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MEASURING CHILD WELL-BEING:

A NEW INDEX

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Introduction:

Dr. Isabel Sawhill, Vice President and Director, Economics Studies, Brookings Institution

PANEL ONE: The Index and Changes in Child Well-Being, 1975-2003

Panelists:

U.S. Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.)

U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.)

Kenneth Land, Professor of Demographic Studies and Sociology, Duke University

THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.

P R O C E E D I N G S

Introduction

DR. SAWHILL: [I'd like to welcome] all of you to Brookings. We are very, very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to showcase some important work that's been done by Professor Kenneth Land from Duke University, who is sitting up here with my colleague Ron Haskins.

It's on trends on child well-being in the United States, and I think is a very excellent example of how research can catalyze a broader conversation about what's happening to children in this country.

I might mention, before we turn to the program, that Brookings has been doing a lot of work on children's issues over the last few years. I might just mention three of our efforts that are related to today's program.

The first is something that we call the Children's Roundtable, which was a group of scholars that met for about five years, and we put out a book in the middle of last year called "One Percent for the Kids." And in that book, we asked leading researchers in different areas to put forward policy proposals that their research suggested the country should consider adopting.

And we called it "One Percent for the Kids," because when we added up the budget for all of these policy proposals, they came to about an extra one percent of GDP.

And although that seems like pie in the sky, given the fiscal difficulties the country faces right now, we noted in the book that in Great Britain, under Tony Blair's leadership, the British have done exactly that: have devoted an extra one percent

of their GDP to children. So, there are copies of that book, if you're interested, out on the credenza.

We have also, as many of you know, had an extensive effort underway over the past few years assessing the consequences of welfare reform, and looking particularly at the impacts on children and synthesizing the research on that question, putting out policy briefs, doing a variety of events on that set of questions.

Finally, our newest effort in this area we call the "Future of Children." We have been awarded a grant by the Packard Foundation and a group of other foundations to take over the policy journal by that name, the Future of Children. We're doing this jointly with Princeton University, and we will be working extensively on, again, bringing research to bear on policy through that mechanism in the future.

We have a great program for today. In addition to Professor Land, we will shortly be joined we hope by two members of Congress. They have both--they're both a little bit late. One is Professor--I mean, excuse me--Congressman Ben Cardin, who is on his way here from BWI Airport, but we expect will be here soon. And the other is Representative Dave Camp, who we also expect to turn up shortly.

I'm very pleased that in addition to Professor Land and two members of Congress, we have Professor Lindsay Chase-Landsdale joining us today.

Lindsay, as many of you know, is a leading expert in the country on children's issues. She is someone I always listen to carefully because she not only knows the research, she always makes good sense when she talks about it in a very nuanced and intelligent way.

She will be joined by a panel of experts and policy makers, and we're very pleased to welcome all of you here, as well.

I want to thank the Foundation for Child Development, and particularly its president, Ruby Takanishi--Ruby's in the second row here--and her colleague, Fasaha Traylor, who have really catalyzed this whole effort.

They have funded the production of this and the research going into this index, and they are also funding this event today and other activities that will follow on it.

So, with that, I'm going to turn this over to my colleague, Ron Haskins, who will hopefully get a chance to welcome our two members of congress before too long, but, who, in the interim, can perhaps turn to Professor Land.

DR. HASKINS: Don't go too far away. We may insert you as a member of congress in just a moment.

DR. SAWHILL: All right.

The Index and Changes in Child Well-Being, 1975-2003

DR. HASKINS: Well, the business that we're about this morning has two roots. The first is that the federal government collects, publishes, and analyzes or otherwise pays for masses of data. Many of you may be familiar with what is probably the second best federal publication after the Ways and Means Green Book, the Statistical Abstract of the United States, which contains numerous charts about children and families, as well as many, many other issues.

In addition to that, there's a magnificent piece of work that was done by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics called America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being. This is the most recent edition, but there's several previous editions.

So, we are a country that loves statistics. Our Federal Government pays for many--the collection and analysis of statistics. So, we have a lot of information about children and families.

But second, I'm going to shock you now and tell you that this is a political town, and in this political town, people are fighting for media attention and, most importantly, money. And, so, when decisions are being made about war and peace and Medicare and Medicaid, some people have notices that kids occasionally get lost in the shuffle.

And, so, there is a second strand who believes that statistics could be used to inform the country, to inform parents, to inform program people, and, above all, to inform policy makers at the federal and state level of the condition, the well-being, the status of the nation's children.

And if we could do that and bring prominence to it, that it would be, it could be, a stimulus to policy making and to additional programs for children. So, for both of those reasons, we're very pleased to have this program here this morning, and to welcome Kenneth Land, a long-time professor at the University of North Carolina--oh, I'm sorry. Really, I'm so sorry. He's from Duke. I'm sorry. He went to Duke only 30 years ago, so I got confused, you know.

So, Professor Land has been working in this area for many, many years, and has, in fact, derived a single measure as well as other measures that are associated with the single measure; and we're very pleased to welcome him here. He will give a brief overview of the Land FCD Index and tell you the results since 1975. And following that, perhaps, we will have two members of congress, highly reliable members of congress, who will appear and will be appropriately introduced at that moment.

So, Professor Land, thank you.

