

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
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CHILDHOOD FOOD INSECURITY IN THE U.S.:
TRENDS, CAUSES, AND POLICY OPTIONS

Washington, D.C.
Monday, September 15, 2014

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HASKINS: Good morning. My name is Ron Haskins. I'm the co-director of the Center on Children and Families, and I've learned over the years always to mention that I'm the co-director with Belle Sawhill, and especially now I want to mention Belle Sawhill because, even though our topic today is food and food insecurity, Belle has just published a book. I checked this morning. It's available on Amazon. I think they got it Friday, *Generation Unbound*, and there was a long op-ed in the *New York Times* yesterday which I hope some of you saw. If you didn't you might want to look at that, and the title of the op-ed is "Beyond Marriage". Belle accepts the idea that marriage is a thing of the past, except for people with a college education. I don't know, I can't remember if she pointed that out, but alive and well with people, women who have a college degree, still get married, have very few children out of wedlock and so on. This -- we'll have an event about this before long. So please run out and buy that book, because our finances depend on it.

So childhood food insecurity is our topic today. And we have this very nice paper that is available outside, I hope everybody got one. And it reports the results of several empirical studies, all new research, funded by the Department of Agriculture, and the brief was written and as I understand, the process for awarding the grants and so forth was done by Jim Ziliak at the University of Kentucky, joined by Craig Gundersen from University of Illinois.

Let me also take a second to explain. I see many people I'm familiar with and so I need to say, we normally have two events a year on the *Future of Children* journals that we release. Our plan is, as this is somewhat tentative, that we're going to have one journal and one event like this. This is the first time that we've done this. And the reason is, it's extremely expensive to finance a whole journal. So we're probably going to have one of these and one journal each year. And next journal by the way will

be on children's' health. And our manager is here, John Wallace. When I say manager, I mean, he runs the whole thing, including all of the senior editors and everything. He says something, we say yes sir. You never want to have a paper edited by John unless you have a very strong self-concept, I assure you, because he -- there are more comments on the paper than the original words, so John, thank you for coming. I appreciate it. And I want to say also, I'm very pleased to be doing this with Jim and Craig. It's important research. We love to report things that are empirical here at Brookings. And of course, it bears directly on the well-being of children.

Here's the plan of the event. After I get through uttering remarks, I'll introduce Jim and then Jim will come to the podium and we'll summarize this research brief. Then we have a very distinguished panel of reactants. I want to introduce them at the appropriate time. Each panelist will have eight minutes and then they will have to suffer through a bunch of questions from me, and suffer through even more with questions from the audience. So that's the plan of the event. And when it's over, we can all go home and take this wonderful article with us and we'll all be more informed than when we came.

So Jim Ziliak, I've been looking forward to this opportunity for many years and I toyed with all kinds of things. Jim used to be here. I'll tell you about that in just a second. He is the Gatton Endowed Chair in Microeconomics. I thought all economics was micro, but, in the Department of Economics at the University of Kentucky. So I'll tell you three important things about him. One, he's a former Visiting Fellow here at Brookings. I gathered his office was just down the hall from mine and I had never met him before I don't think, so we struck up a friendship, so it's very good and gratifying to have him back here. And of course, the fact that he was at Brookings for almost a year added at least 10 points to his IQ, which he badly needed, so it's working out well. Secondly, this is real important to me, you'd probably be bored by this, but he is the Chair

of the Board of Overseers of the Panel of Income Dynamics. PSID is in my view probably the most remarkable survey ever. They've been found -- started with 5000 families and now we can do things like compare the income of parents with their kids at age, when they're both age 40, if you can believe that, and even average it over several years to make the numbers more reliable. It's quite an amazing survey. So that's a great thing for you to do, and I hope you keep it going. And then finally, I want to say that Jim has a book coming out on SNAP and how it affects the health and wellbeing of American children, so why don't you just tell us right now about the health and wellbeing of American children and food insecurity. Thank you.

MR. ZILIAK: Thanks Ron. Good morning. On behalf of my co-author, Craig Gundersen, I want to thank you for joining us today for the release of our report on childhood food and security. Before I turn to a brief summary of the report, I want to express our gratitude to our sponsors in the Food and Nutrition Service and USDA, for their support, both of the research program on childhood hunger, which is the majority of the research we're going to tell you about this morning, as well as the support for this report today. The views and recommendations we present are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of F&S.

