

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

INTRODUCING THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE  
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AT BROOKINGS

FEATURING AN ADDRESS BY  
FORMER VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE

Washington, D.C.

Friday, September 27, 2013

**Welcome and Moderator:**

ELAINE C. KAMARCK  
Senior Fellow and Founding Director, Center for  
Effective Public Management  
The Brookings Institution

**Introduction:**

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN  
Vice Chair of the Board, The Brookings  
Institution  
Co-Founder and Co-CEO, The Carlyle Group

**Keynote Address:**

AL GORE  
Former Vice President of the United States

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## PROCEEDINGS

MS. KAMARCK: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings, and welcome to our C-SPAN audience and to our Webcast audience. Please note that the hash tag for this event is CEPM.

My name is Elaine Kamarck. I'm a senior fellow here at Brookings, and I'm pleased to be announcing the opening of Brookings newest center, the Center for Effective Public Management. So, allow me for a moment to talk about our vision for this center.

I don't need to tell you that things aren't going so well in Washington these days. (Laughter) Indeed, we open this center on the eve of a government shutdown; how fitting. In fact, if you are out and about on the streets of Washington today, you may notice that people seem a little unusually depressed or anxious. In fact, if I owned a bar, I'd call in extra help for tonight. And that's because yesterday agencies issued their shutdown instructions to the staff, and some one million people were told that they were nonessential employees. As you can imagine, that's quite a blow to one's ego. All in all, a pretty tough message to get.

So, let me tell you briefly what I hope we can accomplish at this center. When Washington works, it works because politicians and their appointees bring new energy and new ideas to town. When it works,

it works because they confront the experienced members of the permanent government, the civil servants, who know a thing or two about how to make the place work. The result is a dynamic tension between change and stability. This has been the hallmark of our government, and in fact it is the hallmark of all successful modern democracies.

But these are troubled times for America's leaders, political as well as civil servants. When Washington doesn't work, the politicians can't manage to put their country above their interests and their ideologies. As everything gets politicized, the civil servants move into a defensive crouch, afraid to stick their heads up less they get shot off.

As we've seen, progress stops on all fronts, from big-picture items like the need for immigration reform or the need to cope with climate change to the need for technical amendments to the Affordable Care Act, something that, in more normal times, would have been passed without notice but that in these polarized times can't even be introduced to the Congress.

At this center we will deal with both politics and government, making it a little different from undertakings in the past with similar names. We will focus on political reforms that can help create more effective leadership by getting to the roots of our political dysfunction. We will look at the future of federalism in the United States and ask maybe if the states

shouldn't come back to their rightful place as laboratories of democracy. We will try to understand what happens to regulation in a government in an era where the change is so rapid and technological and scientific change is so rapid. We will try to foster a spirit of innovation in government through our new blog, FIXGOV, and we will look at the current system of capitalism and ask if perhaps it could be structured in a more sustainable way through our corporate-purpose project.

All of this is geared toward making both parts of the government, the political and the career, more able to engage in what my friend and former colleague, Leon Fuerth, has called "anticipatory governance." In today's government, about the only thing we can anticipate is gridlock. Certainly the most prosperous and powerful nation in the world can do better.

I'd like now to introduce an old friend, David Rubenstein. David is co-founder and co-chief executive of the Carlyle Group. Prior to forming the firm in 1987, David practiced law in Washington, D.C. I got to know him from 1977 to 1981, during the Carter administration, while David was deputy assistant to the president for domestic policy. Before that, he served as chief counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary's Committee's Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, and before that he practiced law in New York City. David is a magna cum laude graduate of

Duke University. Following Duke he attended the University of Chicago Law School.

Among his many philanthropic endeavors, David is the chairman of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; a reagent of the Smithsonian Institution; president of the Economic Club of Washington; on the Board of Trustees of Duke University; vice chair here at the Brookings Institution; and also vice chair of the Council on Foreign Relations. In fact, every time I turn around, I find another example of David's generosity. One of our buildings at the Kennedy School at Harvard, where I came from, is the David M. Rubenstein building; and last week we had a birthday party for my grandson, Vincent, at the zoo, and there, it turns out, that the Panda Pavilion exists courtesy of -- you got it -- David Rubenstein. David, if I were one of your children, I'd be seriously concerned about this tendency of yours to give money away.

Back in the Carter administration, David was famous for long hours in the White House and for eating dinner from the vending machines in the basement of the White House. I had the dubious distinction of writing the 1980 Democratic Party platform, and so, some years ago I spent long hours at the White House with David and Alice, who was later to become his wife. David, had I known then how much money you'd have to give away, I would have cooked you homemade lasagna and brought it

to the White House.

Anyways, before David comes up here to introduce former Vice President Gore, I'd like to remind the audience the hash tag for the event is there for both our virtual audience and our audience in the room, and also there are notecards on each seat for your questions for Vice President Gore. As he is speaking, our staff members will be coming around to collect them so we can take some Q&A at the end of the Vice President's presentation.