DR. LAND: Thank you. So, I'm told this will come up. Okay.

Let me begin--can you hear me? Okay. Let me begin with a brief historical note of appreciation.

Some 25 to 30 years ago, at the other end of the Brookings huge building here, there was an organization with a long title called the Social Science Research Council Center for Coordination of Research on Social Indicators.

And it existed for about 10 years there, with National Science Foundation support, and its objective was to stimulate the production of social indicators that would complement the very good gross domestic product indicators of the economy at that time.

And I was on the Advisory Committee of that Center, and there are at least a couple of people in the audience today who remember that Center and who worked with it. I know Don Hernandez perhaps started your career there, and the Center did focus the attention of the federal statistical agencies on the objective of developing social data, social indicators; and it spun off, among other establishments, Child Trends, which continued that work here in Washington, D.C., and, later on, in the 1990's, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics was established and began the annual publication of America's Children. And we have built on that work, and you will see that in the presentation here today.

Let me also preface my remarks by saying that Ron asked me to speak for 15 minutes, and I have to say that, you know, asking a professor to speak for 15 minutes is almost cruel and unusual punishment.

DR. HASKINS: So is more.

[Laughter.]

DR. LAND: Well, I just want to point out to Ron that, you know, we chose colors for the presentation today which have, you know, the Carolina blue sky in the background, but, on the top, you see etched above the sky, in Duke blue, the main logo for this presentation.

So, let me get on with the presentation here today. Okay. What is the Foundation for Child Development Index of Child Well-Being, abbreviated form, the Child Well-Being Index. What is the CWI?

What we are attempting to do here is develop a composite measure of trends over time in the quality of life or well-being of America's children and young people. It consists of several interrelated summary indices of annual time series of 28 social indicators of well-being.

The objective of the CWI is to give a sense of the overall direction of change in the well-being of children and youth in the United States as compared to a base year. The base year we use for our longest historical comparisons is 1975, and that's because several of the indicator series that we use in constructing the CWI began to be available in the mid-1970's.

Now, the CWI is designed to address the following kinds of questions:

Overall, for example, on average, how did child and youth well-being in the United States change in the last quarter of the 20th century and beyond?

This project began when Ruby Takanishi, the President of the Foundation for Child Development, approached me and indicated that she sometimes gets this type of question from journalists and others who say things, like, well, you know, you're engaged in all these efforts, and there are all these other groups engaged in efforts to

improve the well-being of children in the United States, and we have many kinds of studies out there and indicators of this and indicators of that, but really how are we doing overall? Can we answer that question?

And, while our efforts certainly will not be the last word on this, and we will continue to work and improve our indices in the future, and there will be better indicators series developed and that can be incorporated into this sort of project, at least we're beginning to focus our attention on this question at this time.

So, we ask questions like:

Did well-being improve or deteriorate, and by how much?

In which domains or areas of social life?

For which age groups?

For particular race/ethnic groups?

How do they compare for each of the sexes?

And did race/ethnic group and sex disparities increase or decrease?

Now, a brief word about the methods of index construction: we use annual time series data, to the extent that we have it, and in a few cases, we interpolate data series that are not available on an annual basis from vital statistics and sample surveys that have been assembled into some 28 national-level indicators in seven quality of life domains.

Now, let me point out that we're now resting on about 30 years of studies of well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness that have been conducted since at least the early 1970's, and what we did in beginning this project is we took advantage of that body of literature. Because, you see, back in the 1970's, when the SSRC Center and others were beginning their advocacy and development work for

social indicators, we really didn't know what we know today about the kinds of things these studies reveal over and over again about the aspects of life that lead to good adjustment, to happiness, to life satisfaction.

And what we did, when we started this project, is we looked at that literature, and we found that seven so-called domains of well-being, areas of social life, occur over and over again in study after study. And we identified these.

One of them, of course, you would imagine is material well-being. A second is health. A third pertains to what we call safety and behavioral concerns. Productive activity. For most children, this is educational attainments. A place in the community. Attachments to social institutions, such as participation in schooling or work institutions. Social relationships with family and peers. And, finally, an emotion and or spiritual well-being dimension.

Now, again, these seven areas of social life occur over and over again, and study after study has verified that there out there in individual's lives. Now, let me remark that, of course, get turned on, probably by something that's unique to ourselves; and, so, in addition to these seven areas if you look at the quality of life studies, you'll find that, in focus groups and sample surveys and so forth, individuals will identify some unique aspects of their lives that really turn them on. But these seven tend to occur over and over again.

In this sense, what we have here in the CWI is what you can think of as an evidence-based measure of trends and averages of the social conditions encountered by children and youth in the United States.

So, it's evidence-based in two senses: evidence-based in the sense that we use data series that are based on real empirical data; and evidence-based in the sense that its organization builds on some 30 years of studies of well-being and quality of life.

So, our methodology--and do I have to wing through this, Ron; are you going to pull the hook out if I go over?

DR. HASKINS: No, you've got about 45 seconds.

DR. LAND: Each of our 28 key indicators is indexed as a percent change from a base year. Our methodology here is kind of like a Consumer Price Index methodology. Subsequent annual observations are computed as percentages of the base year. The indicators, a couple of them, began in the mid-1980's. These use the corresponding base years from the '80's.