I also want to thank John Wallace at Princeton University, and of course Ron Haskins here at Brookings for their excellent comments that greatly improves the report. Ron warned me in advance that John will do things to my paper that have never been done before in my life, and he delivered. It was amazing, really amazing. I also want to thank Stephanie Sensolo here in the Center on Children and Families for all her assistance in organizing the event this morning.

In U.S. today, over one in five children live in households that are food insecure, defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a household level, economic and social condition of limited access to food. The definition is derived from a series of

18 questions in the core food security module, that ask whether the household face difficulties feeding adults or children over the past year, because of lack of money and other financial resources. As shown in figure one, updated to include the 2013 estimates just released by ERS, food insecurity levels for children saw a substantial increase during the great recession, even though the recession officially ended in 2009, food insecurities remain stubbornly high and have not returned to the pre-recession levels.

The core food security module includes eight child focused questions, and if two or more are answered in the affirmative, then the children in the household are classified as food insecure. Answering yes to five or more of those eight questions means the children face very low food security, a more severe condition where the children face reduced food intake because of lack of money. This very low food measure is an often overlooked measure of food insecurity that is the focus of many of the papers in this report. As you can see in this figure, more than one in nine children in the U.S. are food insecure, and while very low food security is fortunately a rare event, it does affect over one million children in the U.S. today.

In the next figure, which depicts a fraction of children residing in food insecure households by county, using data from Feeding America's math to meal gap in 2012, childhood food insecurity is widely disbursed across the nation, though notably, it is highest in Appalachia, the south and the west, these are all areas that have persistently high poverty rates. This of course begs the question, why are so many children in America food insecure? The map suggests that income poverty is a leading culprit and this is a correct conjecture.

In the next figure, which depicts food insecurity among children as well as households with children, as well as income to needs ratio on the horizontal access, the income to needs ratio is determined by dividing a family's income by the poverty

threshold that U.S. agencies use to determine poverty rates for a family of a given size. An income to needs ratio below one means a family is poor. A ratio of two means a family income is twice the poverty line, and so on. Literally, the risk of food insecurity drops quickly with income. But at incomes two and three times the poverty line, food insecurity is quite high. Conversely, almost 60 percent of children in households close to the poverty line are in food secure households. This suggests that income is only part of this story, and that other factors also contribute to children's food security. And so many of the papers we report on today are looking at some of these alternative factors, and what do these include?

The new evidence from the research program on childhood hunger suggests that there are some major thematic factors across the studies. First, parental mental and physical health -- growing up with a parent with physical disabilities, depression or substance abuse significantly increases the likelihood that a child experiences food insecurity. For example, holding other factors constant, Kelly Balestrari, using data from the current population survey, finds that children living with a disabled adult are almost three times as likely to experience very low food security as children who do not live with a disabled adult. Kelly Noonan and her colleagues found that when mothers are moderately to severely depressed, the risk of child and household food insecurity rises by 50 to 80 percent, depending on the measure of food insecurity.

The second theme is immigrant status. For example, John Cook finds that children of foreign born mothers, using data from the children's health watch, which is a study of over 40,000 children at various hospitals across the U.S., children of foreign born mothers are three times as likely to experience very low food security as children of U.S. born mothers, even after controlling for other known risk factors.

Third, complex families including the issues of child support from non-custodial parents as well as child care arrangements, was a theme across studies.

Several authors find that controlling for socio-economic status, children raised by single parents, co-habiting parents, grandparents, or a stepparent family are more likely to be food insecure than children living with married biological parents. Furthermore, findings of the work of Lenna Nepomnyaschy and co-authors suggest that consistent support from non-resident fathers, whether in cash or in kind, is important for child food insecurity. While inconsistent support can be worse than no support at all, suggesting that income instability is a problem for many of these households.

Colleen Heflin and colleagues found that child care arrangements are also central and center based care, is because children in center based care can receive as much as two-thirds of their nutritional support in those centers. Among low income preschoolers attending child care centers is associated with lower odds of food insecurity than being cared for by a relative, which in turn is associated with lower odds of food insecurity than being cared for by a non-relative in a home care setting. Authors also found that households having weak social and emotional support networks or a parent who is incarcerated exposed children to higher risk of food insecurity. Lastly, summertime, when children no longer have access to school breakfasts and lunch programs also appears to be correlated with childhood food insecurity.

