recovery far fewer blue-collar kind of jobs that would allow you to pay the rent. And there was a rapidly growing awareness that it was gonna take industry value credentials and at least two years of work through the community colleges or some other venue in order to prepare you for that kind of employment.

And what we found with the Chancellor's Office was a very willing partner. So the regions were able to articulate what they needed, and we were able to create a partnership between the regions and the Chancellor's Office. And we identified a number of ways that we thought we could improve the way that CTE funds flowed and the relationship between the colleges and their employers in order to make sure that those programs were hitting the mark, that they were providing the right skills to the right Californians to meet the needs of the players. And that was the right throughput. And we didn't discover any of those things. Those were all things that many of your colleges were already working on. And so the other kind of DNA part of the summit is this isn't people who have the right answer or are smarter than everybody else, it's a group of people who realize that by working together, the answer is out there, and it's about identifying them and taking them to scale. And that's been the summit story on workforce.

Eloy: So the summit really brings together a whole host of different players throughout California that focus on the economy or the workforce. What kind of people attend the summit?

Jim: It's really a fascinating thing because it's grown into something that's completely unique in the state of California. And while this started as regions-based, we very explicitly from day one wanted to make sure that we had private sector people, that we had government people that we had civic leadership involved. It was about building that understanding across all of leadership sectors that are really necessary to do the kind of system change work that's gonna be necessary.

And the other thing is that while I've emphasized the area of workforce, that's not the only element of prosperity. And so we've done a lot of work on housing, we've done a lot of work of infrastructure, we're doing a lot of work right now on watershed and watershed management because these are these priorities. And one of the things that they have in common is that not only do we have to do all of those things, but in order to really move the needle, it takes a pretty collaborative effort from those people across those sectors.

So there's 500 people that participated in the San Diego event over the last 2 days. There's another 300 or 400 people that are active in the summit, meaning they're parts of action teams, they're working on various projects we're doing or they're engaged in different projects that are related to this. And we're striving all the time to make that a more diverse group. Being inclusive is a challenge in California because we are so diverse and we are so big. And so as I say, it's an amazing collection of people that probably you won't find in any one place talking about this broad set of issues and yet that's a metric on which we can always do better.

Eloy: So you talked about regions and California Community Colleges are in 114 different communities all across this big, big state, why do you look at the state in terms of regions and why is that important?

Jim: So if you look at the big challenges we have, the geographic scale for them are community, region, and national, and then global. You'll notice I didn't say city, county, or community college district because the challenges we have, transcend those political boundaries. And the economic ones are primarily regional. We have industry clusters within those regions and they're gravitated there for the geographic reasons. We don't have a creative economy in the San Joaquin Valley and we don't have much of an agricultural economy in Los Angeles. And so by focusing on the regional scale, we can focus on where those job creation and opportunity pathways are.

Eloy: And we agree with you. The work that we're doing, strong workforce really is also focused on those regions, so it's, I think, a great partnership we have with the California Economic Summit. Now, part of the summit agenda is these 1 million challenges, can you tell us a little bit about how you framed these 1 million challenges and what work are you doing to get to that challenge?

Jim: So after every year, we do this. We rigorously analyze it and the first question is do we do this again? It's a heck of a lot of work, are we having any impact and is it worth doing? And every year the leaders involved said yes and absolutely. But two or three years ago, after one of the summits, everybody said we're making good progress, but as one of our leaders said, we're not in any danger of solving the problem. And so we wanted to put ourselves in danger of solving the problem. And we did that by literally looking at what the number was. And we could find that in fact there's a logical basis to set a target of 1 million more skilled workers. And just as there is a logical basis to say we need at least 1

million more workforce homes in California and we need 1 million more acre-feet of water every year to close the deficit we had even before the drought. And so we've tried to be pretty methodical in how we go about creating enough capacity and quality within those CTE pipelines in order to be confident that we're gonna be able to close that gap.