The base year is assigned a value of a hundred. Directions of the indicators are oriented such that a value greater or lesser than 100 in subsequent years means the social condition has improved or deteriorated.

The time series of the 28 indicators are grouped into our seven domains, and the domain-specific summary, or composite indicators are constructed within these summary indices. Each indicator is equally weighted, and the seven component indices are combined into an equally weighted summary index of child and youth well-being.

Why equal weights? Well, I have a methodological paper with a statistician colleague, and we show that in the absence of a strong consensus on a preferential ordering of weights, it's better to equally weight because you get more consensus around the equal weights than you do around any other type of weighting scheme unless there's strong consensus on what the weights should be. And I don't think there's strong consensus at this point.

So, some significant findings. The following chart shows some changes over time in the CWI and its various components. I think everyone here has a copy of our 2004 report. We'll look here at a couple of minutes for the overall index of child well-being, the domain specific indexes. We look at some particular indices on obesity, single parent families, poverty, criminal offending and victimization, teenage birth rates and suicide, some race specific indices.

This is the first one. This is our overall summary composite index, and, again, using 1975 as the base year with a value of 100, we see that this index kind of bounced around in the late 1970's around that value, and then it began a long decline that continued through the '80's into the early 1990's, and since then has shown a fairly steady increase, with increases in recent years slowing down somewhat.

Here is the spaghetti chart. This one shows the domain-specific summary indices, and I'll remark about some of the findings here. I'll point out to you that our-- that some of these are closely correlated with changes in the overall macro economy. Material well-being you might expect to be one of these, and, if you look at the material well-being diamond series here, you see the imprint of major economic expansions and contractions: in the early '80's, a recession; in the early '90's, a recession; and an expansion in the late '90's; and a somewhat tapering off since then.

Some of the other series composite indicator series here show different trends, and I'll remark about some of the findings on those in just a moment.

I want to show you some of the sensitivity analyses we've done. This is our health domain summary index, with and without the obesity series. And you'll see that this series show substantial improvements in the early part of the period, up until the mid-1980's, and kind of an oscillating trend since then. But if you factor in the trend

towards children being overweight, you get an overall composite index that's pulled down quite a bit.

This is a particular component of the safety and behavioral domain of well-being. It's based on the National Crime Victimization Survey data on violent crime victimization and offending for ages 12 to 17. And the victimization series shows again a kind of oscillating trend up until the mid-1980's: a takeoff beginning in '87 to a peak around '94, and a slide since then.

And what's remarkable and really confounding to us criminologists is the continuing slide here, well beyond and below the levels observed in the early part of the series. This upsurge here, of course, was associated with the crack cocaine epidemics and wars of the late 1980's and early 1990's.

Here is another series. It's a major component in our emotional well-being area. This is the suicide rates for ages 10 to 19, 1975 to 2001, with our projections. And, of course, we're not constrained as are the America's Children folks being part of the Federal Government. They have to be very careful as statisticians. We can study the time series properties of these indicator series and do our projections. And, so, we take the bold step of projecting, in some cases, 2002 and 2003--in most cases, just 2003. But, in any case, you see that there was also a period in which the suicide rate went way up compared to its early years, and then has come down more recently.

This is from our race and ethnic specific group studies, and this shows our overall composite index for white children and youths, African American children and youths, and Hispanic children and youths.

And, of course, these are three large and heterogenous population categories, and another problem with these data is we can only go back to the mid-1980's, because most of the data series don't have these race and ethnic identifiers before then.

What they do show is that our minority children and youths did suffer more during the downturn in well-being in the late '80's and early '90's, but since then, the overall composite indices have come up quite substantially, just as for the white children and youths.

So, some conclusions. I know Ron is going to get the hook and pull me off the stage here in a moment.

The overall well-being of children and youth in the United States shows substantial improvement in the seven years from 1994 to 2000. These improvements continued in 2001, and are likely to continue through 2003, but at a slower pace. However, historically, the CWI showed a decline in well-being for a number of years in the 1980's and reached low points in 1993 and '94.

These declines mirror economic restructuring and especially in the 1980's recessions and expansions and demographic changes.

The replacement done by major demographic change was the replacement of the GI generation of parents, those parents who fought World War II and the Korean War, and then raised the boomers; the replacement of that generation of parents by the boomers themselves as parents in the 1980's and 1990's; and the changes in social institutions that the boomers have brought with them, such as changes in family structures, definitely shows up in the--leaves its tracks on the imprints of these indices.

Only since 1999 has the CWI improved to above the 1975 base year levels. A number of key indicators have had a significant impact on the CWI over this 25- to 30-year period. Clearly, obesity, and we need to address that as a society, both for adults and children in contemporary times. Single parent families and its trends. Poverty. Criminal offending and victimization. Teenage birth rates and suicide. Each of these indicator series have had substantial impacts over the 25- to 30-year period of the CWI.

Although children and youth in the United States currently are faring at least better than they did in 1975, they could be doing much better. We engage in an exercise we call best practice frontier by using the best value on each of our 28 indicators and computing what our overall composite indices would be if each of our indicator series were at their best historical values for this historical period. And we find, when we do that, that we could be some 15 to 20 percent higher in recent years than the observed values.