This leads to the next part of our report, where we highlight the major programs in the federal safety net, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, aka SNAP or food stamps, the national school lunch program, the school breakfast program, the child and adult care food program, and the special supplemental nutrition program for Women and Infants and Children, otherwise known as WIC. There is also the emergency food network, provided across the United States, most of the studies in this today do not address this area, and clearly this is in need of future research. Our review of the literatures indicates the very best research suggests that SNAP, the school lunch program and WIC are all effective in reducing childhood food

insecurity. So what do we mean by best? In this case, best practices means that the researchers effectively address the challenges of so-called reverse causation and in some cases underreporting of food assistance participation in surveys. That is, identifying the effect of programs on food and security among children is complicated by the fact that we cannot know what the food insecurity status of eligible non-participants would be, had they received food assistance, or what the food insecurity status of participants would be, if they did not receive food assistance. This is known as a missing counter factual. This is further complicated in non-experimental evaluations by issues of reverse causation, insofar as those who sign up for food assistance programs are more likely to be food insecure in the first place. Compounding this evaluation problem is that subject to national surveys frequently failed to report the participation in food assistance reporting programs, or underreport the actual amount of assistance they receive.

In the case of SNAP, using what's known as a dose response model, which examines how a dollar increase in SNAP benefits affects food and security, offers more variation beyond the basic comparisons of participants and eligible non-participants used in most of the prior research. For example, in a random assignment experiment sponsored by the food and nutrition service, SNAP benefits were topped up for one group of children by 60 dollars per child per month during the summers of 2011, 2012 and 2013. Another group of SNAP recipients did not receive this summertime boost. Among children receiving the extra 60 dollars per month, very low food security among children fell by one third across the 14 site demonstration.

In a non-experimental study on the WIC program, Brent Kreider and colleagues suggest both the selection for this reverse causation issue is underreported and using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, or NHANES, they find that under reasonable assumptions, WIC reduces the prevalence of child food insecurity by one third and a very lower food security by at least two thirds. These

programs are effective.

We conclude our report with suggested directions for both policy and research. On the policy front we emphasize three areas -- first, improving program access and take up rates, second, expansion of wrap around service, especially in the area of mental health, and third, the adequacy of benefit levels, especially in the SNAP program, an issue of take up and access. Many children are not receiving benefits, even though they are eligible for assistance, and thus improving access should be a priority. The process of applying for and recertifying SNAP benefits varies greatly across the country. Some jurisdictions have office hours only during prime work hours, forcing parents to choose between missing work and wages, or failing to enroll in SNAP or recertify. Other jurisdictions let people apply or recertify online, an innovation that may lead to lower transactions cost and increase participation. Some states have also decided to extend the recertification period to combat the sharp drop off in participation that occurs when households need to recertify. One policy suggestion we make is that perhaps the USDA could consider rewarding states at increased participation rates among eligible, especially at the recertification period, when many of these eligible families drop off. With school feeding programs, the access problem is different. In the case of the breakfast program, only about two thirds of schools offer breakfast across the country. Expanding the breakfast program to more schools would be an obvious step. And neither the school breakfast program nor the school lunch program, is available in most communities, when school is not in session. Some communities offer food programs in the summer, typically in community centers located in disadvantaged neighborhoods, but this practice is not wide spread. The recent USDA demonstration that topping up SNAP benefits during the summer can reduce food and security offers an efficient, well targeted option.

Next in the area of mental health -- because a mother's mental and

physical health can affect her child's food security status, access to mental health services should be improved. There should also be a focus on how to better coordinate the provision of programs like SNAP and WIC, in conjunction with mental and physical health counseling. Benefit adequacy and 2013, an institute of medicine panel on which I serve, released a report that questioned whether the SNAP benefits today are meeting the needs of families. For example, the SNAP benefits currently fixed across the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia, however there are substantial differences in cost of living across states, and benefits may need to reflect those differences. Next, families are expected to contribute one third of their net income to food. This is based on a poverty line that was established in the 1960's. Today families spend closer to one seventh of their budget on food. This may be worth revisiting in the SNAP formula.

Research shows that take up rates fall quickly as the potential benefit declines. Therefore even though a family may be eligible for assistance, the benefits aren't enough to make it worthwhile to apply. Raising this minimum benefit, currently at 16 dollars, could potential address this problem.

Finally on the research front, we emphasize a need for additional research on the following areas. Food and security among households with children of disabilities and or adults with disabilities -- we don't really know today what the mechanisms are that expose these households, again, holding income and education constant why disabled households are at such high risk. Is it the process of applying or recertifying for benefits? Is it the process of actually preparation of food? This is an area in need of future work.

Food and security among groups that are often not included in standard surveys, but this we mean populations that are homeless, or those in marginal housing situations, who are unlikely to be captured in our national surveys. We need further work on how the role of human capital, or parental education plays in terms of food security.

