

We're speaking today with Heidi Shierholz, the chief economist at the US Department of Labor. Heidi follows the job trends and occupational opportunities around the country. And so this is a good opportunity to discuss where some of the good jobs are. So Heidi, thank you for joining us today.

It's my pleasure.

I wonder if you could start by telling us what do you see as some of the good job opportunities for young people entering the labor force today?

I think it's important to know that there are a lot of good jobs being created. There are a lot of good opportunities. And if you look, our Bureau of Labor Statistics does these employment projections, where you can look and see what kind of jobs are growing strongly for the next 10 years, what kind of wages will those jobs have. And there's some trends that come out of that, that you can see. So some of the fastest growing jobs are jobs in the health sector, particularly nurses-- really strong wages and really strong job growth.

We also see good job growth in the tech sector, so software engineering, software development, those kinds of jobs are growing quickly. You also see projected growth in some jobs in professional and business services like accountant jobs and auditing jobs, sort of those old standbys. We're going to always need them, and they're really decent paying jobs.

So that's at the high end of the labor force. How about at the middle tier of the labor force. What's happening there?

One of the phenomenons that we're seeing there is there's this big group of people who are hitting retirement age, the baby boomers. And as that continues to happen, there's going to be a lot of job turnover in some of these really good middle class jobs like carpenter jobs, electrician jobs, utility workers, welders. Those kinds of jobs that historically people got a lot of training in those kind of jobs through their unions and apprenticeship programs.

As we have this group of people that was trained in that way hitting retirement age, we have to really figure out how we're going to refill those jobs. One of the things the Department of Labor is doing is really doing everything we can to support apprenticeship programs so they can help train up people to get into those jobs, because those are really good middle class jobs that are going to be very in demand going forward.

Well that's great, because apprenticeships have such a positive record, so rebuilding those is so critical to our economy and the future workforce.

Research shows apprenticeship has the highest rate of return as far as investment in workers, what pays off for

the economy, for their future earnings. So it's a really good route for our country to invest in and for people to take advantage of as they're thinking about what their careers are going to look like going forward.

And what about at the lower end of the occupational distribution?

The projections show that we are expected to add a lot of jobs that, at this point, are low wage jobs: home health aides, food prep workers in restaurants and bars, child care workers, janitors, maids and housekeeping cleaners. So some of these lower end jobs are projected to see strong growth going forward. So I think that's a really important segment of the labor market to think about.

And that's where policy can come in to help make sure that those are better jobs. So things like making sure we have a decent minimum wage-- increasing the minimum wage. Making sure people have overtime protections. Making sure that people have paid leave. The president just announced initiatives to bolster paid leave in the United States. Those kinds of policies can help ensure that we have high quality jobs for people at all levels of education and training.

Certainly important that we really help to improve those low wage jobs and provide career opportunities for growth, and so on. What else would you say that young people need to do to prepare for the good jobs of the future?

Thinking about investments in your own training and education over the course of your career is a really smart idea. One of the things people should be doing is asking their employers for what opportunities there are for advancement, asking your union what can you do to help support these kind of career ladders, looking into things like joint union and management programs that support these kind of career ladders. For example, there's programs that will help people go from a nursing assistant, to an LPN, to a registered nurse. And if you can think of supporting those kinds of trajectories, you can really carve out a career that really let's you punch the ticket to the middle class.

I think that's good advice. Young people have lots of opportunities and they have to create new ones along with the partnership of the Department of Labor, and good employers, and good labor organizations. So thank you very much.

It's been my pleasure.