So, anyhow, that's a brief version of the story we have to tell with this overall composite indicator. It's not the last word. It's a beginning effort. And I would hope a generation from now, just as we can do a lot more than the SSRC Center could have done in 1975, I would hope a generation from now, this type of effort could be much improved from where it is today. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

DR. HASKINS: Thank you very much, Dr. Land, and now we're fortunate to be joined, and I mean fortunate, by two very influential members of what I think could safely be called the least influential subcommittee of the most influential committee in the Congress, the Human Resources Subcommittee.

And I would call your attention that this Committee has jurisdiction over a host, a mass, of children's programs, including Supplemental Security Income, Cash Welfare, the Child Support Enforcement Program, almost all of the child protection programs; has substantial influence on the Earned Income Tax Credit. So, this is a Committee that really has a lot of responsibility for children's programs.

And we're very pleased to have Dave Camp from Michigan, who's a long-time member of that Committee, and also probably one of the most important Republicans in the House on children's issues. He was the acknowledged House leader back in 1997, when the Adoption and Safe Families Act was passed.

And Ben Cardin, who I think is acknowledged as the House leader among Democrats on several issues, including most recently the Reauthorization of Welfare Reform Bill. Hopefully, when this meeting is over, we'll get Camp and Cardin together in the back room and let them cut a deal, and we'll get a bill this year, I hope.

So, thank you very much. We've asked them to speak for eight minutes, and then we're going to have questions. So, why don't we start with Ben Cardin?

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: Ron, thank you very much. First, I disagree with you. The Human Resources Subcommittee is the most influential subcommittee, and I was going to say that, you know, since we've had new staff there, the subcommittee has gotten--

DR. HASKINS: The influence has gone up.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: Right. Exactly. I do want to acknowledge Nick Wynn, who's here, of course, as staff director on the Democratic side for Human Resources, and is very, very helpful to the entire Committee. And Ron's absolutely right: if Dave Camp and I could cut a deal right now on TANF Reauthorization, I think

you would have a very good bill that would be sent to the President. And I'm not so sure the President would sign it, but we would work out, I think, a very good bill.

It's a pleasure to be here with Dave Camp, who I think is one of the most serious legislators in Congress on child welfare issues and child well-being issues, and it's a pleasure to be here with him. He is very much interested in trying to figure out ways that we can get policy changed to help children in America. So, Dave, it's a pleasure to be here with you.

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: Thank you.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: Professor Land, I thank you for your presentation. I read the material. I'm very impressed by it. Congressman David Price told me to expect a high quality of product, and it is; and I'm feeling much better about Duke University now since the ACC Tournament, and Maryland beat Duke. It's nice to be here with you. So, it's a pleasure to be--it's interesting. I looked over your material, and I was trying to figure out the reason why all the domains were rated evenly.

And you gave a very good explanation: you couldn't get consensus on which factors are more important than others, 'cause I had a hard time equating a child's faith strength versus material wealth as being equal. But I understand you needed consensus.

If we had a way for consensus in Congress between the Democrats and Republicans, nothing would get done. So, I appreciate that, although I think there is a difference on the importance of the different factors. But you clearly utilized existing material to come up with a well-being index, which is extremely helpful to us, because so many of our policies are affected by the factors that you have used to develop your indexes. And that can only be helpful to us in trying to come together with policy that

can improve the well-being of children. So, we are very much appreciative to the work that was done, and I think it can be extremely helpful.

Now, I'm going to talk--one factor I would ask that we look at and that is this is good national numbers. It would be nice to have it on a state-by-state basis. We do rely on our states to implement many of the policies concerning child well-being. I know that Senator Rockefeller is working particularly with the Annie Casey Foundation to develop a state-by-state analysis for a well-being of children, and I think we should be supportive of that, because it would be useful to see how our states are doing in relationship to each other, and trying to get the best practices.

Now, you went through what your report showed, and I'm not going to repeat that--the decline in the early '80's to the mid-'90's; that we're slightly higher today than we were in 1975. The biggest increases in safety issues on well-being. The biggest decline on health, mainly because of obesity. The material well-being climbed from 1993 to 2001, and then it has now started to decline.

Now, that's what you show. Now, my, of course, inquiry is why did this happen--the causation. I understand that social scientists have to be cautious in this regard, and you have to go through certain protocols before you can make declarations on causation. Well, I'm a member of congress, and I don't have to do that, so--

[Laughter.]

So, I'm going to give you my views as to why we all this occurred.

My first observation is that the overall index in the individual domain on well-being, material well-being of a child, are closely parallel; that if we're looking at one area where we could make progress on the overall well-being of children, I would suggest that the material well-being is the one that we should probably spend our most

attention on dealing with, 'cause so many other factors are affected by that. That's just commonsense tells us that. But there have been many studies that have shown that the material well-being of children will affect many of the other factors that you have used in developing your indexes.

Considering that the material well-being is currently moving in the wrong direction, even though the index is slightly increasing overall, I would suggest that that could be a forecaster of some problems ahead, on the overall well-being of children, and it's something that we should be very concerned about.

Now, even if we agree that we need to do something about material well-being, there would be a tough time for us all reaching consensus as to the best way to achieve material well-being of children. I think we all would agree that we need to improve the economy and create new job opportunities. Democrats and Republicans agree on that. We certainly don't agree as to how we're going to get there.