Most of the studies report that education matters, even controlling for income and other factors. So one thought is that there might be differences in household budgeting skills, that come about through human capital. So this requires future work.

Additionally, in terms of the evaluation issue, linking administration and survey data may help considerably. By this, the issue is trying to address the underreporting of transfer participation and benefits that plague so many evaluations. In addition we need future work on qualitative studies. The research program on childhood hunger did support some word search using qualitative methods and in other cases mixed methods, however, due to budgetary restrictions, they were necessarily small in scope, and so future work linking qualitative with quantitative studies is needed, especially on household budget making decisions.

Finally, we need surveys that follow families and their food security status over time, to understand better the long term consequences of food insecurity on family wellbeing. Ron mentioned my participation with the panel study of income dynamics. Recently the Food and Nutrition Service agreed to add the food security module back to the PSID. It was on the panel from 1999 to 2003. So when it's added on, you will actually be able to look at the food security status across the decade, of the same family. This is a great great improvement. There are many open questions about food insecurity affects households, but given the high numbers of Americans living in food insecure status, it's clear that we must continue to examine if critically, to help policy makers and program administrators better address this significant policy challenge.

Thank you very much.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, so we have a wonderful panel to respond to this report. We're going to start right here on my immediate right with Rich Lucas, who is the Deputy Administrator for Policy Support at the Department of Agriculture and has a long history of experience with food programs, and I understand played some role in this

research and has followed it very carefully. And then Russ Sykes, who's the president of his own consulting firm, but in a former life, he was the head of SNAP and several other welfare programs for the State of New York. And he also was a member of the National Commission on Hunger, which was recently appointed by Congress and I their administrative appointments as well, was a part of the Agriculture bill last year. And they've already met several times to (inaudible) to see their final report.

Then next is Mike Wiseman. He's a professor at George Washington, and I would say he's one of the nation's leading experts on anything to do with welfare, and Mike is very gratified that I gave him weeks' notice this time. The last time he appeared at Brookings, I'm not kidding, I called him at 9:00 the night before, because Mary Daly was supposed to be on the panel. Her mother was very ill and she called me that day, so I thought of Mike of course, and called him and he said he would do it. I was shocked by that. And so he showed up and he was -- another member of the panel criticized him, I mean, really, I was completely out of bounds. I don't think you were here but it was really -- so Mike has a lot of reason never to come to Brookings again, but there he is. He did decide to come, so good.

And then Bob Greenstein, who is the President and Founder of the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, I think probably the most respected or one of the most respected think tanks and data base organizations in Washington, D.C. And I can introduce Bob very simply by just saying that he is the most influential person in Washington, D.C. on anything to do with social policy other than elected officials and people on the administration, and has been for many many years. So we're very lucky to have Bob here. Bob also ran the Food and Nutrition Service at a previous time. That was decades ago now I believe, so we're both over Bob.

And then finally, Craig Gundersen, who was one of the authors of the report -- he's a Professor of Agriculture Strategy at the University of Illinois, and of

course, a co-author of this report. He has a little pad there and a pen. He's going to take notes about what people say here and anyone who disagrees with the report, he's going to criticize, so, we'll begin. We have more paper if you need.

MR. LUCAS: Well thanks Ron. Thanks for having me here. I appreciated the chance to be here with all of you today, for the release of this important work that we helped to support. I also wanted to let the panel and the audience know that Audrey Rowe, my boss, the administrator of Food and Nutrition Service, wanted to be here, but she had a prior commitment. She sends her regrets, but also her appreciation of the work that Craig and Jim and their colleagues have done, and of the discussion here today.

I wanted to begin by mentioning though; it's not the focus of the research itself. It is included kind of in a summary form, but it seems worth mentioning that the evidence that childhood food insecurity is not only a substantial and persistent problem, but has some serious negative consequences. We're sort of -- we had in recent weeks, some question about whether the condition of food insecurity is actually a serious problem, and I think a recent child trends report summarized some of the latest findings, about the fact that children in food insecure households experience more illness than those who are in food secure households. They tend to be in poorer health, they are more likely to be developmentally at risk. They have higher rates of chronic hospitalization and health conditions. Food insecurity is associated with problems beyond physical health, including higher rates of behavioral problems in 3 year olds, psycho social deficits, anxiety and depression in school age children and higher rates of depressive disorder and suicidal symptoms in adolescence. We also see some limits in educational gains that are associated with child food insecurity. And some evidence that there is significant detrimental effects on non-cognitive classroom measures -- interpersonal skills,

self-control, those types of things. So I think it's important to remember not only what we are learning about the causes, consequences of, or about the causes and the potential answers to childhood food insecurity, but also to remember that the consequences are serious.

