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POLICIES FOR CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

PANEL TWO AND Q&A SESSION

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The Brookings Institution
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[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM TAPE RECORDINGS.]

PANEL TWO:

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THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.

P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. SINGER: Hi, everybody. Welcome to the second panel. I'm Audrey Singer, immigration fellow at Brookings.

And I'd like to move the conversation away from illegal immigration and back to children of immigrants and policies around children of immigrants. And as we've heard from the discussion, the children of immigrants comprise a large and growing part of the U.S. child population.

As this cohort becomes a larger part of our domestic labor force, they will contribute widely to various sectors of the economy, and they're also projected to assist in keeping the Social Security and Medicare programs afloat.

The future contributions of this group to the U.S. economy are also important for the nation's ability to compete in the global economy. Therefore, it's important that we make sure we address educational needs and gaps now to get these children on the path to economic mobility and to prepare them for what lies ahead for them and for all of us.

So we have a distinguished panel today--welcome--who will be presenting with a range of viewpoints to discuss the future of immigrant children and the policies that might help. I'll introduce everybody very quickly at first. You have bios in the handouts of everybody. And each panelist will speak for about five minutes, and then we'll open up to questions.

Michael Fix, in the green and blue tie, directs the immigration studies program at the Urban Institute. And next month, he'll become vice president and director of studies at the Migration Policy Institute.

Next to him is Tamar Jacoby, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Next to her is Steve Moore, who is the president of the Club for Growth.

Cecilia Munoz is next to me, vice president for policy at the National Council of La Raza.

And Peter Skerry, all the way over on the other end, is a professor of political science at Boston College and a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings.

Thank you. And Michael, will you start?

MR. FIX: Ron told me--Ron Haskins told me I had to talk at warp speed, and I can talk faster when I'm standing up than sitting down.

Thanks a lot, Audrey.

What I want to do this morning is to look at federal policy for immigrant children, but I want to do so through the lens of young children of immigrants under age six. I want to do so for a couple reasons.

First, Randy Capps and I and some of our colleagues at the Urban Institute are about to release a report on the topic. It's funded by the Foundation for Child Development and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

I want to do it also for a more substantive reason, and that's because children of immigrants under six are different in some interesting ways, interesting policy-relevant ways, not just from native children, but also from older children of immigrants. And finally, it goes without saying, I think, that early childhood is crucial to development. So this is a critical time in life.

What I've been asked to do is to give an essentially statistic free, number free, PowerPoint free presentation this morning. But the claims that I'm going to make are, in fact, I hope empirically supported in the handouts that you've gotten that were at the front table.

Let me start where I always start when I talk about the children of immigrants, and that's that you can't--this follows up Don Hernandez's point. You just can't underestimate the impact of immigration flows on the composition of the child population in the United States, and you can see this particularly clearly when you look at the child population under six.

Where what you see is that almost one in four children under six in the United States is the child of an immigrant. Almost 30 percent of low-income children under six in the United States are the children of immigrants. And this has two obviously implications.

First, it underscores the fact that our federal child and family policies, all the way from SCHIP to No Child Left Behind to Head Start, are going to have big and maybe even you could say disproportionate impacts on the children of immigrants. But it also reinforces the fact that the effectiveness of those policies, how we judge whether they're successful or not, will increasingly turn on how well they equip immigrant kids to succeed and how well--and their effectiveness in underwriting my own expensive retirement.

I would argue, second, that these kids, these children of immigrants aren't only demographically prominent. I would also say that they're distinct in some interesting policy-relevant ways. In the first place, in contrast to all children of immigrants, almost all young children of immigrants under six are

citizens. Ninety-three percent of young children of immigrants are citizens, and they live in mixed-status families, that is to say families where one or more of their parents is a noncitizen, and that raises issues that Ron raised, the earlier issues of membership and access to benefits and access to services.

Second, and not surprisingly, the parents of these young children are more recently arrived than older children of immigrants. That has some implications. That means they are more likely to be younger. They're more likely to be poor. They're more likely to be limited English proficient, to have lower levels of education. And they're more likely to be undocumented.

In fact, our analysis finds that almost 30 percent of all the children of immigrants in the United States have one or more undocumented parent.

But while the risks then, Don talked about the risks and protective factors, the risks faced by these young children of immigrants are in some ways distinct, I think in other ways, they're emblematic of those faced by other children of immigrants. And they emblematic in ways that aren't, I would argue, reached by many federal policies that deal with children, policies--children and families policies that emphasize work, policies that emphasize marriage, policies that emphasize discouraging the use of public benefits.

Don touched on this, but I would just make three points. In the first place, these young children of immigrants are more likely to live in two-parent families than natives. However, the presence of a second parent in these families is less likely to translate into lower poverty rates than as the case with natives.

Second, work also appears to be less of an antidote to poverty in immigrants than in native families. If we look at young children of immigrants in families where both parents work, we see that they are more than twice as likely to be low income as natives.

And third, Don mentioned this, too, over half of children of immigrants under six are low income. But despite somewhat higher levels of hardship than natives, children of immigrants are substantially less likely to receive public benefits and work supports. They're substantially less likely to receive TANF, food stamps, housing assistance, and child care than are children of natives.

So what are some of the policy directions that flow from this statistical profile? First, since this has been largely a session around the question of welfare reform, one point to make here is that welfare reform's exclusion of immigrants from federal means tested benefits for five years after entry basically effectively excludes all noncitizen children under six from services during a critical period of their development.

Second, our study for the FCD and for the Annie Casey Foundation found that children of immigrants are substantially less likely to be in center-based child care than children of natives and that the children of the least educated are the least likely to be in center-based care. And of course, these are the kids who probably stand to benefit from it most.