And what I wanna underscore is by "we" I don't mean California Forward or the Economic Summit as even the regional organizations, it truly has been this partnership with colleges and with the Chancellor's Office, and with other business associations. And that too is one of the accomplishments I think of the Chancellor's Office was...and being that willing partner, you looked externally. And you built the infrastructure within the system that matched the infrastructure that the regions wanted. They not only wanted some kind of regional structure so that they didn't have to go to eight districts that really all served their workforce shed, they did wanna have some alignment around industry cluster. That's how they'd been doing their economic development. And they wanted that kind of alignment. They wanted people and staff within the colleges that understood those aspects and could work with them around the industry sectors and on a regional basis.

And so one of the great accomplishments I think over the last five years has been the colleges creating that infrastructure that has I think added tremendous value on the side of the community colleges to their communities. And what we've been focused on after the enactment of the Strong Workforce Program, so there was a couple of years there where the emphasis was, "Let's get that program up and running. Let's get that structure in place. Let's have those dollars flow to regions and then have it go to programs based on in-demand jobs. And let's send a little bit more money where the unemployment is higher and let's send a little bit more where they've got programs that are gonna get people into employment. And then we're gonna put some money based on outcomes."

And if you look at that structure and that Strong Workforce Program, that's really a model for how the state can align and use its resources to create all of the permission and incentives to community-based organizations to solve the problem. And it's having impact far beyond the \$200 million. I was on the committee to decide how to allocate the 17%, and I was impressed by college presidents on that committee who said, "This is gonna not just steer our \$200 million, it's gonna steer the \$2 billion of additional CTE money." So that's that infrastructure that's

gotten built within the colleges first around staffing and organization, and now around the fiscal part of it.

And this last year, through the summit, the priority has been on implementation, because we can get these bills passed and they're just not self-executing. The cultures, the bureaucracies, the processes have been known to resist all kinds of change, statutory or otherwise. And that's not out of ill will, it's just the nature of organization...we design bureaucracies to be consistent. That's why we designed them the way they are, to be predictable and reliable, but they also need to have an element of innovation and adaptation. And that's what the Strong Workforce Program, both the structure and the dollars has provided. And so for this last year, the emphases have been working with regional civic partners to really engage with the colleges to essentially take co-ownership for those outcomes.

Also in that meeting over the 17%, there was a college official that said, "There's 6 outcomes here, and 4 of them are post-graduation." And the first thing, and maybe this was a joke. He said, "Why should we be held accountable for outcomes beyond graduation?" And being the only non-college person, I went too far and I said, "Well if you can't get the outcome with the \$200 million, who should we give the money to?" And then there was a chuckle and they said, "No, no, no, we should run this program. This is our program." And I said, "But it's not yours alone in the sense that you've got partners in your community that wanna help you do this."

And so that's the more diplomatic answer is that yes they're being asked to drive those outcomes, including did people get jobs in the places they trained for, and did they get employment? Were they successful? They are being asked to do that. And that's gonna require, and it's to their advantage to work closely with their employers and their business associations and their civic organizations because they all want that same outcome. And that's what we've been seeing in the last year was every region is a little different, but I think if you look back over the last year, the level of engagement has gotten deeper and more meaningful.

I was in meetings where the conversation was so superficial it was almost embarrassing. And you come back six months later and you can see them getting past the tipping point. You can see the colleges seeing the opportunity and the civic leaders seeing the opportunity, and the employers being willing to re-engage because they know it's worth their time. So we're at that moment, Eloy where in many ways we're kind of

still catching up to where we need to be, and it feels like the goalpost keeps getting farther away, but we should be confident that we can make the changes we need.

Eloy: Well, I would agree with you. I think the partnership has really deepened, and we're starting to see real concrete examples of how regions are solving problems on the ground. It's wonderful to see. So you touched on a couple of different topics. Certainly poverty, the summit, we've talked a lot about equity, and we've talked a lot about income divide in California, the growing divide between those who have and have-nots and sort of this concept of two Californias. One of your themes is Elevate California. Can you talk a little bit about that theme and particularly as it relates to equity, prosperity, and sustainability for the state of California?