So, let me first mention by history going back onto to two policy changes that we did that were done by Democrats and Republicans working together that I think made a major difference. And that is it's interesting to show that the material well-being really started to take off after we increased significantly the Earned Income Tax Credit, which was a matter supported by both Democrats and Republicans, and a matter that I think added greatly to the fact that we've been able to show an increase in the well-being of children.

The second is welfare reform, which we've all been involved. Ron Haskins, of course, was the principal staff person who developed it for us, the welfare reform bill, that I think also was a very positive step in increasing the well-being of children. So, that's two issues that we have. I'll make one other observation. I looked at

the--the greatest growth in the well-being of children took place during the eight years that President Clinton was President of the United States. Now, to me, that's a very interesting observation. So, it's--just put that on the--maybe David has a different view on that, but I just thought I would like to make that observation.

I'll make one other observation in this regard, and that is the overall index has increased modestly since 1975; yet, children living with a single parent, the social relationship has actually had a marked decline.

Now, I mention that in that I strongly support the positive impact of a two-parent family on children. I think that's an important factor, but I would suggest that promoting marriage is not the only thing that we need to do in order to deal with child well-being today. And I don't believe it's the primary core factor that needs to be dealt with.

Some suggestions. On child obesity, it needs attention clearly. And one of the problems is overeating. But I would suggest that children are not overeating today because they have too much money. And there are some people who might suggest well, perhaps we should put our money elsewhere rather than in nutrition and food programs. I would suggest that we could do a better job in education so children eat better foods and that, in many cases, the junk foods are cheaper; and that eating well sometimes is a result of the financial ability of our children, the resources that they have.

Reducing child poverty, to me, should be our number one consideration, and I take that out of here. And there's many things that we can do to try to reduce child poverty. I would suggest extending unemployment insurance. Unemployment compensation would be one area that we could do it. We know that that would cut their children, those who receive unemployment compensation, poverty rate in half. We

could increase the child care amounts. Democrats and Republicans are both in agreement on that. Let's figure out a way to get it done. Increasing child care would certainly, in my view, have an impact on this. We could raise the minimum wage-- another area that I think we can deal with child material well-being. We could have fair tax policies, helping the six and half million low- and moderate-income families that were left out of the child tax credit last year. We could improve the foster care system, and here David's been working very aggressively. Our Committee has taken up several of the child foster care issues and improved the efficiency of our child foster care system.

We could enact welfare reauthorization. I really do think that what Ron said is right: I think Democrats and Republicans should get together and enact a multi-year reauthorization bill. But it shouldn't be dictated by one philosophy or another. Let's sit down and let the legislative process really work and produce a fair bill, and David and I have had a slight disagreement as to whether this bill currently underscores the importance of reducing child poverty enough. I think it should be at least equal in importance to the other already statutory goals within the welfare system itself.

And then lastly, I would suggest education and training is a key factor in allowing low-income families and families that are on welfare to be able to move up the economic ladder of success; and anything we can do to increase education and training on low-income and moderate-income families we should be encouraging and not discouraging.

The bottom line is that I think the Brookings Institution has done a wonderful job--the Institute has done a wonderful job in bringing forth Professor Land

and this program. It allows us a forum to talk about the well-being of children. It's clearly America's most precious resource, and it really speaks to our future.

So, I thank you very much for bringing Professor Land here, and allowing us a chance to talk about ways that we can improve the well-being of children here in the United States.

DR. HASKINS: Thank you very much. Dave Camp. Thank you.

[Applause.]

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: Thank you, Ron. Well, thank you, Ron, and thank you all for being here, and it is great to be here with Ben Cardin. We do work together on a lot of issues. He's really a leader on the Committee, and really the person that a lot of us want to work with on issues. I mean, I'm glad you introduced him as Ben, so we don't think his first name is Portman.

We really do try to come together, particularly on these issues, and they're so critical. Obviously, the children in today's world are going to be our next leaders and really are the future of our whole country and society, and Professor Land, thank you for your report.

Ron and I worked very closely together when he was on the Ways and Means Committee. I don't know if you really work with Ron. You sort of work for him, if you know what I'm talking about.

[Laughter.]

But we did accomplish a lot, and we're in some very difficult times, really difficult debates, in terms of how do we really approach the whole question, not just of welfare, but of how to help children and families. And, so, you know, I appreciate all

the work you've done over the years on this, Ron. Ron really has been an intellectual powerhouse in driving these issues. In fact, you know, and Ben has as well.

And, you know, when Ron asked me to come here, I said, you know, who's going to be on the other side. And when I heard it was Ben, I said yes instantly. I mean, because he's somebody that you really can and have a civil discussion with, and sometimes that gets in short supply.

But, let me just say I think these studies show that the policies in place really have benefitted children. Now, while Ben might point to the election of the Clinton Administration, I would say that the decline in child well-being stopped in 1994, when we had a Republican Congress, if you look at the data, and started increasing in 1996, when we had welfare reform pass the Congress.

But I guess that's one of the things about data: you can make it say pretty much what you want at times.

But sort of kidding aside, I do think that we really have seen some levels that have benefitted children, some policies that have benefitted children.

And what's also I think exciting and interesting is that these benefits have extended to all children, regardless of ethnic background. And I think that is important, because in some areas, we're seeing, particularly in education, a big divergence there.