Third, the fact that so many of these young kids are growing up in households with one or more undocumented parents, I think represents a new and a kind of troubling national experiment, one whose costs are as yet

undetermined, but whose costs also I don't think have been very much factored into current comprehensive immigration reform debates.

And finally, the high levels of limited English skills and linguistic isolation we see not just in the households of these children, but in the schools that they attend. And what we've found is that 50 percent of limited English proficient children in schools go to schools where 30 percent of more of their classmates are also limited English proficient.

This reinforces for me the deep logic of the No Child Left Behind Act provisions which, for the first time, holds schools accountable for the performance of limited English proficient children. And I would argue that if implemented well, if decently funded--both big ifs--I would argue that the No Child Left Behind Act represents perhaps the most important piece of immigration legislation enacted in the past decade.

Thank you.

MS. SINGER: Thank you, Michael.

MS. JACOBY: Well, Michael made me promise to come up here so he wouldn't be the only one. So that's why I'm doing it.

I want to thank Brookings for having us here and for putting this question in such sharp relief. I think the way Ron Haskins put it, you know, growing disadvantaged, at-risk population, but so much of U.S. self-interest riding on their success, I mean, that sharp--posing the sharp dilemma that way, I think, helps us all to think about it.

I'd like to bring something that's been, interestingly, not much represented here today, a little bit of a political perspective to it. I'm not an

elected official. I'm not a pollster. The evidence I bring is really more anecdotal than quantitative.

But it's my very strong instinct that a reversal or even a significant rolling back of 1996 would be extremely unpopular in this country, and not just unpopular, but would have, I think--as somebody who wants a more generous immigration policy, wants a more immigrant-friendly country, I think a rolling back of that kind would have very bad consequences for the kinds of policies and the kind of country I want to be.

I mean, I spend a lot of time on talk radio defending immigration reform and explaining why I think immigrants are good for this country. And I'll tell you, if there is one question that's considered a slam dunk for the people on the other side of the radio, as it were, is aren't immigrants abusing welfare?

I mean, it's the one thing where the--you know, we don't have to characterize them, but the Americans who are concerned about immigration and the Americans who aren't sure they like immigrants and the Americans who aren't sure that immigration is good for the country, it's the one thing where they're sure they're standing on solid ground.

You know, we're not sure about economics. Maybe, maybe not. Culture. Maybe, maybe not. But you know, they're coming here, and they're taking our taxpayer dollars? I mean, it's just not even close as an issue for people.

So I worry that an effort to roll back '96 or an effort to revise it significantly, to change that compromise, as Ron put it, really would very much tip the balance in an uncomfortable way in terms of immigration reform of the

kind that we're all hoping to see, or I'm hoping to see anyway, in the next couple of years. And would also tip public attitudes toward immigrants here in a divisive and troubling way.

So, you know, that doesn't tell us don't--absolutely don't do it. I mean, if people were starving in the streets and whatever, you'd think differently. But it certainly does sharpen the dilemma yet further.

What's the answer to that? Well, I mean, my instinct is people are not willing to go further with--the public is not willing to go further with giving immigrants welfare, but people are very interested, very keen--and this goes all across the spectrum--in what you might call assimilation policy or integration policy. People all across the spectrum in very strange political corners are willing to spend public money to help immigrants, as it were, become Americans.

And it doesn't necessarily mean become Americans in the sense of, you know, forget who their grandmother was or never speak their language again or melt into some stew. But it does--so let's not get hung up on the word of what "assimilation" means. I'm not suggesting assimilation in some sense of obliteration of your--the culture you bring with you. But so, you know, call it integration or think of it as what I mean as integration.

The public is very keen on that. And gosh, I'm already down to two minutes. How will that help? I'm going to skip the part where I talk about where I see the public is keen on it. How will that help these things that we're talking about? How can you use assimilation policy to help poverty, to help people with improper housing, to help people with problems with nutrition?

I actually think you can because I think the things that people are willing to pay for and would like to see the government pay for and would like to see business, frankly, step up to the plate and pay for more, and I think businesses increasingly are willing to take on this burden--English Prepares.

Well, English Prepares is going to help people obviously economically. It's going to help them get a different level of job. It's going to help them feel more part of the mainstream.

Similarly, surprisingly with citizenship. The public is very interested--and this goes across the spectrum, Democrats and Republicans, the public is very interested in helping people become citizens. And what's interesting is, well, so how is that going to affect poverty?

Well, interestingly, citizenship--changing your status in that way does affect people's socioeconomic outlooks. It helps people, people once they become citizens are much more likely to invest in this country, to buy homes, to start building wealth. People who are citizens invest in self-improvement. They go to school.

So, obviously, services are still going to have to be available, but assimilation assistance for the parents, I think, is going to be helpful. But I also think assimilation assistance is a way to tuck in various kinds of services for the kids. You know, ESL classes, additional funding for ESL classes, ways to bring people out of the isolation of the linguistic--the enclave and the schools that are only--that are what Michael just described of where these kids are limited English proficient kids are going to schools where everybody else is limited English proficient.

You could build into assimilation policy ways to bring people out of that isolation. It could be part of the--you know, in the name of helping them become Americans, you could help bring them out of their isolation.

Preschool, I think you could build into that. You could make the case that people are--that lots of these people that we need to help become Americans are having educational problems, and build in money for preschool in an assimilation policy. Build in money I think for a bigger effort in the schools to do ESL training and the kinds of things Mr. Ortiz talked about, about the after school programs where you bring parents and kids into the school. I mean, that sounds like an amazing program.