Thank you very much for being with us. David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you very much, Elaine.

It was nearly a hundred years ago that Robert Brookings decided that government could be managed somewhat more effectively than it was being managed, and he put up some money, modest in those days -- by today's standards certainly modest -- to put together some institutes that would study how government could be made more effective. Ultimately, these came together in 1916 as the Brookings Institution.

It's altogether fitting that as we get close to celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Brookings we are in effect returning to our roots a bit by creating this center, because this center will help us study, even more intensely than we do today, how we can make our government work much better. And it's of course altogether fitting that the person who's

going to kick off this center with his speech today is Al Gore, who, among other things when he was Vice President of the United States, our 45<sup>th</sup> Vice President, led the Reinventing of Government project. And that effort really did many things to make our government more effective and more efficient, and I wish today that the government was as effective and efficient as we would like it to be. But many of the things that Al Gore put into place and recommended to President Clinton did come to be and are now some of the things that we are fortunate to have with us.

It was years ago that another group of people began to think about reinventing government. It was last week, 226 years ago, that a number of individuals, 55 of them, came together in Philadelphia and said let's reinvent the government we have. And they took the Articles of Confederation Government and tore it up and came up with this incredible document called the U.S. Constitution. Now, it wasn't a perfect document, and it didn't create a perfect government. But it did do more than any other government in history to come together in a democratic form and a government that has lasted for some 200 years. So, think about that. Over 200 years ago people came together. They spent about three months working on how a government should be structured, and they came up with a system that wasn't perfect, and, as we are reminded by Elaine and we know today, we see the imperfections of our system every

day now on Capitol Hill. However, with the exception of some amendments we've had to make that system better, we have in effect, put together a government that is as effective as any in the world's history. And it's a government that I think has its imperfections, but it can be improved upon, and it should be improved upon.

Had he been around about 220 years ago or so and been of age, I think our guest today would have been a founding father (laughter), because no doubt he would have been invited to that Constitution convention. He had the intelligence; he had the drive; he had the commitment to make the world a better place; and he had the ability to really work effectively with other people. It is to our great regret that he was not a founding father. One of the reasons for that is that no doubt he would have been prescient enough, had he been involved in those days, to recommend that as part of the government we might have direct election of the president. (Laughter, applause)

But, he wasn't around then, and so we have a different system, and perhaps we can study whether direct election of the president would make the government more effective. You never know.

I do think, though, that our country owes Al Gore two great favors, because while he was born much later than he might have been born to be a founding father, there are two things that I really want to cite



right now as to why I think our country is in his debt.

First, when that famous election happened in the year 2000, it was obviously a very complicated, difficult situation for our country. And it's not clear that other individuals or other governments would have acted the same way. I know had I been in the situation that Al Gore faced himself, I wouldn't have handled myself nearly as well as he did. He recognized, though, that the most important thing in this country is the rule of law, and while the system may not have been perfect and maybe the government that was invented by the Founding Fathers didn't work as well as we would all like, it was important that everybody recognize the rule of law prevails. And so Al Gore did what I think every great citizen should do: recognize that the rule of law is more important than anybody's individual ambitions and anybody's individual plans. And so he basically said, I think the system should work; it isn't working as well as I think it should, but we should let the system work. And he, in effect, left town, let his successor do what he wanted to do, and he basically did not disrupt that government. And I think that's a very important thing. While we all may have disagreements of what happened in that administration, there's no doubt that allowing the rule of law to prevail is an important thing, and I think it set a lesson for people all over the world. And for that and letting the rule of law prevail, I think that's a very important thing that Al Gore did

for our country.

And then when he left Washington to return to his native Tennessee, what did he do? He reinvented himself. What he decided to do was to pursue what I consider the highest calling of mankind: private equity. (Laughter)

Much more successfully, much more successfully than many people who have left government, he basically returned to the private sector and showed that after government service you can do very useful things in the private sector, and he's done an incredible job of building a number of companies which have been quite successful.

But he did one other thing that I think puts us all in his debt, and it's this, and it may be something more significant than anything that any of us have ever done or anybody in the city has ever done or ever will do. He basically made it clear to people that we have a problem with the way our globe is working. There is a problem with climate. And against great odds and against derision at times, he said no, we have to recognize that the world is warming up and there has to be something done about it; and while we might not be able, in our lifetime, to really have dramatic effects on climate change, we have to begin now.

And although he was criticized by many people and is still criticized by many people for what he has done, the truth is the world has

recognized, in the form of a Nobel prize, that what he did was a great thing for humanity. And so when history is written, people will say, who changed the world the most in the lifetime of which we all live? And there will be many people who will be given that potential honor, but I think nobody is likely to receive that honor more than Al Gore, because Al Gore really stepped up and said the world has to do something about this global problem; it's not just a national problem, it's a global problem, and every government has to reinvent itself to make sure that it's doing something to conquer and challenge the problems of global climate change.