So, I think overall to see that in all ethnic groups I think is something that's very positive.

And to see this go on really at a time when we had sweeping changes to our nation's cash welfare program, really dramatic policies compared to the way things had been done for ever and ever and ever. And, yet, to see these improvements I think confirms that we did make some positive changes, because we did have a lot of

discussion that if we made any changes at all, we would hurt children. And I think that has proven to be untrue. So, I think that what our--what these proposals, and particularly what welfare was about was really trying to increase child well-being, and clearly that's happened.

I think this obviously shows there's still a lot to do. The number of children raised in single-parent households continues to be an issue of concern, and seems to be one of the key factors that stands out whenever there is difficulty with a child's life. That seems to be one of those regrettable constants that we find, and so I think there's obviously something we can do there. I mean, I've--we've worked in the House, trying to pass legislation to provide some resources to families that are interested in, and particularly mothers, that are interested in marriage and for stronger relationships, and I think clearly marriage has been determined to be the best course of that.

This whole child well-being was first proposed by the Bush Administration in the TANF Reauthorization, and I think has--is an important tool to really track what is happening in society and what are the effects of the policies that we pass? And it is sometimes difficult to find a direct cause and effect.

But I think what's really been proven by these studies is that throwing money at the problem isn't going to necessarily do it. Clearly, resources are an important part of helping children and families, but I think throwing money doesn't equal better well-being for a child.

And I know that Dr. Haskins and Isabel Sawhill have issued a report on welfare reform and beyond that really concludes that, even if the current welfare benefit were doubled, that would do little to reduce poverty, compared to what full-time work,

marriage, high school diploma, clearly education, and I think those issues I see as being much more significant in terms of how we move forward.

I guess I would say that I think it's encouraging to find out that we are doing better, and to see that we've regained some of the ground we've lost in the '80's. And if you look at this in a broad sense, I read this as the economy has a significant downturn, you see a downturn in well-being for children. Clearly, in '82 and the '80's, and we've weathered that. Clearly, in the early '90's, when we weathered with that economic cyclical downturn, and now, while we have a downturn, it's not as severe. For example, in my part of Michigan, the unemployment rates were more than double in the '80 recession than they are now. And things aren't going that well. But I think that's why you see, continue to see, maybe the child well-being number decline maybe on the material side, but--and some of these other factors. And clearly, when you can have improvements, like the death rate for children, having been cut in half since 1975, I think that is a whole host of factors that can have that sort of positive and dramatic turnaround in what was happening to children. I mean, clearly, that is a very positive.

So, I think we're here really to try to find ways to highlight policies that will even make these numbers better and try to work together in a way that we can actually get something done. So, I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and be glad to extend your discussion.

DR. HASKINS: Thanks a lot.

[Applause.]

We are going to have a second panel of people who are largely professionals and scholars.

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: As opposed to the amateurs.

DR. HASKINS: Yeah. No. No. As opposed to people who actually get to make decisions. So, I want to focus your attention on, because you're the two experts on this issue, which is a major part of the thinking behind this index and behind having a single number that says child well-being is at such and such a level, and it's going up or it's going down or historically it's low and so forth, clearly part of the thinking is that people would like to bring attention to children. And to have policy makers focus at least as much attention on children as they do on Medicare and defense and so forth. Do you think that this is going to work? Do you think--can you imagine that a number like this, an index, would be useful for people who want to focus the nation's attention, and especially the attention of the Congress, on children's issues?

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: Well, I think it's helpful. Now, clearly, you can misrepresent, as we sort of did in a light hearted way about what the numbers mean and what they do. And I think you'd have to get behind just the index. But hopefully, having the index will then cause people to go behind that index to find out what made that index up. So, you know, it's sort of like the unemployment rate, too, as an indicator, and you have to go behind what is that--you know, how long have people been unemployed? What sectors of the economy are they unemployed? So, I do think this will be a helpful approach, but, you know, it's--it could be used in a way that isn't helpful, but so can anything--just about anything else.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: The difficulty, of course, is to get any significant change in index takes some time. There's not one factor, or one policy, that's going to change the index dramatically. It's a--it's really more of a way of tracking a whole host of different types of policy, and the impact that those policies have on the 28 factors that go into the different domains.

So, I think it is useful, though. I think it is useful for us to track where we are. I'm not sure it will translate into direct policy change by having this index. I think it will help us confront different policy options by reflecting the fact that there are multiple factors that go into this. So, I think it's useful. And I think it--I hope David's right. I hope we just don't use this for a political purpose, but we use it instead to focus in on policy changes that will help us improve the well-being of children.

DR. HASKINS: A related issue is that a number of people think that there is a child--a problem with children, and the index is going down, that that means that we should spend more money. So that an index of this sort is sort of inherently democratic. It's useful that Democrats and people who would like to increase spending to have more programs. Is that correct? Do you see it that way or do you think that's not correct?

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: I'm trying to figure out if that was a compliment or not.

[Laughter.]

I think it--well, I'm going to take it as a compliment.

Look. What we're trying to do is get America to focus on the well-being of children. I think that's what we're all trying to do. Now, we may, again, differ as to the best way to solve the problem. I happen to believe that we should be putting more resources into children's programs, whether it's education, whether it's nutrition, whether it's job training or dealing with the economic conditions of their families. I think we should be putting more of the resources of government into those programs. So, I hope that it will lead to more public support and legislative action for resources going into these various types of programs.