So I think you could use an assimilation policy to tuck in maybe not all, but a lot of some things that could be very helpful. And I think then you combine that with commitments to education, to No Child Left Behind, to basic sort of other--to community colleges, to other kinds of sort of social mobility policy that again Americans support.

I mean, the compromise of '96 left room for education training, you know, include more money for public schools, include more money for community college, include more money for different kinds of mobility--services that you justify in terms of mobility rather than welfare. And I think, you know, that combination of assimilation policy, money from sort of mobility policies, and--well, I mean, just really that combination.

The bottom line for me--the sign says "stop" in big letters. It's a good thing I got to this sentence. The bottom line for me is I think that we should all be sort of getting--the sharpness of this dilemma should be

encouraging us all to get much more creative in thinking about how we could use assimilation policy to address some of the difficult questions, difficult challenges that were raised here.

MS. SINGER: Thank you very much, Tamar.

Mr. Moore is up next.

MR. MOORE: Good morning. And Ron, thank you so much for inviting me to this conference.

I've been a fan of Ron Haskins for over a decade now, and I think that the country owes him a great debt of gratitude for the work that he did on the 1996 welfare bill, which I view as probably the most important social policy legislation we've passed in this country in the last 50 years.

And I think you've heard this morning many of the successes of that bill. And so, Ron, I just salute you for the work that you did on that. I think it's changed America in a very positive way.

I represent the Club for Growth, which is an organization dedicated to try to promote policies to make America's economy grow stronger. And one of the things that we feel very strongly about is that immigration is an essential part of America's economic growth in the future.

We absolutely need immigrants if we're going to continue to be the number-one economic superpower in the world. And so, it's very critical that we keep our gates as wide open as possible to legal immigrants.

It's interesting, when you look at the demographic situation, which you've heard about already this morning. I think that immigrants are probably more important to the American economy going forward over the next 25 and 50

years than maybe they've been at any time in American history. Especially when you all know about the low birth rates, the aging of the baby boomers.

I'm going to be speaking on a panel later today on the Social Security crisis. Social Security crisis would be a whole lot worse if it were not for immigrants and their children.

It's also interesting when you compare--I tend to be very bullish on the American economy. I think things look very bright. I think we're in a commanding position to retain this global superpower position that we have with respect to the economy. And I think one of the reasons for that is when you look many of the countries that we compete with--Japan, Germany, France, Spain--those countries, it's hard to be optimistic about those economies. You wonder where is the growth going to come from because of their very low birth rates.

And so, I would make the case to you that immigration is sort of America's demographic safety valve. We don't--number one, we don't have quite as low birth rates as most of the other developed countries do. But number two, the immigrants that come tend to be a highly dynamic population and add greatly to the population and to our growth rate.

So let me just make a few quick points about the topic at hand, which is the economic impact of immigrants and their children, and just go through these as quickly as I can. First, I'm a very big fan of this idea of immigration--yes, welfare--no. I think it has worked quite well.

I was very heartened to--I hope I'm not misinterpreting the data that Michael Fix has in his excellent report. But it appears from this, it confirms other reports that I've seen, which is that welfare use of immigrants has declined

very substantially since 1996. This is a very healthy trend because I believe that just as Tamar mentioned, that Americans in general are very favorably inclined toward immigration, but they are also very hostile to the idea of immigrants coming to this country and going on welfare.

They want immigrants to come to share in our economic freedoms and our political freedoms, not because they're lured here by the magnet of welfare. So I think we ought to stick with that policy, and I agree entirely with Tamar that it would be a great setback, both for welfare--you know, for social welfare legislation and also with respect to maintaining a public acceptance of immigrants if we move back to the pre-1996 policy.

The second point I'd like to make is that--this is an historical point, and I don't have any recent evidence to confirm this. But historically, that is to say at least, you know, as long as we have data over the last 100 years, one of the great assets of immigration is precisely their children. And so, when you look at evidence about how do various cohorts do in America economically, what the data has shown over the last 100 years or so is that immigrants themselves do fairly well, and they catch up with natives in terms of income over time.

But what's very interesting is that their children tend to be extremely successful, and they tend to go into professional classes and so on. And so, I always say to people, look, the problem is if you cut off immigrants, not only do you cut off immigrants, but then you don't have the value of their children. And by the way, what tends to happen is that you've got a regression to the mean over time. So that by the third generation and so on, the children become sort of Americanized and they're no different than Americans.

Third is that immigrants use--one of the great myths about immigration is that immigrants use more public services than they pay in taxes, and that is entirely false. And the reason for that is that a lot of times when you see this analysis of public services used by immigrants and their children versus the taxes that they pay, what is left out of the equation is what we spend the most money on in Washington, which is Social Security and Medicare.

And when you take into account those two programs, the great benefit of immigrants and, of course, their children is that they are young. Immigrants tend to come between the ages of 18 and 35, whereas the average age of Americans is a lot older than that. And so, essentially, you get this sort of one generation net benefit to the Social Security and Medicare systems because what happens is the immigrants start paying into these systems immediately, but there is no elderly cohort to collect the benefit.

And then, of course, when the immigrants start collecting the benefits themselves, they have their children who are coming into the system will pay for their benefits.

Another point I'd like to make is that quality matters a lot. And if we were to change our immigration policy in any way, I think, as an economist, I would say there is no question that we ought to keep the numbers as high as possible. We ought to, in our economic self-interest, move toward a more skill-based system because the higher immigrants are a form of human capital. And to the extent that the immigrants come in with high skills, it's just a major, major benefit to America.

Two last quick points. One is that I agree entirely with this idea of the importance of English acquisition. I am a very big enemy of the idea of bilingual education. I think it does a big disservice to the immigrants themselves. And if you knew nothing else about an immigrant and you just looked at the profile of that immigrant and you knew nothing else, and you want to just look at one statistic about whether this immigrant would succeed or fail in the American economy, the one overriding statistic that trumps everything else is whether that immigrant learns English.