And therefore I hope very much people recognize that when they hear Al Gore today they're seeing a man who not only did something great for our country, which is to recognize the rule of law, but he's done something great for the world, which is to say we have to attack this most important problem: global climate change. And therefore we all are very honored that he's come today to kick off this center, and we're all very honored that he's done the things that he's done in his life, and he has reinvented himself and helped to reinvent our government, and now I hope he can help to reinvent Brookings. Thank you very much.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Thank you, David. Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you,

ladies and gentlemen. I'm very -- thank you very much. I appreciate the warm welcome.

And, David, thank you for that over-the-top introduction. I cannot remember who deserves credit for first using this old line -- I'm sure you've all heard it -- but my father would have enjoyed that and my mother would have believed it. (Laughter) And I really appreciate it.

And your comments about the election -- you know, my attitude is you win some, you lose them, and then there's that little known third category. (Laughter)

And as for how to react to it, I did actually study the work of the Founding Fathers in some detail during those days, and I confirmed my worry that actually in our system there is no intermediate step between a final Supreme Court decision and violent revolution, and given those options (laughter), I basically did only what the American people are credited for doing famously by Winston Churchill. They generally do the right thing after first exhausting every available alternative. (Laughter) And of course we are here today at a moment when we are exhausting a lot of alternatives to keeping the government running.

But, David, thank you for kindness and for your generosity and leadership in so many spheres of our life together.

I want to also acknowledge Darrell West, vice president of

Governance Studies here at Brookings. And I'm going to get to Elaine in just a moment and talk about this important new center, but I also want to acknowledge one of the board members here at Brookings, my friend and long-time business partner, Joel Hyatt, who, as some of you have heard me say on many occasions, is absolutely the best partner anybody could ever have, and our partnership recently ended very successfully but the friendship will be eternal. If I had to pick one person to be in a foxhole with, it would be Joel.

A lot of my former colleagues in government are here. Leon Fuerth was mentioned by Elaine. Bill Galston, senior fellow here, is present, and some of my former colleagues in the Congress -- former -- let's see, Congresswoman Jill Long Thompson, who I greeted just on the way in and some of my friends in the campaign years. Donna Brazile, my former campaign manager is here somewhere, and Ted Devine, who was an important leader in the campaign. And my other colleagues from the White House years, in addition to Elaine and Leon, include Gordon Adams and Jim Kohlenberger, LeAnn Brackett, Kiki McClain, Sally Katzen, Rob Shapiro, Mike Orfini, Paul Weinstein, Ellen Oakes, and others. I also want to acknowledge Josh Gotbaum, the U.S. Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation head.

And so now to Elaine. (Laughter) I have known Elaine

Ciulla Kamarck for 20 years, almost exactly 20 years, and I want to acknowledge her husband, Tino, who also was, in a previous lifetime, a tremendous public servant running the Ex-Im Bank, and their daughter-in-law, Christi, who is here, and Elaine's sister, Joan Ciulla. But Elaine is, by all odds, one of the most talented people that I've ever worked with, and whether it's in the sphere of governance or in politics, she is just truly outstanding, and everybody who's worked with her knows that.

And to the powers that be here at Brookings, congratulations in wooing her away from being a professor at Harvard and establishing this important center. I'm going to talk in a moment about why I think this is unusually significant and important. It truly is - it's hard work. But there is literally no one in the world who understands it better or more thoroughly than Elaine Kamarck. That's literally the truth. There are slightly more than seven billion people in the world (laughter) and only one Elaine Kamarck. (Laughter) So, you know, that's pretty special. But it's all true. In any case, I'm really happy to be here. I'm glad you all picked a slow news day (laughter) to launch this new center.

The most important news of the day, other than this launch, is actually not the pending potential shutdown of the government or pending potential default. I do want to talk about that briefly, but it is the release this morning in Stockholm of the fifth assessment by the

intergovernmental panel on climate change, and you may have seen it in the news and if you haven't, I urge you to look at it. It's not the topic that brings us here today, but it is intimately connected because we have a set of challenges that we must now confront that are very different in kind and difficulty compared to any issues that we have ever had to face and our ability to do it competently. It is absolutely crucial to the success of what we're undertaking.

But, you know, where the report from Stockholm is concerned, they used to be certain only to a degree -- somewhere between 90 percent and 100 percent. Now, they are certain to a degree somewhere between 95 percent and 100 percent. I'm sure that will make all the difference to those who are wondering how serious this is.

(Laughter)

But joking aside, we're still putting 90 million tons of global warming pollution into the atmosphere every 24 hours as if the atmosphere is an open sewer, and the cumulative amount of manmade global warming pollution now trapped there is trapping as much heat every day as would be released by 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs going off every single day. And it's a big planet, but that's a lot of energy.