But regardless of what path is taken, we want to focus America more on the fact that we need to deal with the well-being of our children, because we're not doing a satisfactory job today.

I accept the fact that the index is slightly better than it was in 1975, but I think most of us would have hoped that we would have made more progress during this period of time.

And I think that's the big message, and it's not really a Democratic or Republican agenda right now; it should be America's agenda to deal with, in the next 25 years, making substantially greater progress than we made in the last 25 years.

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: Yeah. I think it's hard to know whether the policy that we passed actually directly impacted this index. For example, we've made dramatic changes in the adoption tax credit, trying to move children out of foster care. You know, has that had an impact, for example, which isn't necessarily--I mean, clearly, a tax credit does mean, in some ways, revenue to the government declines.

But it's not a spending program as such. And those have been pretty much supported, and, you know, very big bipartisan majorities, so, I mean, what it might allow you to do is to dig further to find out if we need to do more of something.

It may not necessarily be spending, but I think what the data shows is that if we did spend a lot more, that doesn't necessarily impact children in the direct way that some of these other programming efforts might in terms of really requiring work in terms of welfare, really maybe having an impact, as some of the reports have said, to have children stay in school longer, because they know they're going to have to work anyway.

And, so, where you end up having positive consequences that weren't necessarily evident from the initial discussion of the bill or the policy.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: I would just clarify one point. I believe more resources are needed, but I agree with David: I'm not so sure the answer is just putting a lot more money into these programs. I agree with the point that he's making, but it doesn't refute the question, though, that for material well-being, in my view, should be where we should place our primary focus. It doesn't necessarily require government spending to increase factors that deal with material well-being.

DR. HASKINS: I'm going to ask. Can he continue on this line for just a minute and bring Professor Land in about the policy relevance of these issues. But here--if you think about this index, and for any of you who have had chance to really look at it, smoking, drinking, drug use, single-parent families, non-marital births, almost many, a majority of the issues here have to do with self-discipline, with self-control, with teaching young people to do the right thing, so to speak. And, so the question is--this is what I think you meant when you said you can't just throw money at these problems and expect to solve them.

So, if this is correct, that most of these have to do with individual decisions, will government programs, can government programs, have impacts on young people making the right decision?

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: Well, clearly government has a role here. We've seen that government policies has affected societal views on things like driving and drinking, on the acceptability of smoking, on education programs, on drug use; have all had major impact, all of which have been initiated through government actions.

So, government actions can have a major impact on acceptable conduct and taking responsibility for your lifestyle, and we need to continue to do that in a very aggressive way in every area that you mentioned. Obesity is an area that we haven't been aggressive on in government; quite frankly, we haven't been. And I think we're paying a very heavy price. The index indicates that we paid a very heavy price, 'cause there hasn't been much attention. We sort of joke about, you know, the hamburger issues here--like, it's not a serious problem of this nation. It is a serious problem. I'm not suggesting there's an easy answer for government, but for government to take a pass on it is wrong. Government has to be part of dealing with responsibility by making it easier for individuals and children and their families to understand the risks involved and that the--that the decision you make will affect your well-being.

DR. HASKINS: Dave Camp.

CONGRESSMAN CAMP: Well, we've been hearing for a couple of years about the obesity issue in children, and so it's not a surprise that--but I think that is one that clearly education programs I think are going to have to be the way to go, and those have to be continual, because you always have a new generation of people coming along, and some of basic concepts of nutrition that are really not as commonly understood as you might think. And you have--you do have this personal choice issue there, too. I mean, my eight-year-old, we were in the car, and just out of the blue, he says, you know, why are they suing McDonald's. He says, isn't their choice to go eat there? And, so you do have to--I mean, there is--but I think an education side of how we deal with that obesity issue is critical, but I just don't think you can ignore in this child well-being issue without the emotional, spiritual side, because if you're going to have the

self-discipline to say--to conduct your life in a certain way, there has to be some emotional and spiritual stability there.

Now, government's role in there is hotly debated, but I don't think we can ignore that that is a critical factor in any child's--I mean, and certainly even certain basic concepts of, you know, treating people how you like to be treated, are I think important to the well-being of society and critical. But, you know, that has been on the rise, and getting hard social science data on that I'm sure is very difficult, too.

DR. HASKINS: Professor Land, would you like to add something to this?

DR. LAND: May I respond. Thank you very much for these comments, and I want you two Honorable Representatives to know I did check you out with David Price.

[Laughter.]

And he said you were both good guys. So.

Several comments. We are working with Bill O'Hara, the Casey Foundation people to develop summary indices at the state levels.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: Good.

DR. LAND: Material well-being. Let me focus on that for a moment. I think that, you know, what happened in the early 1980's, and you see the impact, the imprint of the economic recessions of the early '80's and early '90's on that trend, on children living in single-parent families. It really jumps up when that economy goes down. And what happened in the '80's was economic restructuring. Remember the decline of the Rust Belt economy in the late '70's and early '80's, and throwing out of work many men especially who had relatively high wage unionized jobs, who had to

take lower wage jobs and or job retrained, and the adjustments for that, the impacts on families and on children were dramatic and enormous.