And so, we ought to do everything possible to make sure that we hasten the learning of English by immigrants not only because it does lead to better assimilation, but also because it's good for the immigrants.

And finally, I just wanted to reiterate a point that Tamar made, which is that this idea of assimilation is such an important point. I face the same concerns even among our members who tend to be generally very pro immigration, but they're also very concerned about this idea, are the immigrants Americanizing?

And so, I believe that Tamar is right. We need to rededicate ourselves as a nation to building institutions that Americanize these immigrants. And by the way, "assimilation" and "Americanization" are not dirty words. These are very critical to the well-being of the immigrants.

So, Ron, thank you so much for putting on this conference. It is really quite an honor to be invited to speak here.

MS. SINGER: Thank you very much, Steve.

Next we will hear from Cecilia Munoz.

MS. MUNOZ: I was clearly invited to be the rebel on this panel. So I'm going to sit and make my presentation from here.

I largely agree with most of what Tamar and Steve just said, although I want to address just a little bit about the political feasibility of this notion of rolling back the '96 act because, in fact, parts of it have been rolled back three times now since it was enacted. And that's why food stamps are available to legal immigrants.

And that has to do with a couple of issues. One is the fundamental question of fairness, that if we're going to be providing a safety net for people in this country who are paying taxes, that it doesn't make sense to ask immigrants to ultimately have the same obligations as U.S. citizens in terms of paying taxes, military service, and every other obligation that you and I have and not allow them eligibility for a safety net--for the same safety net that their tax dollars pay for, when they fall on hard times.

Ron is right. We, in fact, strongly strengthened the affidavit of support, the sponsorship requirements. We made them enforceable. We beefed up sponsor deeming. The '96 act enhanced all of those provisions to make sure that sponsors are, indeed, responsible for the immigrants that they petition for.

But if that sponsor falls on the same hard time as the immigrant because they work in the same industry or live in the same community, federal benefits are not available to the immigrant at all because of the '96 law, and that strikes us as there's a fundamental fairness question because immigrants are, indeed, taxpayers. And it does seem to be overkill in that we've both beefed up

the sponsorship requirements and the sponsorship responsibilities and made people ineligible anyway.

And the second piece of the fairness question has to do with the impact of that on the states. And that is that, as you've heard Steve describe, the federal government gets something of a windfall because of Social Security payments by immigrants who are of working age and who largely come, arrive in this country in their working years.

When the federal government doesn't provide a safety net, but there are, in fact, needs in immigrant communities, the states end up having to step up to the plate, and that's ultimately what has happened. So when the federal government was not providing access to food stamps, the states were putting in their own dollars to provide nutritional services.

That is still true in terms of other services, and that again raises a fairness question of ultimately who's footing the bill when there are needs? And the answer is that the feds have been taking in the tax dollars and the needs are being addressed by state governments.

The second question after fairness is the wisdom of denying especially children access to safety net programs which it is economically wise to be providing them. One of the leftover riches of the '96 debate is whether we'll give states the authority to cover immigrant children under the State Child Health Insurance Program, whether pregnant women--legal immigrant women will have access to prenatal care.

It's, again, maybe penny wise, but pound foolish to be denying prenatal care to immigrant women are ultimately giving birth to U.S. citizen

children. It just doesn't make any economic sense to have that part of the restriction regime. And so, where there is a struggle going on, it is on those questions where it's quite simply not fair and quite simply unwise to be denying access to those safety net services.

But beyond that, I think was the question of integrating immigrants fully into American life, including economically, and especially economically is the paramount question. And I'm happy to report that there is no debate about whether or not English is important in that construct. Right? There is simply no debate about it.

The question is not should we be doing everything possible to make sure immigrant children and immigrant adults make the transition to English? There is no question that we should be. The real question is so are we going to be dedicating resources to doing that?

My organization, a Latino civil rights organization, we have 300 affiliates who are service providers all over the country. More than half of them are providing English language services to adults, English language classes to adults. And they're doing that with the educational equivalent of duct tape and string. There are no resources dedicated.

We have some programs at the community college level. But the demand for English language instruction by immigrant adults far outstrips the supply of those courses. So we don't need to have a debate about if we should be doing the English thing for adults and children. The question is how and with what? And it's ultimately immigrant communities themselves and their co-ethnics who are leading the charge because they see the need, and they're doing

everything they can to address the need, often with nothing in the way of resources.

But there are other--in addition to English, there are other policy discussions in which the question of immigrant children and the extent to which we should be making investments are relevant. You saw in the statistics in the slide presentation this morning that immigrant children and immigrants in general tend to use the services for which they are eligible less than natives.

For U.S. citizen children, that continues to be true, in part because often their parents aren't eligible and in part because we have stigmatized the use of anything smacking of a safety net service in immigrant communities. So there is a real fear factor which keeps kids out of Head Start, for example, for which they are eligible.

Again, if we're trying to help these kids make the adjustment into English and limit linguistic isolation, you want them Head Start programs, and you want those Head Start programs to be focused on multiple factors, including school readiness and including helping students make the transition to English. Those are investments that are worth making.

And in the No Child Left Behind context, there are provisions in the law that we worked hard to put there to create and implement parent training programs, parent involvement programs aimed at the parents of limited English proficient children, English language learners as we call them, and at parents who are English language learners themselves.

You heard Assemblyman Ortiz talk about one such program in New York. Think of what we can accomplish if we were to dedicate even

modest federal resources in the structures which already exist in the law to begin to invest in immigrant students and their parents. For starters, on moving forward in English, but also building that into our structure to help people advance their position in the workforce.