And it's that energy that's disrupting the water cycle that's central to life on earth; disrupting the stable pattern of climate and weather

systems that have been in place since first cities were built 9,000 years ago; melting the ice and raising sea level; drying out the land surfaces in important regions including our own Southwest and soon in our own Midwest, Southern Europe, Southern Africa, Central America, the Amazon -- the list goes on; causing all the extra water vapor to evaporate from the oceans into warmer skies that hold much more, creating much larger downpours that trigger the kind of flooding that we saw in Boulder, Colorado, over the last few weeks, in Nashville, my home town, three years ago, and Pakistan in that year when 20 million people were displaced from their homes, further destabilizing a nuclear armed fragile country, and that list goes on; creating more fires. We've seen them in the West this year, of our own country. We saw them in Russia a few years ago, leading to the removal of all grain from world markets by Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, leading to the highest food price spike in world history, and at that moment a food vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire, and although there were many other factors that contributed to that individual tragedy and the events that soon thereafter unfolded, food riots have followed crop failures in recent events related to climate disruption.

Climate refugees are challenging the ability of governments to remain stable, and in those developing regions where governance is already on a knife edge, there is now the going threat of more post-



national entities and the problems that come from it. So, we have to address this. We have to put a price on carbon and the economy, and we have to put a price on denial in the political system. And I will have more to say about this on many other occasions, but because this report was released just hours before we gathered here, I would not have felt right about not addressing it.

Now, I'm going to talk about the potential for a shutdown in just a moment, but I think the only phrase that describes it is "political terrorism": Nice global economy you got there. Be a shame if we had to destroy it. We have a list of demands. If you don't meet them all by our deadline, we'll blow up the global economy. Really? Where are the American people in this? Why does partisanship have anything to do with such a despicable and dishonorable threat to the integrity of the United States of America? It cannot be allowed. But it can only be stopped if people in both parties and independents as well say, look, I might not agree with everything that is in the Affordable Care Act, but it did pass, it was upheld by the Supreme Court. It is the law of the land. You didn't succeed in the constitutional process by which this was considered, and now you want to threaten to not only shut down our government but to blow up the world economy unless we go back and undo what we did according to the processes of our democracy? How dare you. How dare

you.

But it doesn't matter what I feel or what many of you feel unless the American people not only feel it but express it. I sure did appreciate my fellow Tennessean, Senator Bob Corker, yesterday, and I disagree with him on all kinds of things -- most things, I guess -- but I really appreciated the spirit and sentiments that he manifested there.

In any case, one of the reasons why there has been too much tolerance of trifling with the shutdown of the government and the forcing of a default on payments that are owed is that the hostility to the very idea of government, which is in part something that goes way back to the days of King George but has been fed by too many instances of poor management, problems that are allowed to linger, incompetence, bureaucracies that seize up and don't function well. So, the work of this center -- in bringing to bear the best minds available, the best scholarship available under the leadership of the best leader of this center you could possibly have -- this work is really important far beyond what many might think of when they see the nameplate on the door or read the short description of what it does. This is really about the hard work and fresh thinking that is now essential in order to redeem the promise of self-governance.

We are still, in Lincoln's phrase, the last best hope; and the

U.S. Constitution is still, having been changed and made better over the last two and a quarter centuries, the finest document on governance ever devised. But as we implement that document and administer the programs of government, we have to do it well. And we all know -- when we go into a business or a store that clearly gets it and has incorporated the finest lessons of high-quality management and serves its customers extremely well and the costs are surprisingly low compared to what we might have thought when we walked in and everything clicks -- we recognize such businesses and we patronize them and their reasons why they operate so well. And the same principles that have led to their success can be applied to the public sector.

So, it was 20 years ago this month that I went out on the south lawn of the White House and presented President Clinton with the first report of the National Performance Review, also known as Reinventing Government. In proper parlance, we called it REGO, which was "Gore" spelled sideways (laughter) for reinventing government. We held this event in front of two enormous forklifts piled high with government documents intended to serve as symbols of the excessive bureaucracy and the frustration that most Americans associated with the government.

We worked at reinventing government and REGO for the

entire two terms that we were privileged to be in office, and I'm very proud to say that a great many of the ideas and practices that were new back then are standard operating procedure in the federal government today. And looking back, the Reinventing Government movement started actually three revolutions in government, and I'm going to list them one by one. All three of these revolutions have not only survived in one form or another within the U.S. federal system, many of them have moved -- well, all three of these revolutions have moved to state and local governments, and they have been emulated in countries around the world.

In the wake of our Reinventing Government initiative, the United Nations sponsored a series of global conferences to take these ideas and spread them to other countries, and these meetings continue to this day. Public policy students now routinely study things that began 20 years ago with the team of change agents in the Reinventing Government movement.

Now, I often refer to myself as a recovering politician, David (laughter), on about Step 9, and the longer I go without a relapse the more confidence I have that I'll not get back into it. But after 20 years, I like to think that I have earned the right to do a little bragging, not as a politician but as someone who is very lucky to be able to work with hundreds of determined reformers, men and women, many of whom still work for the

federal government, who accomplish great things, who answer the call and perform in an outstanding way. And I am indeed extremely proud of what they have done and continue to do.