The report presented here today highlights the depth and complexity of those, the causes and the contributors to childhood food insecurity. In many ways, it confirms something we've known for a long time, that a fundamental contributor to domestic food insecurity among children is household poverty, the lack of adequate resources to address basic needs, not only for food but shelter and healthcare as well. But it also underscores that the story is more complicated than that, that other factors like employment, family structure, the presence of disabilities, parental mental health, skills and coping strategies, of the household can really, can mean the difference between adequate access to food and food insecurity for kids.

So as we think about policy prescriptions, in my judgment, we need to think more broadly than nutrition assistance alone. USDA programs provide a safety net that improves access to food for those with critical needs, but addressing the causes of childhood hunger and food insecurity requires a broader strategy. We need to look at ways to improve economic opportunities and increase incomes, and of course, there are a wide array of strategies that seek to do that, but I think it's important to keep in mind the link between those strategies and any comprehensive answer to childhood food insecurity.

But at the same time, looking at not only economic strategies, but other kinds of personal family and social problems that need to be addressed to create a comprehensive long term solution -- all of that said, I'm from the Food and Nutrition Service and the nutrition system safety net was created and is designed to address the acute needs of individuals and families facing food insecurity. We need those big picture

solutions in the long run, but I'm going to take the chance to cite the oft cited New Dealer Harry Hopkins at the height of the Great Depression, who said people don't eat in the long run, they eat every day, or at least they need to. And the core of our mission in the Nutrition System programs, is to ensure that whatever other challenges folks face, children and families in the United States should have access to the nutritious food they need. The programs, just too kind of give my conceptualization to the 15 programs that the department offers, they're designed to work together, by providing a basic level of assistance that meets the basic food needs of low income people by supplementing their own discretionary household income. That's the basic role of the SNAP program and the block ramp programs that operate in a SNAP like fashion in some U.S. territories. And then there's an array of other programs that complement this basic food spending, by providing benefits in special settings such as school meals, to serve specific nutrition needs such as WIC, or to address emergency situations such as disaster assistance and support for food banks and pantries.

I think this report points to potential policy changes in both areas. In terms of basic assistance we need to look at potential gaps in the availability of the programs and the adequacy of benefits. I think the finding that the children of foreign born mothers are substantially more likely to experience very low food security than those of U.S. born mothers, suggest that we need to find better ways to serve these families in getting them the SNAP benefits for which they're eligible, and to consider whether limitations on those benefits for non-citizens may have unintended consequences on eligible children.

We also need to consider that factors that impact the adequacy of SNAP, and Jim referred to this in his comments. We, the Department commissioned an Institute of Medicine expert panel to examine the adequacy of SNAP allotments. They identified a wide array of different factors, many of which looked at what impacts the overall cost of a

healthy diet that the program should support and so that includes accounting for regional food cost variation, looking at the impact of food preparation time and cooking skills in SNAP households, and the timing of adjustments to account for food price inflation. But it also looked at any array of factors that impact the level of discretionary food spending that SNAP is intended to supplement, looking at the availability and size of deductions for earned income, and for medical expenses and high shelter costs, as well as the overall proportion of net income that remains, that can realistically be used for food and whether those levers need to be adjusted to make the SNAP benefit truly adequate.

So while the institute recommended these areas for consideration, they did not recommend specific adjustments. So additional research and analysis is needed to adjust for these factors in an evidence based way. The department has launched some of this research and will continue to pursue these efforts, to translate the recommendations into potential program changes for consideration by policy makers.

With regard to special assistance, that's array of programs, we need to focus on ways to target benefits to specific needs or risks of childhood food insecurity. Thanks to some strong evaluation work including some of the projects that Jim mentioned, the topping up of SNAP benefits we did through the summer food for children demonstrations for example, we have clear evidence of the impact of household benefits in reducing food insecurity generally and child food insecurity in particular. But expanding eligibility or increasing benefits is a costly prospect, and we know that we work in a resource constrained environment at the federal level, and frankly at every governmental level. We need to make sure every dollar we invest is making a real difference in the lives of our participants. In the realm of childhood hunger and food insecurity, that means we need to be able to carefully distinguish high risk households from those that may appear similar in terms of basic characteristics, the kinds that we might have in our eligibility requirement now, but be able to target them for those special

programs and special supplements so that we can focus those resources on those areas of greatest need. That's where I think that the work that's summarized in this paper is especially valuable and sort of direct us towards future research -- finding ways to better identify those at highest risk for food insecurity among kids so we can target programs to meet those needs.