Jim: Absolutely. So from year one, the idea that we have two Californias and that's unacceptable has been kind of very much a driving motivating force for everybody involved in the summit. But over those six years, I think what we've discovered as many people have throughout the country, that many of these disruptive economic forces are really resulting in structural changes. And the anxiety not just in California but in the nation around economic security is real, it's valid and it needs to be addressed. And it becomes so intransigent and enough research is catching up with us to let us know that it's unsustainable. It's unsustainable economically. We're not gonna thrive when two-thirds of Californians can't afford homes that they're supposed to be living in, and we've got 5 million Californians in minimum-wage jobs right, and two-thirds of those people are head of household, that's just economically unsustainable. And candidly, there's a lot of research to say it's socially and politically unsustainable. Our system of government was not divided for a class society. That was the feudal society and the monarchies that we left behind in Europe, and the Constitution was drafted with the assumption that we weren't gonna have a rich set of elites. Our legislature isn't set up to be a House of Lords.

And so what we've seen through this summit is that it's gone beyond kind of a desired outcome to a requirement. And so we're trying to bring as much attention and urgency to the need for a comprehensive strategy to make sure that people do have the education that they concede. We've gotta be more assertive and coordinated as government agencies to create the conditions under which we're gonna attract the private capital that's gonna result in median wage jobs. Jobs just don't happen in California anymore, at least not enough of them and



not enough of the good ones. And we're trying to use, going into 2018, a season in which we're gonna elect half of the community college trustees, half of the City Council members, half of the county supervisors, half of the Senate, all of the assembly, and the next governor probably for the next 8 years to say, "Do you agree with us that this is the highest priority and we need to work across party lines, we need to work urban and rural, north and south to make sure we're solving this problem." The federal government was never gonna solve this problem for California. It's up to California to solve it.

Eloy: Well, especially not now, so. But you mentioned the rural communities, where is space in this conversation for rural California?

Jim: So when it became clear when we were mapping out what more we needed to do to elevate California, that there was a corollary effort that needed to be made around rural California. And this wasn't a parallel effort, this was that rural communities in California have some distinct needs and we need to make sure that we're adapting whatever work we're doing so to make sure that it works in rural California, whether that's rural forests, rural desert, or rural ag. And so we're on the verge of creating a partnership. And I think we came very close in our meetings with the summit to stand up and elevate rural California collaborative, in which the community colleges have become part of that conversation, the rural county supervisors, the University of California. There's some very good things that are happening to create and restore economic opportunities, but they need to be better coordinated. And those partners have asked the summit to see if we can play that backbone collective organizing effort to help build understanding and connect the...whether it's workforce development or economic development or both, that could really go back to creating some of those median wage jobs in some of those smaller communities.

Eloy: Right. So as we wrap up, let me ask you one last question. You know, the California Community Colleges are in 114 communities in all the regions you just talked about and all the different places across California, how can the California Community Colleges help in this effort?

Jim: You know, the community colleges, I think even more so in the rural areas are a critical community asset. They are everywhere, but particularly in the rural areas. And we're hoping that as that work moves forward, we can identify and create the right connectivity with the community colleges. Throughout the state, the colleges clearly have

been the cornerstone of what the regional organizations felt that they needed. Jim Fallows recently traveled around the country and documented communities that were thriving despite horrible conditions, and among the 10 things that he says every 1 of those thriving communities has is a strong community college.

Eloy: Great.

Jim: And so that's part of our roadmap as well. This isn't just about workforce development, it's everything community colleges bring to community. And increasingly, it's gonna be about adaptability and resilience, and innovation because the future is not gonna look anything like today.

Eloy: Well, on that note, thank you for joining me, Jim. I've been talking with Jim Mayer, President of California Forward and the primary sponsor of the California Economic Summit. It's been a pleasure talking with you, Jim. Thanks for joining us.

Jim: Glad to be here. Thank you.

Eloy: So you've been listening to the California Community College Chancellor's Office podcast. We look forward to our next guest and hope that you join us. Take care everybody, and thanks for listening in.

Man: Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.