Now, these three revolutions. The first revolution, the performance revolution, required a cultural transformation for many agencies, because it entailed a new way of thinking and a new way of doing business. Unlike prior attempts at measuring government performance that were initiated and then soon thereafter abandoned, this one has now lasted for two decades. President George W. Bush expanded on the idea by creating an innovation known as PART, the Program Assessment Rating Tool. And President Obama appointed the federal government's first Chief Performance Officer and signed into law amendments to GPRA, the Government Performance and Results Act, that embedded some of the best innovations that evolved since that original law was enacted in the wake of our Reinventing Government report in 1993. This new idea to set goals and measure government performance against those goals can now be found in the federal government and in city and state governments, and I am very proud that we were there at the beginning of the performance revolution.

The second revolution we launched was the customer revolution. Now, the word "customer" created some controversy when we

used the phrase “customer revolution.” In some quarters, people objected that the citizens we were referring to were in fact owners of the government. Nevertheless, there was no other word other than “customers” that so accurately conveyed to our workforce how we wanted our citizens to be treated. So, we stuck with that word. And to this day, federal agencies that deal with the public measure their performance in the quality that they bring to serving their customers.

One quick example that stuck with me from those years: We went out and studied the rather isolated examples of governmental units that had actually pioneered some of the things that we instituted in the federal government, and we went and spent time with private corporations that were known for efficiency. I’ll never forget spending two days shadowing Herb Kelleher at Southwest Airlines. What a kick that was. (Laughter) But I learned a lot from Herb and from several of the other CEOs that I met with.

But I remember an example from one of the state Department of Vehicles. Of course, the DMV is kind of a symbol for many people of everything that can go wrong. Anyway, this particular DMV decided that they had to reform, and they just assumed that what they needed to do was pull out all the stops to reduce the waiting period and the length of the lines. And so they went through their work, and before

they pulled the trigger and implemented the reforms, they decided, well, maybe we ought to ask the people who we're trying to help here what they think about it. Well, that's a clever idea (laughter), and they did that, and they were shocked. The biggest complaint that these folks waiting in line wanted fixed was not the line. You know what it was? It was the picture. (Laughter) They stood in line once every two or three years and they looked at that picture quite a few times a week. (Laughter) And so they reengineered the system to give them choices and so forth, and it didn't add that much extra time, but people responded to it. And they also shortened the lines. But there are many similar examples of wisdom that are impossible to gain access to unless you engage in a dialogue with the people to whom you are trying to deliver the services of government.

The third revolution was the innovation revolution. Twenty years ago when I entered the White House, there were 50 sites on the World Wide Web, five-zero. There were one or two other geek wannabes like me who used it, but there was no such thing as a government website.

The word "website" was -- you know, you might as well have been talking about something on the surface of Mars let alone was there any ability to conduct government transactions online.

But a few years after we launched this initiative, we published a book entitled *Access America: Reengineering Through*

*Information Technology.* And in an age when less than 25 percent of the public was online -- we actually released this four years later; this was in '97, and even then less than 25 percent were online -- this report summarized what was to come. The Internet would be used to bring information to the public on its terms. Information technology made it possible to begin implementation of a nationwide electronic benefits transfer program to integrate information in the criminal justice community and to provide simplified employer tax filing and reporting. It also began the integration of government information through the creation of *FirstGov.gov* -- the federal government's first comprehensive web portal, launched in 2000. Today it's called *USA.gov*, but its purpose is the same, to offer citizens one-stop access to government information. And this innovation also was quickly spread to state governments and local governments and governments in countries and regions and municipalities throughout the world. So, I'm proud of what our team did on that as well.

I like to think that we left the government in better shape than we found it, and I believe that is still true today, especially for the career people who keep this thing going. In spite of sequesters, shutdowns, and of course non-stop criticism, the federal workers land our planes safely in ever-crowded airports. They track down the bacteria that sickens people in unsafe food and food chains or grocery stores. They



get the retirement checks out on time. They protect Americans here and abroad.

So, the federal workers are not the problem. The political class is the problem. And just as we began our Reinventing Government work by saying that the federal workers were good people trapped in a bad system and that what needed to change was the system, our political class is trapped in a bad system. Many of them are very good people, very dedicated, some of them here. But the system has been degraded.

Mr. Mann, you and Mr. Ornstein were prescient when you wrote "It's worse than you think." It is, and maybe even worse than you thought. (Laughter) But thank you for that wonderful book. I know that you and Norm took a lot of heat for it.

But, ladies and gentlemen, American democracy has been hacked. That's a computer word, as you know (laughter), which refers to somebody taking over the operating system of a computer and making it do things that the owner of the computer doesn't want it to do. Well, our democracy has been hacked. Its operating system has been taken over by special interests by using big money and lobbyists and taking advantage of a very sick political culture that has grown worse very rapidly in the last couple of decades. It needs to be fixed.