TANF right now makes immigrants eligible for these sort of bootstrap programs that Ron mentioned that are supposed to help people advance their skill sets. But very often, language instruction isn't part of that. So you're technically eligible for a program to teach computer skills. That program is taught in a language you don't speak. Ultimately, that eligibility doesn't lead to real access and to real improvement of economic opportunities unless we dedicate TANF resources, Workforce Investment Act resources towards language instruction for adults to help them enhance their economic position.

One other quick point on No Child Left Behind because the stop sign has come up, and that is that we're in the middle of a debate about, as you've heard from the state representative from Kansas, about what it means that we are imposing testing structures on schools across the country, including schools that have high immigrant populations.

And the debate is going to go one of two ways. One is that we-- that because students in these schools are failing these tests, in part, because of language issues, one very vigorous debate that's happening in my school system is that maybe we should be exempting immigrant kids from the accountability system altogether, which would be a mistake.

It's an acknowledgment of the fact that the testing regime isn't really testing what people know in their subject areas. It's testing their ability to

speaking the language. But the answer is not to remove the kids from the testing structure and, therefore, from the accountability structure for the schools.

The answer is investing in making sure we're really finding out what those kids know, investing in making sure that their teachers are trained in how to teach kids who are speakers of multiple languages, and investing in the resources to help them cross the bridge into full English proficiency so that they're successful and the schools are still being held accountable for their success.

MS. SINGER: Thank you, and thanks for sticking to the time.

Peter Skerry?

MR. SKERRY: Thank you, Audrey.

I want to chime in, too, and thank Ron for not only inviting me to participate here today. But also for being the coauthor of this paper, which I think is really a very useful document. It sets out an array of various policy proposals, but it also really reasons through differences, reasons through differences among the coauthors, which is then reflected in the panels we see today. And I think that's all to the better.

I also very much applaud the effort that's clearly the focus of that paper, to appeal to the self-interest of nonimmigrants in terms of how to broach these programmatic changes that are being suggested.

There has to be a bargain here. There has to be a quid pro quo, and I think that helps keep that front and center.

Having said that, I'm going to raise some questions about what was put forward in the paper. I'm probably going to wind up agreeing, I think,

with the cautionary note that Ron sounds or manages to sound among his two coauthors in that paper, but may get there in a slightly different way.

The first issue I would raise is that the paper suggests that now is a good time to move ahead with some not enormous, but significant changes in our policy toward immigrants, and I'm just not convinced of that at all. If this is a great time to make big changes in immigration policy, it hasn't--the news doesn't seem to have gotten to Senator Clinton, who's clearly making very different kinds of noises these days with a clear eye on the political horizon. I'm just not at all persuaded that this is the time for substantial changes.

With regard to the self-interest component that's emphasized in the paper, I applaud that, as I said. But to the extent that that rests on an argument about Social Security, about which we've heard several speakers emphasize this morning, all well and good. I'm just not at all persuaded that that's the kind of self-interest that's going to appeal to large numbers of Americans who are very anxious about the record levels of immigration we have. It's just too long term. It's too far into the future for most people to fathom. They have more immediate concerns about immigration. They want more immediate responses.

The other point I'd make is that there is a tension in this paper, an understandable tension, between arguing for more resources for immigrants as well as arguing for how those resources get used, and I want to focus a bit on how they get used, rather than the more. And I want to specifically raise some questions about how we use these resources to build on immigrant family strengths and not potentially weaken those strengths.

First, and here is where I want to just sound a note again agreeing with what I think Ron lays down in that paper. I think the distinction between citizen versus noncitizen is really important to hold onto. I think it's meaningful to large numbers of Americans. I think it's meaningful to immigrants, and I think we should definitely not blur that any more than we already have.

This is not the time to renegotiate that bargain. There are some notions about how to do that. The little Hoover Commission in California had some interesting thoughts a few years ago, but I don't think in this conversation I want to go that way. I want to try to maintain that line.

I also like Ron's emphasis on trying to tie benefits to work, and this gets to my more principal point, I think. I fear that we could walk down a road that I thought we'd learned to be more cautious about here, which is that in social welfare programs, there's always tensions between eligibility for programs and participation rates.

There's a tone in this paper of trying to encourage immigrants to participate more. The language of rights is never used, but no one ever talks about welfare rights in here, and I'm not suggesting they are. But it does sort of hearken to that. There was a time in our history when we pushed ahead with urging those eligible to take advantage of their rights to participate in welfare programs.

It seems to me we don't want to do that with immigrants. If we do, we risk undermining the strengths of immigrant families that we've seen today, the two-parent working families. This comes up in a related context with early childhood education, at least to my mind.

Participation rates in early childhood education programs among immigrant families, we've been told, are low. I think one reason they're low, inevitably, is the programs may not make themselves as available as they might. That's inevitably probably true. But it's also true, based on research from people like Bruce Fuller out at the School of Education at Berkeley, that immigrant families, especially Latino immigrant families, are so strong that they often don't want to relinquish their kids to institutions, formal institutions, whether those are Head Start programs or child care programs.

I'm frankly not sure we know if that's good or bad. But I know that the strengths of those families result in some of that disinclination to participate. I don't think we know enough about the impact of these programs on those strong family ties, and I think we ought to proceed with caution for that reason.

So what that leads me to emphasize, based on what others have said here this morning and what's laid out in the paper by Ron and his coauthors, is to emphasize that I think we ought to focus on some basics--basics politically and basics substantively. And that boils down, again, to what's been said before about education and English learning.