And then we had a younger cohort of young adults coming into the family formation and childbearing ages who faced a very different economic environment, and the imprint of that on single parenting was very substantial.

Now, I mention this because, as you both know, we have been in a recently in a no-growth or slow-growth era on jobs and incomes--and we need to recognize, I'm not sure exactly what policies we need to adopt--that's your jobs--but we need to recognize that if that period continues five or ten years, we may setting up another generation of young adults, forming families and rearing children for similar types of problems which impact on child well-being. So, just something to think about.

Interactions on these trends. One of the series we were interested in is the poverty series, of course. And it down trended in the 1990's. And, yes, I believe there is an impact there of the EITC program and perhaps of welfare reform. But there's something else that was going on in that time, and there are people in this room who should get some credit for it. And that is part of the--what happened in the lat '80's was that upsurge in teenage childbearing, and that trend has been down dramatically as well in the 1990's and into the 2000's. And ask yourself: who is at greatest risk of rearing a child in a household with an income beneath the poverty line? Well, certainly at the high end of that group are teenage mothers.

And so, there were nationwide efforts, grassroots efforts, including some national organizations and grassroots efforts, through the '90's, the objective of which was primarily to reduce teenage childbearing. That probably had an impact on the percent of children living in families beneath the poverty line.

The final remark. I want to talk about obesity a little bit. The last time I checked, I think the Department of Agriculture has a county extension and agents in virtually every county of the U.S.; right? Part of their efforts is devoted towards home economics, and I think we could harness the Department of Agriculture county extension folks, together with schools and teachers, to do a lot more instruction on proper eating patterns and exercise patterns and so forth.

What has happened? Another interaction in these series is the downtrend in violent crime victimization over the past decade. Parents have a fear of crime and the risk of their children being exposed to crime.

And, so, what happened is they programmed their kids after school hours much more closely today with soccer practice, piano practice, et cetera, et cetera.

But when the kids are not in practice what do they do? They go home and play video games. And they sip on soda water and eat snacks. And I showed these data series to one of our family sociologists at Duke, and her remark was this obesity thing is entirely correlated with the disappearance of the family dinner. Think about it. Grazing on whatever is in the fridge or available has, by and large, replaced that old ceremony we used to have; not that it's gone entirely, but it's certainly been impacted. And that grazing is done on prepared foods from the supermarket and or fast foods. And I think we can work with the food preparation industries a lot more than we have to get those wholesome foods in there, and we can educate children on the impacts of those foods on their weights and so forth.

So, just some reactions to your comments.

DR. HASKINS: Thank you for that. We're going to take one question from the audience. Please raise your hand. Someone will come around with a mike. And tell us your name and position, and ask a brief question.

Right there, on your right.

MS. PHILLIPS: Hi, I'm Susan Phillips from Connect for Kids. My question is this: do we have any, or do you know of any, data that would allow us to compare these trends for children to trends for elderly in America, for example?

Since I think sometimes in Congress, we're making choices or it should be about how to spend money.

DR. LAND: May I respond? One of the other things I do as a demographer is I work on demography of aging, and we do have a number of studies that pertain to the well-being of elderly folks in American society. However, there's no panel existing to construct this type of index that I know of on a broad scale basis for elderly folks in America. I think that's a project that needs to be undertaken.

DR. HASKINS: Part of the answer to the question is certainly that if you look at--

[Tape change.]

Among the elderly. So, if you look at our demographic groups and said who needs the most help, and just based on poverty and many other problems, you would say the children should be a focus because we've done so much for other age groups. Now, I know the standard answer is well, we can help them all. But as the \$500 billion we just spent on Medicaid drug benefits shows, we don't always spend it on all of them, and that we do favor certain groups.

CONGRESSMAN CARDIN: I think a lot of that would depend on what base year you start with, because that may--it's very true if you go back to the 1930's. It may not be true if you start in 1975. I don't know. So, I think a lot depends on base year. But I'm not aware of any reliable analysis that would compare, on a broad basis, the well-being of children versus the well-being of seniors in a comprehensive way like Professor Land has done.

DR. HASKINS: One more question. Very quickly.

This gentleman right here looks to me like Nick Zill. I think we should-- wait until you get to the mike.

DR. ZILL: I do want to say that Congressman Cardin's comment about the equal weighting is, I think, a key problem here. Just to think that infant mortality rate, the child dying in infancy, is equivalent to a child being overweight in importance I think is really incorrect. And I think there are some approaches that could be used to try to give some weighting to this one.

For example, psychologists all the time do magnitude scaling. There's a stressful life events scale. You could get a sample of parents and say how stressful would these different events be? How important they would be? And that would give you some sense of rating.

The other thing is we have a growing body of longitudinal data that tells us the predictive importance of childhood events for later adult well-being. And using some of that to perhaps give some weight.

I just think something like the race gap in achievement is so important compared to obesity in terms of its effect on--

DR. HASKINS: Professor Land, you want to respond to that?

DR. LAND: Those comments are well taken, and certainly this is an initial effort, Nick, and we plan to continue working and exploring various possibilities.

DR. HASKINS: Well, join me in thanking the panel. Thank you.

[Applause.]

DR. HASKINS: And if you just sit tight for a minute, the second panel will be here in a moment.