Like many other citizens, I've been dismayed by what's been

going on in Washington, D.C., and in the political decision-making process. The level of partisanship and vitriol has been growing, of course, and that, too, is connected to the influence of big money -- anonymous contributors, corporations pretending to be people pursuing business plans in the guise of politics and encouraging many politicians to say things and do things that would not have been seen in the best interests of the public in years past.

I grew up in a political family, and my father was in the Congress for 10 years before I was born and did not leave the Senate, defeated in 1970 because of his opposition to the Vietnam War and support of the Voting Rights Act and so forth, until I was out of college. So, I saw it all my life, and some seven, eight years after that I went to the House of Representatives. But the varied experiences that I've had in my lifetime have given me an idiosyncratic view of the arc of American democracy over the last six decades. And it's changed quite a bit.

Most of our elected officials now are forced by this system to spend five hours a day on the telephone raising money or going to cocktail parties and events to raise money from special interests. And it's a kabuki routine that both sides of the askers and the givers understand. It's spiraled downward, the crassness with which the *quids pro quo* at the heart of the equation are made openly visible. That crassness has grown

as well. And over time, those who are drawn to participate in such a culture have changed. Many men and women who I wish were in politics aren't in politics now. Why would they be. And some that I surely wish were not in politics are speaking for long stretches of time. (Laughter)

But the point is not to make it an *ad hominem* discourse but to focus on the changes in the system that have led to these problems. And the influence of money is number one on the list.

David, you were generous and kind in your comments about the founding fathers. Back in those days, at the birth of our country Thomas Paine was able to walk out of his front door in Philadelphia and find a dozen low-cost print shops within 10 square blocks, and he printed *Common Sense*. He had no money, came from England as a penniless immigrant. But he had the gift of clear thinking and clear expression, and he published *Common Sense*, and it became the Harry Potter of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (laughter) and helped to inspire the American Revolution. And in those days when the marketplace of ideas was dominated by a technology that was easily accessible by individuals, individuals could use ideas as a way to counterbalance power and money. As the decades rolled by and we entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century by mid-century, by the '60s, the 1960s anyway, television eclipsed the printing press and today is completely dominant, although the Internet will soon be powerful

enough to bring another dominant medium. But today Thomas Paine could walk out his front door in Philadelphia with his newly created video, called *Common Sense*, and walk down to the nearest TV station and say, this is really important, I need to get it before the public's mind, when do I go on the air?

Well, you know the answer. Unless he has several million dollars to pay the gatekeeper, he doesn't have access to the public's mind over the medium that now dominates our democracy. Who does have access? The same special interests that hold the fundraisers here in Washington and elsewhere. And their messages prevail. And the politicians who have to beg them for enough money to put their 30-second TV ads on end up paying the piper evermore so.

And it has gotten to the point now where vibrant, intelligent discourse, including spirited disagreements -- that's how we come to the right decisions. It doesn't take place anymore. Facts don't appear to matter. Preconceived ideas are simply repeated over and over and over with greater force and more loudness as if that makes them true. And now once again, power and wealth is pushing ideas and political discourse back out of the system.

Now, the Internet is beginning to change this. Individual bloggers can change the discourse now. Television's still dominant,

because the average American watches it five hours a day, and the number of minutes goes up every year even in the age of the Internet. But we're at a tipping point. And that's why this initiative here at Brookings comes at an ideal time.

Now, the potential for a shutdown that is going to unfold before us this weekend really reminds me -- how could it not -- of the shutdown that we went through when Elaine Kamarck was working with me on Reinventing Government. And she told a story this morning, leaving out some important details (laughter) on what's your blog, *FixGov*, *FixGov*. During the last shutdown it had occurred not that long after the Oklahoma City bombing and the destruction of the Murrah building, a horrible tragedy, and President Clinton was about to make his State of the Union address. And I went to Elaine Kamarck and I said, I want you to talk with our Reinventing Government team, and I want you to find me somebody -- this was after the government had shut down, that's right -- I said, I want you to find me a man or a woman that qualifies according to three criteria. Number one, this person must have been inside the Murrah building when the bomb went off. Number two, this person must have been a hero in the aftermath of that tragedy -- many were. Number three, this person must have been relocated to another temporary government building which was itself shut down by the congressionally mandated

shutdown.

So, she went to work on it and got help from one of our team, Susan Valaskovic, and they came up with this incredible guy named Richard Dean, who was a Vietnam veteran, and he was in the Murrah building. And, God bless him, he went back into that burning building and saved three people by himself and brought the body of a deceased co-worker out. And then he went to a temporary building, and when the Congress forced a shutdown he was told to go home.