We don't do a very good job at teaching people how to learn English in this country. I couldn't agree with Cecilia more. I've visited a fair number of ESL programs. They're very inspiring, very heroic, but they work with abysmal resources.

I've been trying to learn German the last few years, using CDs while I'm doing all sorts of things. You go to ESL classes, and they have quaint-

looking Jane and Dick books with no kind of audiovisual aids that I've seen, very inadequate kinds of resources. There's all sorts of things we could do there to make those programs much more serious, much more engaging and successful.

So I think we want to focus on that and focus on, as what we've heard, on both generations. One of the downsides to assimilation that we don't talk a lot about is that when kids learn English and their parents don't--this is an old story that we learned 100 years ago--that undermines the natural authority relations of families and harms families. That's I think one reason why parents might be ambivalent about some of the assimilation processes because they see themselves losing influence over their kids.

So we ought to emphasize learning English both generations. The program that Representative Ortiz mentioned in New York, I know nothing about, but it sounds very interesting for that reason. I think we ought to focus on that. Focus on those basics and avoid programs that are problematic politically and, I think, problematic substantively.

Thank you.

MS. SINGER: Thank you, Peter. And thanks to our speakers, especially for keeping their comments short. I know it's hard with such an interesting topic.

We're running a little bit late, but I hope that we can go over and that you'll stay with us for questions and answers. I'm going to start with one question and see what people think here, and then we'll open it up to questions from the floor.

And the question or the topic I want to talk about is about a broader economic issue in the U.S., and that is the restructuring of the U.S. economy. So when we look at the earlier wave of immigration, the early part of the 20th century, there are manufacturing jobs aplenty in our cities. Immigrant workers came in, took these jobs, experienced mobility. Their children did well.

The concern with today's restructuring of the economy to a service-based economy is that the kinds of jobs that immigrants easily find themselves in aren't suitable for the same kind of mobility. And therefore, their children are more vulnerable to not experiencing this mobility. And so, we have an opportunity through education, through English language training, to enhance their opportunities, and that's what this program is all about to a certain extent.

So my question is, is there a role for employers in this sphere of immigrant integration in English language training and work support that will move immigrant families further? And if so, how do we think this is going to happen? Will it happen through federal or state funding, through private funding, or what?

MS. JACOBY: I'll start. Not only is there a role, but employers are really--

[End of Tape 1, Side B, begin Tape 2.]

MS. JACOBY: --McDonald's people, actually. People from the fast food industry. Because if you have an employee who's, you know, working the French fry machine, and he doesn't speak English, he's fine at the French fry machine, but it's very hard to promote him. You can't be a manager if you don't

speaking English or, you know, at McDonald's they don't promote to many managers who don't speak English.

So if you can't promote the guy, you can't retain him. And that is really bad for McDonald's because they spend \$1,500 training every employee when they first get there, and they want to retain them. It's a huge financial interest to retain them. So recruitment and retention are big interests for companies, and they're running up against problems of English language proficiency.

So in the fast food industry, companies are getting interested in actually paying for--I mean, not even wanting aid to do it. But they're thinking about how can we pay for people to learn English, and can we successfully teach them? And can we think of a cheap way and a fast way to teach them so that, you know--I mean, they're not doing it out of the goodness of their heart. It's not going to be the Rolls Royce version of learning English, but at least to learn the "French fry machine is hot, don't touch it" kind of English.

And I think there's a huge challenge for policy to figure out how to use that self-interest and build it into incentives and encourage people to do it, encourage companies that don't quite see the self-interest to figure out how to do it, lower some of the costs. You know, like if the federal government provided a curriculum that was English language instruction that was easy for McDonald's to then plug in and use, that would lower the initial cost of getting into that English teaching business.

And so, I think there's a huge kind of role here for public-private policymaking to get employers into the business of helping with this kind of

assistance. And you know, the one number that has kind of--the one study that's kind of interesting that supports what a lot of people on the panel have said. In New York, for every one immigrant adult who wants to learn English, there are-- excuse me, for every one class place where you can learn ESL in New York, there are 10 immigrants waiting for that slot, 10 to 1.

So there's a huge need for this. The federal government is not going to go into the business of teaching all adult immigrants English. The business sector could be positioned so that it could see its self-interest to helping in a big way. And you know, I think that's one of the huge things that we could do is kind of create some kind of public-private partnerships and incentives for business.

MR. MOORE: On this issue of immigration and the new economy, which is obviously a good question, I would just make a couple of quick points. One is that, you know, when you look at the skill level of immigrants, they tend to be sort of bipolar. We have a lot of immigrants at the very low end of the skill spectrum, and then we have a lot of immigrants at the high end. And actually, we don't have that many in the middle.

And I regard America as sort of a middle skilled country right now. And so, it's somewhat beneficial--I mean when you look at those low skilled immigrants, one of the things they really do is they have this knack of filling into these niches in the economy. You know, I love to tell the story when I was on the border a year ago and just interviewing immigrants on the border. And I interviewed this Mexican and, to be honest, I don't know if he was here legally or illegally, possibly illegally.

And he was saying to me in a very kind of broken English, he said, "I don't understand all this talk about unemployment, you know, and a lack of jobs in America." He said, "I've only been here four weeks, and I already have three jobs." So there is this tendency for these immigrants to come in and fill these niches.

Now on the high end, that's something I'm a little worried about, though, because it is--it's a cliché, but it's absolutely true that there wouldn't be a Silicon Valley if it had not been for this infusion of immigrant talent all over the world that came in through Stanford, and then you had this wonderful combination of Yankee ingenuity and some of the top engineering and scientific minds from all over the world that created this new industry.