So in conclusion, F&S and USDA look forward to using the evidence generated from this project to strengthen nutrition system safety net, both in reducing food insecurity, mitigating its consequences, but also looking at ways to make sure that we support and align the strategies to reduce the underlying causes of this problem.

MR. HASKINS: Thank you. Russ Sykes.

MR. SYKES: Thank you. And since Ron mentioned that I've been appointed to the National Hunger Commission, I want to just clarify; I'm not speaking on their behalf today. I'm speaking as an individual. The Hunger Commission has met three times. It was appointed as part of the Omnibus Appropriation Bill this year, and its mission is over a period of 18 months, to try to put together a final report by the end of next year for Congress and for the Administration and others that will look at some of the hopefully, in more depth, based on everything we've heard, some of the potential solutions to food insecurity. I do want to say that we will soon have all sorts of contact information and a web site and I will circulate a report that we've done if someone doesn't mind just circulating this around. I only brought one copy. It was done by our vendor RTI International. It's basically a literature review of the incidents of hunger and insecurity in this country at this point in time. I think it tailgates nicely with (inaudible) Report and so forth.

I'm a practitioner as Ron said. I ran the SNAP program in New York for seven years. So a lot of my thinking about the program comes from sitting in waiting rooms talking to workers, talking to clients, and other things, and I just spent a year after I

left the State of New York running a local office of America Works, where TANA recipients come in looking for both work and benefits and so forth. So that informs my thinking about a lot of this as well.

I'm very pleased with this report. It does some things that I think really expands the already pre=copious literature on food insecurity, but it also deals with a lot of causal effects that are outside income economics, which I think is important that we understand. There's government assistance and there are people themselves and what they can try to do for themselves in spite of areas that may be difficult to overcome. So I'm very pleased that the report we can add to the weight of trying to do some things.

The Commission in its infancy is looking particularly at the measure for very low food security, at the metric that we hope to be able to move through many different avenues, some within food assistance programs, some outside of food assistance program. I do want to point out, I think this is known by everyone here, but I mean the measure of food security is certainly validated from a research point of view. The current population survey, the food insecurity studies, but there is some ambiguity to the data and in anything that is survey data, there's dangers of both underreporting and over reporting and so we have to take some of it with a bit of a grain of salt. And it does not measure hunger. I want to make that clear. Hunger is a clinical condition. Food insecurity certainly is likely a predictor of hunger, but we're not measuring hunger when we talk about food security or food insecurity. So let me just mention some things. One thing that we looked at, at the last meeting of the commission that I found very interesting and I just use it -- we were looking at two maps. One was a USDA map looking at characteristics of the SNAP program across the board and showing a map of the United States with participation rates based by quarters. And I just happened to look at two states, New York and Minnesota and two other states, Oregon and Washington State. New York and Minnesota have the lowest quarter of participation of eligible according to

USDA and Oregon and Washington have by far the highest. And but when you look at the overlay, the incidents of food insecurity, while it exists in all four states is actually higher in Oregon and Washington than it is in New York and Minnesota. So I think that gives us some sense that while all the evidence weighs towards yes, SNAP does do many things to help and WIC does many things to help, it's not completely empirically demonstrated, because we have people on these programs that suffer higher food insecurity than people sometimes not on them.

I think that there are several things that I want to talk about. One is Ron Haskins' three pillars of success, because I think it weighs in on this measure and on poverty in general -- finish school, postpone having children and marriage. We know that in all those instances, and when you add in employment, frankly, that people are less food insecure, children and adults, if indeed they're working, although there are working families that are still food insecure, and if they have a higher level of educational attainment, as everyone said, and we know that single parent families and particularly single parent families with multiple children are at higher risk. And I got to say, 46, from my point of view, 46 million people on SNAP is both good and bad news. The good news is the program is very responsive economically. The bad news is it means we have a pretty terrible economy and still do, and in spite of improvements in the drop of the unemployment rate, we still have real unemployment when you look at the number of people who have given up looking, is tough. So jobs I think are very critical to this discussion, whether they be subsidized, leading to unsubsidized, I think it's something that we really need to look at outside the realm of SNAP and WIC and other programs, and I think it's very important. And I'm hoping that the new SNAP work pilots shed some light on this and give us some further evidence about how to do different creative things to help those who are on the program who could work but are not working.