And so I told President Clinton, this would be great for your State of the Union, and we could put Richard Dean right next to the First Lady. Well, now his speech writers -- who were great speech writers, by the way -- this was a temporary lapse of judgment (laughter) -- said no, it's a terrible idea; we have three runners who carried the Olympic torch, and we're going to have the Olympics, and this will be very inspiring and we want them next to the First Lady to tell that story. I said, please, please, you don't understand. This needs to be done. No, no, no, no.

Well, after they all left, President Clinton and I had a pretty good way of talking to one another and he said, okay, Al. So, the day of the speech comes, and I'm sitting up on the dais there. Somebody could write a book just about the things that happen upon that dais there (laughter), like the time earlier when President Clinton went -- I was sitting

up there as V.P. and everybody's standing, you know. I don't know how many standing ovations come off, but he goes to look at the teleprompter, and he smiled and he turns around and looks at me and says, Al, they have the wrong speech on the teleprompter. (Laughter)

And I jumped off the podium, went down to George Stephanopoulos -- now, George, you've got the wrong speech on. So, President Clinton -- and, of course, from my vantage point I could see when they were frantically scrolling trying to find the right file in the teleprompter -- and completely unflappably, president extemporized for eight minutes. It was the best eight minutes of the speech. And then finally the text stabilized, and he seamlessly got into the rest of the speech. But, anyway, that's another book. (Laughter)

This time he goes through the presentation of Richard Dean, and a genuinely inspiring story, as I've noted. And I'm sitting there, and to my left is the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, and he said all the heroic things Richard Dean had done and triggered a standing ovation and we're standing there clapping, and I looked over at Newt and I said, Newt, wait for it. (Laughter) And we sat back down and the President said basically: Unfortunately that was not the only time that Richard Dean was forced out of his office. And he went in and said: And on behalf of Richard Dean and all these other heroic -- he said let us pledge that we

will never shut down this government again. I leaped to my feet and I looked over and said, I told you to wait for it. (Laughter, applause)

Anyway, nothing particularly funny about what's going on now, but here's what those who are threatening the shutdown and the default should understand. In situations like this, the president of our country has, as he or she should have, an inherent advantage in speaking for the whole country. And when the Congress can't even -- when the minority can't even get its act together to pass its own substitute version of what ought to happen, that just further illustrates the fact that the president speaking for the country, leading the country, is going to win this confrontation. But it's not a game. It's not something that is just a political contest. But they ought to understand that. And don't put our economy through this.

In any case, I am excited about the future of these efforts to make government work so well that when the average citizen hears some threat to the continued operation of the government, they will think about the high-quality service they've just been delivered. They will think about the individuals who are working hard to redeem the promise of American self-government, and they will say no, this is our government and we need to make it work well. And with the challenges that are coming up now, we have got to take the lessons that Elaine Kamarck and her team will be



exploring and presenting here and make sure that they are spread far and wide.

I'll close where I began. I truly believe that the launching of this center is far more than an ordinary or routine new center announced by a preeminent institution like Brookings. This one is going to make an even larger difference than normal. This one really is at the heart of what we need to do to make the United States of America what our founders intended and what our people deserve. So, we found out when we were doing this work of reinventing government that it doesn't always get headlines. In fact, it seldom got headlines except when I went on David Letterman to break an ashtray, and things like that. But it doesn't capture attention in the way it should, because it's hard work, and it requires rolling up your sleeves and really getting things done. But it is absolutely central, and I could not be happier that Brookings with all of its greatness and tradition has recognized the individual who can do this better than any other and has allocated the resources and the organizational work to launch this center. I congratulate Brookings, I congratulate you, Elaine, and I congratulate your colleagues. And I predict great things.

Thank you very much.

MS. KAMARCK: We're going to do a couple of questions.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Oh, yes, that's right. Go ahead.

Thank you, David. Sorry if I went over a little bit.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for that *tour de force*. We've got a great deal of questions from the audience but time for a couple, so why I don't just start right in.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Okay, okay.

MS. KAMARCK: And we've got a great question from Tony Smith of the French American Foundation, who asks a pretty big question: "In light of our persistent inability to get anything done in Washington, is it time to think of abandoning the separation of powers in order to produce more responsive government?" I told you it was a big one.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: No. (Laughter)

MS. KAMARCK: Okay.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: But let me add just a bit to that. I'm surprised by the question. I'm not surprised by the level of frustration that leads to the question. But the essential genius of our founders is as relevant today as it was when they wrote the Constitution, arguably even more so.

There is, in human nature, a power-seeking impulse, and many thinkers over the centuries have expressed, in different ways, the thought that, in Lord Acton's words, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." But the essential genius of our founders was an

understanding that this is a key aspect of human nature and is not tethered to any particular ideology or set of political viewpoints. Anyone who is put in a position of exercising too much power is vulnerable to wanting more power, and the only way to contain that threat to freedom is to create an equipoise by balancing different centers of power against one another to create a space in between where individuals can be relatively invulnerable to the abuse of power by any one center because it will trigger a countervailing force from one of the other centers. And so much more to say, but that's an insight that we've got to protect.