One of the things I'd like to warn people about, I think a big public policy problem that we have to deal with is for the first time in many decades, we're not getting the top students into our universities here. And when they don't come here to study, guess what? They don't stay here. They don't go to Silicon Valley. They end up staying in Germany or France or China, wherever it is.

I view that as a really troubling trend, and I talked to a lot of university presidents who say, you know what? We can't get visas for some of these top students that we need to get to retain our competitive situation. So it's something that we should put sort of on the public policy agenda.

MS. SINGER: Okay. Michael, and then we're going to go to a question.

MR. FIX: Well, let me just put some numbers underneath because immigrants are 11 percent of the population, but they're 14 percent of the workforce in the United States. And they're 20 percent of the low wage workforce.

And while I agree with Tamar on this point that there is a huge opportunity in place for employers in this whole area of integration, language, and skill training, our own forays into the field on this suggest that employers are a rather unpredictable group. And even though--and their supply of these services is often fairly unstable.

I mean, the cost to the employer is significant. It costs them in terms of time. It costs them in terms of space. It costs them in terms of employee salaries. And one of the things that we noted was in the recent downturn in the economy, these were the programs that were the first to go in lots of workplaces.

MS. SINGER: Thank you.

Okay. How about Alan Kraut right here? The microphone is coming.

MR. KRAUT: Alan Kraut, American University, history.

I'm wondering if we could sort of broaden the discussion beyond economics and education and into the realm of health and health care? Because not much has been said about that this morning, and it's terribly related to the other things you've been talking about. The lack of access, especially of young children, to the basic services, preventive health care, health insurance, and so on.

And what needs to be done, what could be done within the context of the paradigm you've been using this morning?

MS. MUNOZ: I'd love to jump in on that question. It's a terribly important one. Again, especially if you're--if the focus of today is about immigrant children and the extent to which we're all ultimately going to be dependent on them economically, it is a mistake and it's terribly dangerous both to deny immigrant kids eligibility for the basic health care programs that are offered as part of the federal safety net, which we do.

But also the economic situation, the fact that their parents tend to be engaged in employment in industries which don't provide health benefits means that if you're an immigrant kid or a child of immigrant parents in this country, you're less likely to have--far less likely to have health insurance, which is, you know, related ultimately to success in school and to the larger public health.

And that's a very serious policy concern that a number of us are engaged in dealing with, both in terms of reinstating access to what safety net there is. Engaging in the debate on Medicaid to make sure that it remains available and becomes more available to folks who are restricted to access from it. But then also looking at our ability to expand health insurance coverage to cover more families that are in the workforce with children. That's one piece of the puzzle.

Another incredibly harmful policy dynamic which emerges from everybody's frustration with our broken immigration system and the high numbers of undocumented immigrants present in the United States is that we

keep having enforcement debates that focus on the emergency room. We had such an enforcement debate in the House of Representatives, you know, just a couple of months ago, where there was a serious proposal which got to the floor for a vote on essentially requiring the collection of documentation and that information when people show up in the emergency room.

Which doesn't get you very much in the way of immigration enforcement, but it has a real impact on scarring the tar out of people when they have a sick kid or they have an injury of some kind. And so, that has, I think, profound implications for the public health and for access to health care. Even when people are eligible for services like emergency care, if you discourage them from coming forward, you have a serious negative impact on health care for everybody.

MS. SINGER: Next question. Back there in back of the auditorium.

MR. SMITH: Merrill Smith, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, our new name.

This is for Tamar. But actually, anybody could answer it because it's about assimilation, and everybody is in favor of it, or at least nobody has said anything against it. Yet I think it actually is a little bit more contentious than perhaps we're assuming.

There have been several recent state referenda on the question of bilingual education versus immersion. One in California defeating bilingual education and in Massachusetts. But it failed in Colorado. Go figure.

Also the Supreme Court, in recent years, heard contentious cases about racial and ethnic preferences, not strictly speaking about immigration, but since most immigrants would fall in the protected classes, it's a very divisive issue that most Americans do oppose.

My question to you is--you laid out the challenge, and I took it as a challenge to the immigration advocacy community, of which I count myself as a member, what kind of grade--if you were giving a scorecard, what grade would you give the immigration advocacy community on actually taking on the tough questions about assimilation?

And feel free to differentiate between who's doing well and who's doing poorly. Thank you.

MS. JACOBY: Gosh. Really put me on the hot spot and ask me to criticize all of my friends. Let's see. I think I'm going to side-step this question.

No, I think the point--I think your question kind of has the seeds of the answer in a way, and Cecilia said it, too. Everybody is for better assimilation policy. I mean, we don't all use that word. But, you know, for 10 years, almost every article you can read about immigrants or immigration policy comes to the end, it says, well, and of course, we need better assimilation policy, too.

The problem is how, and the problem is where to find the money. What really can we do to help? And how do we pay for it? And is it business or is it government? And I think those are hard questions, and I think people, they

get lost because we are also absorbed in the debate about, you know, immigration reform and that sort of thing. That's obviously more contentious, more political.

The tendency with assimilation policy is, I think, for us and even for the public to say, well, of course, it would be better if we could help, but it is sort of happening. So it doesn't loom as an emergency. People sort of think, well, it's mostly going all right out there. And so, people kind of say, well, we'll take care of that some day.

It's like, I don't know, some improvement on your house that you'd like to make some day, but it's not as urgent as the water coming through the ceiling, and so we don't get to it. And we could all do better, and I don't have to grade individuals. But I, myself, you know, I work on it, and then I get more absorbed in immigration reform. And then you kind of go back to it, and then you lose sight of it again.

So, you know, I don't know what presses us to move toward it more. But I do think that part of the problem is resources. And what Michael says about business is true. I think they're the place--they're the people that have the resources, but how do we set up a structure that really gives them an incentive and encourages them to do it?

