Commissioner Conversation: Remote Work

Attendees:

- Stephane Kasriel (Commissioner, co-convener)
- Roy Bahat (Commissioner, co-convener)
- John O’Duinn, Author and Consultant CivicActions, Vermont “remote worker” incentive, cofounder
- Molly Pyle, CivicActions cofounder
- Jamie Orr, Founder & Operator, CoWorkTahoe
- Laurel Farrer, Utah Remote Work
- Aaron Bolzle, (TulsaRemote)
- Matt Dunne, Center for Rural Innovation, Vermont & Black River Innovation Campus
- Irma Olguin, founder Bitwise, Fresno.
- Adam Hickman, The Gallup Organization
- Stacy Elliott, Microsoft
- Dan Lindquist, Work on Mainstreet
- Doug Ludlow, Work on Mainstreet
- Kate Lister, Global Workplace Analytics
- Michael McGeary, Upwork
- Julie Su, Secy of Labor (CA)
- Lenny Mendonca, Chief Economic Adviser, GO-Biz
- Aneesh Raman, Senior Advisor on Economic Strategy and External Affairs, Gov. Newsom
- Abby Snay, Deputy Secy. of Labor (CA)

Discussion:

- Assembled a group of experts in remote work.
  - People involved in the remote work policies set by Vermont, Utah, Massachusetts and Tulsa, OK.
  - Inland California residents who are building co-working spaces and other initiatives to attract and/or retain knowledge workers to work remotely.
- Why remote work?
  - Based on BLS data, about 25% of jobs in the US can be done remotely and this number is poised to grow.
This can be a major vector to address various crises affecting California
  - Using San Francisco as a model for discussion, data show that residents have jobs that could be done from elsewhere in the state. And increasingly, they’re open to moving. And unfortunately for California, when they move, it's often out of state.
  - Conversely, people whose jobs require them to be in SF increasingly can't afford to live anywhere nearby, leading to ever growing commutes.
  - The Commission was in Stockton last month. Population ~300k of which ~80k commute to SF every day.
  - The question is: how do we accelerate the transition
- To that end, we adopted three frames for discussion:
  - Incentive programs, skill development, and infrastructure needs
- Then, we asked several questions to tease out key learnings in each of those areas.
- What would you need in order to do what you do faster/better?
  - Jamie: Capital investment to help with real estate acquisition
    - Also, increased access to broadband
    - Opportunity zones can also provide a solid framework for incentivizing and placemaking
  - Irma: Transit, transit, transit
    - We are actively marginalizing ~65% of our population
  - John: VT law calls out that fiber last mile is hard, but easier if you are going to one building in a walkable neighborhood
  - Mike: How do we incentivize hiring from away from traditional areas like Silicon Valley to throughout the state?
- How do you cross the recruiting chasm if people feel like there’s a dearth of opportunity?
  - Aaron: We faced this in Tulsa, first we talked about how remote work makes you place-proof long-term
    - We also asked, do communities know what they need to do to recruit and retain talent?
  - John: Economic development has a chicken/egg problem
    - Aaron: we now have the data to combat the narrative and we’re finding positive response
  - Jamie: I often act as a reference to discuss the community remote workers would have access to
  - Laurel: What these programs are lacking after launch
    - 5 pillar ecosystem govt, community, employees, employers, educators
      - Utah: 6k tax incentive per role for conversion to virtual > 0 roles converted because of lack of talent pool access
    - There has to be a step-by-step handholding process
● Have training programs for all parties which map to similar curricula
  ○ Kate: The trust issue is the largest thing holding back
    ■ 86% wants to work remotely, 3% of jobs are remote
● If we got one line in the report, what should it be?
  ○ Stacy: If people don’t drive as much, there’s a conservation aspect, tap into the climate/sustainability narrative
    ■ John: Tie into existing program like spare the air?
  ○ Kate: Demonstrate the ROI, show bottom line impact
    ■ Show overall strategic imperative not just a tactical solution
  ○ Kate: State also needs to walk the walk on telework
  ○ Laurel: Facilitate, don’t just advocate
    ■ Give businesses access to common tools, lexicon and curricula to manage and enhance transition to remote
  ○ Adam: Three chunks of data tease out obstacles and opportunities
    ■ Pre-employment, brand and culture, awareness and acceptance
    ■ Shift long-term workforce investment to performance development, not management
● We identified 3 areas for further exploration and recommendation:
  ○ Learn from existing incentive programs, rewire them for the CA economy to get companies to allow remote work / de-location / encourage hiring from inland California
  ○ Build skill development programs: most of these jobs don’t need a 4 year degree. E.g. Trailblazer program + Google.org
  ○ Define infrastructure needs: broadband, co-working spaces, transportation (shuttles, transit, etc.) and map to how to best serve communities
● Proposed pilot between SF / South Bay and Stockton.
  ○ Too far for (enjoyable) daily commute but close enough for regular meetups.
  ○ What can we do to build that connective tissue