MS. KAMARCK: Another one from Stephanie La Sage: "According to you, what can make all Americans acknowledge the global climate change and address this issue, and the contrast about Europeans seem to be much more aware of this issue. What's the difference?"

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Well, part of it is what I was describing earlier in the description of television and big money and our politics. There's been an extremely well-funded campaign of distortion, and it was modeled very consciously on the campaign undertaken by the tobacco companies some decades ago. In fact, a terrific book co-authored by Naomi Oreskes called *Merchants of Doubt* documents this in great detail. They've hired some of the same people that put out lies in return for money for the tobacco companies to do the same thing for large

carbon polluters.

And you remember, the tobacco companies hired actors and dressed them up as doctors and put them in front of cameras with a script that had them saying they were doctors and the public didn't need to worry about lung cancer or any other diseases as they might have heard were linked to cigarettes because as doctors they could reassure them there was no such thing to worry about. And many tens of millions people died during the 40 years between the Surgeon General's warning and the first meaningful steps to reign in the deceptive marketing and the killing of people.

So, they're doing exactly the same thing now, and, you know, 97 percent of all the climate scientists agree with the consensus. And if, God forbid, you had chest pains that got worse and if you were able to consult the hundred leading heart doctors in the world and 97 of them said, oh, my God, you need to have this procedure and change your diet and exercise, and there were three that said, well, I'm not sure yet, we need to do some more tests, what would you do? I mean, the answer's pretty simple. But that's what the world -- that's the question the world faces now.

And here in the U.S., the news media has been intimidated, frightened -- and not only frightened, they are vulnerable to distorted news

judgments, because the line separating news and entertainment has long since been crossed, and ratings have a big influence on the selection of stories that are put on the news. And the deniers of the climate crisis, quite a few of them paid by the large fossil fuel polluters, really, it's like a family with an alcoholic father who flies into a rage if anyone mentions alcohol, and so the rest of the family decides to keep the peace by never mentioning the elephant in the room.

And many in the news media are exactly in that position. They get swarmed by these deniers online and in letters and pickets and all that, if they even mention the word "climate." And so they very timidly - they get frightened and they're afraid to mention the word "climate." Some of them are changing now, thank goodness.

But this is -- and while the news media is not mentioning it here, has not been, the large corporate-driven advertising agenda has kept putting out these messages. Why is so-called clean coal one of the three principal sponsors of every news program and every talking head show? Why is that? Is it because they have an idea that the consumers watching television are going to say, Mildred, I'm going to go down to the store and buy us some coal. (Laughter) No. No. Their purpose is to condition thinking and to prevent the consideration of a price on carbon. I mean, it's just that simple. And so, you know, as both President Clinton

and I have said, there's an old saying that if you see a turtle on top of a fence post, it's a pretty good bet that it didn't get there by itself. When you see this anomalous outcome here in the U.S. public, it didn't happen by itself.

MS. KAMARCK: One last question, and it's from Wilson Golden, Vice President of Government Affairs at Xerox, "What's next for you, and how might those of us nearing retirement become active in your good works?"

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Oh, what a lovely question.

(Laughter)

MS. KAMARCK: I thought I'd end with a softball.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: Well, as the chairman of the Climate Reality Project, I spend most of my time on trying to move our country and the world past a political tipping point beyond which we recognize the reality of what's going on.

You know, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a cholera epidemic in London, and a famous doctor there made a map and put a dot every place there was a case of cholera. And he overlaid the map on the sewer system of London and in that way found that one malfunctioning pump on Broad Street was the proximate cause. And just a few years later Louie Pasteur found the biological cause. They connected the dots,

and cholera is no longer the mass killer it once was.

We need to connect the dots now, because the 90 million tons of global warming pollution that we spew every day into the atmosphere, as I said earlier as if it's an open sewer, are trapping the heat, causing all of these extreme -- making worse and contributing to the extreme weather events that are related to climate. And these extreme temperature events are now one hundred times more common than they were just 30 years ago. When will we awaken to the point where we say, hey, we've got to do something about that?

That's how I spend most of my time. And the Climate Reality Project will have its Third Annual 24 Hours of Reality next month, a global telecast. We had 18 million viewers last year. We're launching a number of new websites. I also work, as David said earlier, in private equity. I'm co-founder and chairman of Generation Investment Management, which pursues sustainable capitalism, and although I didn't have the occasion to talk about that in depth here, I know that your corporate purpose initiative is -- it is really in the same space, and we'd love to work with you on that. So, anybody that wants to help on the climate issue, go to [ClimateReality.org](http://ClimateReality.org), and we'd love to have your help.

And, Elaine, thank you again for inviting me here today.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, thank you very much, and if everyone

would please be seated while the Vice President leaves.

On behalf of Brookings and certainly on behalf of myself,  
thanks so much for coming by.

VICE PRESIDENT GORE: My pleasure.

Thank you all very much.

Congratulations.

MS. KAMARCK: Bye.

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