

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

OUR FAMILIES, OUR COUNTRY, OUR WORLD

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CLOSING REMARKS:

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

Dean, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs
Princeton University

MS. SLAUGHTER: Thank you, Larry.

These are my favorite kinds of Woodrow Wilson School events, where I get to sit and listen to wonderful substance all morning and learn something myself. This is a particular pleasure to be here at the Brookings Institution and to do something that I think both our organizations are jointly engaged in. I think of that, broadly, as translation, aggregation, and dissemination.

We are part of a spectrum that extends from pure academic research on the one hand to actual policymaking, policy practice on the other. It's a spectrum that starts, really, in the social science equivalent of the laboratory at universities and, of course, extends to government. And not just government, but, more broadly, non-governmental organizations and even the private sector.

The biggest change in that spectrum has been — over I don't know how many years, but I think it's sort of a steady trend — increasing specialization on the academic side and really on the policy practitioner side.

So in the academy now, where once we just studied political science, now we have subfields of political science. And within those subfields of political science, we have ever smaller areas of study. Inevitably, the world's more complex, and to do serious academic work, that's what is needed, is increasing specialization, and similarly, of course, if you move to the other end of the spectrum and you think about the proliferation of committees in Congress, or the proliferation of agencies and subagencies. So again, intense specialization.

In the middle of that spectrum, you have policy schools and think tanks, and we play a critical role in translating — as Belle Sawhill said — the results of pure research, evermore specialized research, into a form that can be digested and used by policy practitioners.

That translation function is one that, even in my lifetime, we didn't need intermediaries to do. In my lifetime, even when I was studying international relations, you had scholars — who were people like Strobe Talbott himself — who could move back and forth between the academy and government, and who could produce their research in a form that was readily understandable.

That's less true, and, thus, we need places like the Woodrow Wilson School, where we see our mission as taking really top-quality, academic research, of the kind that Larry, and Sara McClanahan, and Jennifer Widner produce, and translating it, and then projecting it into the public's sphere. That's precisely what the Brookings Institution does. The difference is we're one step closer to the peer researchers and

Brookings is one step closer to the actual policy practitioners. But there is a huge overlap there, and one where we think a wonderful partnership can be formed, and we have begun.

The second area where we both participate that is critical is aggregating knowledge. In an era of much great specialization, you still need generalists. You still need people who can take from all these different areas, as we've heard this morning, and think about the bigger picture. Whether it is thinking about reconstructing failed states, or thinking about children, or thinking about the entire picture of American politics, there have to be people who are trying to aggregate that information.

Again, I think you find more of those people in public policy schools. So we find more of those people in the Woodrow Wilson School than we would find in their affiliate departments of economics, sociology and political science. And there are more people similarly in places like the Brookings Institution, where you have many wonderful scholars who are thinking more broadly about the future of foreign policy, or the future of families and domestic policy, or American politics.

And finally dissemination. Here, we in the academy spend an enormous amount of time producing our research. Increasingly, we understand that we need to be putting as much effort into disseminating that research as we do producing it.

So to give one example, we have been working on the Princeton project on national security. We've involved a number of very important scholars at Brookings; Jim Steinberg, before he decamped for Texas, and currently now, Ivo Daalder, and a number of other scholars at Brookings.

We're going to spend as much time disseminating the results of that research as we did producing it because, increasingly, the sort of one-time report, where

you do the work and you issue the report, if you do that once, it tends to create a buzz for a few days, to be perhaps picked up, if you're lucky, in various press articles, and then to disappear.

This is something that I think all academic institutions and indeed think tanks have discovered. And we and Brookings together — exactly some of what you heard this morning, like the Journal of the Future of Children — are working very hard, again, to aggregate what we do, to translate it, but then to really work on disseminating that information over time and as broadly as possible.

Here I think one of the things we heard this morning was we are focusing on government, but we're also focusing on the entire policy practitioner community. In the area of children, that is everybody from school principals, to social workers, to the various non-governmental organizations that are often partnering with local and state government on the ground, working on the future of children.

In the area of foreign policy, as we heard with the reconstruction project, we're actually looking to make information available to soldiers and diplomats on the ground, but also, again, to local NGOs in ways that can be directly used, and, of course, to our own government officials on the ground.

It's wonderful to me — not only on a personal level — knowing Strobe Talbott and valuing this partnership at that level, but also intellectually. I think the policy school think tank partnership draws on the comparative advantage of both institutions, and really then serves the larger purpose that our institutions seek to serve.

Strobe started by mentioning Woodrow Wilson as the only president with a PhD. It is Woodrow Wilson's year not only because it's the 75th anniversary of the Woodrow Wilson School, but it is the 150th anniversary of Woodrow Wilson's birth.

I was delighted to discover the connection between Woodrow Wilson and Robert Brookings. It then seems particularly fitting to end this morning with a quote from Woodrow Wilson. If you are dean of the Woodrow Wilson School, you discover that Woodrow Wilson had a quote for absolutely every conceivable thing. When I became dean, I was given a little booklet of his quotations and instructed that I was to read it before bed every night.

But the one that I would leave you with today is he said, "We are not put into the world to sit and know. We are put into the world to act." That's right. And his own career, he moved from the world of thought to the world of action. But I think he would have equally recognized that action that is not informed by thought and knowledge is sometimes worse than no action at all.

I'd like to thank both the Woodrow Wilson School and the Brookings Institution as places that seek to harness knowledge but to use it to spur action. And it's wonderful to be here this morning and to see some of the fruits of that partnership, and to lay the ground for a future partnership.

In closing, I would like to thank Steven Barnes, our Assistant Dean for Public Affairs, and Melissa Skolfield here at the Brookings Institution, for making this morning possible. I'd like to thank all of you for coming, and I look forward to many more such events. Thank you.

(Applause)

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