MS. SINGER: Let's hear from Peter and then Cecilia.

MR. SKERRY: Well, I don't want to rain on the parade, but the fact is, we don't all agree on assimilation. We don't all agree that it's a good word to use.

Coming from a college campus, I can assure you that lots of students, lots of immigrant students, minority students on my campus don't like

the word at all, and I've come to understand why. It's because Americans tend to use it, nonimmigrant Americans tend to use it as a kind of bludgeon.

Basically, what it means to assimilate to most Americans is we want you immigrants to shut up, keep your heads down, and make progress. But don't make any waves, don't make any noise, don't bother us. Act like our grandmothers supposedly used to act. And I can understand--I've come to understand why immigrants, you know, hear that and why they resent it.

Now that's not what Tamar means. But it is what the term has come to use in our political discourse when we talk about immigrants. It also is heard to mean, and I think this on the part of immigrants, it's heard to mean that you have to deny your past and deny where you come from. And I think on that score, when immigrants hear that in the term "assimilation," they exaggerate.

No immigrants have ever had to do that really. I mean, there have been attempts to kind of bleach them, to cause them to forget where they came from and Henry Ford scenarios of people prancing into melting pots and coming out, you know, pure Americans. There were those excesses. But by and large, the American ethnic and immigrant history is people managing to negotiate their past with their present, holding on parts of their past while moving ahead into the American future.

So on that score, I think immigrants and immigrant advocates often exaggerate. But on the more fundamental point about assimilation meaning "go away and progress and leave us alone," I think that is highly problematic for lots of immigrants. But that's why we should talk about specifics. Forget the

words, okay? Because I don't want to engage in polemics. Let's focus on learning English.

We've spent a lot of time and money in this country on bilingual education. A lot of time and money arguing about bilingual education. To me, a curse on both their houses. Let's talk about English. Let's talk about what immigrants want, what's in their self-interest economically and culturally. What's in their kids' interest economically and culturally, and what we all want of them.

So let's put our money where our mouths are, put some serious money and put some serious attention on English programs, and I think we'd make a whole lot, much more progress.

MS. MUNOZ: A quick illustration of the point that Peter just made, and he and I don't always agree. So I have to say that because this time we do. I mean, essentially, bilingual education has come up a number of times. It is the favorite strawman of the argument that immigrants don't want to assimilate and that those of us who are supporters of this particular educational strategy have some nefarious ethnic agenda to keep people speaking Spanish and not learning English, which is the inverse of the truth.

The bottom line is that two thirds of the kids who are English language learners in our school systems see no program of any kind whatsoever to help them make the adjustment into English. Of the third who see any kind of program, bilingual education represents a fraction of what programs are available.

We're having this huge debate over assimilation, about what is essentially a tiny program, which is meant to be a tool in the toolbox toward the goal of helping children be successful in school in English, and we're not having the broader debate, which is a source of extraordinary frustration.

MR. FIX: Just a footnote to that comment. We just had the director of the Office of English Language Assessment Acquisition at the Urban Institute a week or so ago in which he announced was that the empirical evidence of the best ways to learn English were immersion, but were also dual language bilingual. That the empirical evidence is there on those.

So bilingual education itself is a devious word, because it means quite a number of--quite different things.

MS. SINGER: I'm going to allow Steve Moore to have the last word. We've run out of time, and if you have anything you want to add? Otherwise, we'll close.

MR. MOORE: I was thinking about this discussion about the bilingual issue, and I thought I'd just tell you a little story.

I was in Austin, Texas, last week. We were driving from Dallas to Austin. There were about six of us in a van. And you know, these were not-- these were not rednecks and so on. These were highly educated folks. And when we were driving there--

[Laughter.]

MR. MOORE: --one of the things we saw, that we looked out at the road, and there were these four big billboards, and they were all in Spanish.

And one of the guys just turned to me and said, "You know, I just hate that. I just hate to see, you know, these big billboards in Spanish."

And the only reason I tell the story is he represents the view of just a lot of Americans who just sort of rebel against this idea that we're going to be a two-language culture, and you know, the average American voter, I think, is very worried about that. And so, I do think we can do a lot better.

I mean, I am adamantly opposed to bilingual education. It's one of the few things I might disagree with Cecilia on. I believe that the agenda for the bilingual education system is actually to delay people's learning of English.

And the other thing--I mean, there are little things, like why in the world do we have bilingual ballots? I mean, it just makes no sense to me.

MS. MUNOZ: So people can vote.

MR. MOORE: You shouldn't be able to even--

[Laughter.]

MR. MOORE: You shouldn't be--if you can't speak English, you shouldn't be able to vote. A citizen is supposed to be able to speak English. So, you know, I think those are important things in terms of moving the country in the direction that we want to go to.

I hope maybe you could give Cecilia a chance to have rebuttal on that.

MS. MUNOZ: Okay. He's told a story. I'm telling a quick story. I know we're almost out of time.

A gold star mother in Texas--this is a woman whose son served and died in Vietnam--came to lobby with us on behalf of bilingual ballots. Why?

Because she's a Texan who lived on a ranch where she--the school bus would not pick her up, and she could not get to school because she was Mexican-American. As a result, this is an adult who is limited English proficient.

She can get by in English. She could pass a citizenship test if she needed to, except she was born in this country so she doesn't need to. But have you tried reading ballot initiative language in a language which is your second language?

This is an American who gave up her son, who wants to be able to make an informed vote. The ballot in Spanish is useful to her, and that's why we have bilingual ballots.

MS. SINGER: Okay. Join me in thanking our panelists.

[Applause.]

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