I also really want to say that there are about four areas of interest,

particularly to me, that we've brought up at the Commission level, in SNAP, and I think they'd have to be pilot issues, but the gold standard in research is random assignment, and I think there are certain things that we could look at. One would be a pilot that compared families having their food stamps based on the turkey food plan versus having them based on the low cost food plan, which is a higher level food plan and goes to the issue of adequacy. Again you could look at regional issues, the regionalization of benefits, in some ways, through pilot approaches. You could discount the earnings disregard for working families, which I think might help a bit. And finally, you could eliminate or reduce that benefit reduction rate that was spoken about that is the notion that families have to pay 30 percent of their income over and above their SNAP benefit in order to ostensibly reach a food secure diet. So I think those are good ideas. The individual and cultural issues, everyone has brought them up. I'm not going to repeat them. Many of them are brought on by low income itself. We know that, but many of them are brought on by individuals themselves, and I think we need to pay more attention as we did in TANA, to the role of the individual in trying to improve their own standards as well. And I know it's tough. I don't mean that in a mean-spirited way in any fashion at all. But seeing people come in to different places and seeing the, quite often, some of the dysfunction they bring, and how one tries to address that as well as their income situation is very important. There's a lot of new research that HHS is interested in and I'm participating in another study of job search activities in TANA, and that's the issue of executive functions -- executive functioning -- how people make decisions, how they're resilient, how they react to bad outcomes, et cetera.

So I just think that the other issue that's always been dear to my heart, the study points out, is the issue of child support. Even if the father's not involved directly with the family, the issue of child support, when you look at the earned income tax credit, food stamps and child support comes in about third as far as the largest income

supplement for low income single parents. And so I'm glad the report identifies that. I know the Commission will look at this very carefully over the course of its work, and I appreciate Jim and Craig, that you've done it. And thanks for inviting me.

MR. HASKINS: Thank you. Mike Wiseman.

MR. WISEMAN: Ron always calls me in when he needs an old white male to fill out the panel and I did that. I'm surrounded by great competence on these issues. I'm going to be sort of an outlier. I want to raise some issues I have about this report and its coverage and many things I'm going to complain about I know that were in the paper before John Wallace took them out, so I don't really blame the authors.

Let me just cite the second paragraph. "Food's insecurity rates remain stubbornly high for a number of reasons. One is that we don't fully understand what causes food insecurity or how food assistance and other programs can help alleviate it. Food insecurity has been researched extensively and this research has helped policy makers and program administrators better address the problem. Now right off I got stopped, because first of all, there are a number of reasons but we only got one, because that reason is that we don't know much about it. And then, what is it that we have told those policy makers and administrators that goes beyond of role of having a reliable source of income and reducing the prevalence of the kind of experiences that the food security measures identify, especially among children? I couldn't find in this, I couldn't find in my experience, and in this literature, much about what those lessons have been, that connection between what we as academics learned and what administrators have to do, if there are good connections, we need to know more about them because we need to study and be able to do it better. But there's much information in here that's important.

The paper has four parts. It starts out by talking about the food insecurity measures, which we have a long history on, then talks about this interesting body of micro-research, much funded through F&S by way of Lexington, telling us

nuances of the distribution of these things, then addresses policy recommendations, and finally, we need more research, which is an academic obligation. You have to put that at the end, because it surfaces interesting things at every stage. The food security, I would have -- we want to hear, we can't complain about. They're not writing a book, but the time has probably come to think about the structure, about what we've learned about the food security measure and so forth, its validity and its utility over the decades in which we've been using it in these -- we take in this paper the measure is a given and work for them. I was looking for a more return to it. There's extraordinarily interesting information. The new report just issued that Jim mentioned, has the wonderful table that shows the number of children in households that are designated as food secure and then the number of children that are themselves classed as food secure. And it's extraordinarily interesting that first of all, that number's been very constant, the aggregate number's been very constant over the past decade, and then interesting, the ratio of children that are themselves food secure to children that live in households that are food secure -- it's always a subset, that ratio has stayed remarkably constant, at about .54. Why do we know? Why is that stability, despite all of our policy, why has that persistence maintained?

Then they do a survey of new research, principally about correlations. It starts with the core, food insecure children, and then works outward. What I missed in this paper was the working inward from some of the macro information. We've seen some studies; most of this material comes from the last two years. It's very -- brings you up to date. But what happened to, for example, the Nord Prael work on AARA, the American Reinvestment whatever, the thing that -- where you saw the --

MR. HASKINS: The Stimulus Bill

MR. WISEMAN: The Stimulus Bill, that you saw an increase in income, exogenous, and then could look at the impact of that on food security. Now they don't

talk about the kids in there, but it totally has a connection and you clearly have evidence it gets around the simultaneity issue -- suddenly more income and you saw food security reduced. There's another paper last year from Mathematica that looked at food security for persons that were newcomers to the system, this self-selection problem, and looked at the progress of food security over the first six months after taking up food stamps, saw improvement in security, specifically identified the impact on children. We should have heard something about that in this discovery.

Continuing the list of factors or aspects of literature that might have been brought to bear, think of that list that Jim put up, that they pulled together, of factors associated with food insecurity -- mothers' health problems, mental health, substance abuse, residential instability, and so forth. That list seemed to me to coincide with the set of factors that Milena, Finn and Shafir argue in their 2013 book, "Scarcity", that reduce the capacity of people to do the planning necessary both to budget and to take advantages of, such as they exist, of opportunities for improving their family situations. Is there nothing in the new brain science literature, and that's something, when Russ was talking about executive functioning, is there nothing in this literature that should be brought to bear on this problem? We didn't hear anything more about that.

I have more in this direction to go, but let me mention one other bit of literature. Martin Nard is no longer at ERS, but he's got people both successors, Alicia and others there, but in 2008, he published with Heather Hopwood, a very interesting paper comparing food security in Canada with food security in the U.S. I mean, after all, we're dealing with a food security measure with a measure of material deprivation, the things that so interest, for example, our friends in the United Kingdom. The Hopwood Nord paper really got -- first of all they got installed into the Canadian household survey, the essence of the food security question. And then on top of that, they do an elaborate job trying to compare income levels and controlling for demographics. They found -- I

copied down a few of the results here, but the percentage of population living in households classified as food insecure was lower in Canada, seven percent, than in the U.S., 12.6 percent -- I forgot to copy the year. The difference was greater for the percentage of children living in food insecure households -- 8.3 percent versus 17.9 percent in the U.S. than for adults in the Canadian U.S. comparison. Now, and that's holding constant similar demographic characteristics. What is it about the income situation of low income Canadians that lead to greater food security, so much dramatically food security among children apparently, than we have in the U.S.? What's about the system? And that probably, and I'm coming to a close here, raises an issue that really struck me about this paper, is context. What else has been going on during the past ten years? The focus is on the five big nutrition programs that of course, that's paying the bill. But outside, the issue becomes, the larger issue, the apparatus that we used to have to address the broader issues of these families -- the scarcity issue, was AFDC and then TANA. It was old style welfare, case management, addressing the serious sub-group, the 50 percent of the household insecure people for the children who are food insecure, that needed additional help, the kinds of things that Milena and Shafir talked about. There's not a mention of the consequence of the contraction of TANA for food security of the interaction of that program with SNAP. And I think that's a shame.

MR. HASKINS: Thank you. Bob Greenstein.

MR. GREENSTEIN: Well, as a onetime long ago American History graduate student, it's a real pleasure and a first for me to be on a panel where one of the other speakers mentions one of my favorite figures from American history, Harry Hopkins, FDR's great aide. Russ talked about some of the individual responsibility issues. I'm going to talk about the other side of that equation -- government policy, social programs and what I see as some of the policy implications of the findings in the report, but mostly for non-food assistance programs, starting with the point that Jim mentioned

and the paper states, that the evidence suggests that improving mothers' health can decrease food insecurity among children, and it places particular emphasis on mental health and depression. Many people who are -- many mothers who are uninsured, have difficulty getting access to treatment for this. And in states that have taken the affordable care act, Medicaid expansion, this is creating a new paid funding stream for mental health and providing some expansion of those services. To me this is one more suggestive piece of evidence of the value and the importance of the states that have not yet done so, electing the Medicaid expansion. I looked on Friday to see what is the income limit, the point at which a mother becomes ineligible for Medicaid in the median state, the typical state of those that have not yet taken the Medicaid expansion, and the answer is 47 percent of the poverty line. A mother who has sporadic part time work, and her earnings are at 50 percent of the poverty line, is too wealthy in those states to qualify for health coverage, and as a result is less likely to have access to mental health treatment. That's something we ought to address. It also would be useful to have research, now that this, the Medicaid expansion is going on, we have states that have taken it and states that don't. It would be interesting to see if there could be some research designed to study its impact on child food insecurity.

The second issues, Russ mentioned child support. One of the few but significant areas where there seems to be some cross party cross-ideological interest in a poverty modification in the poverty policy area, Ron is very interested in this I know, is in enlarging the earned income credit for adults who are not living with and raising minor children, including non-custodial fathers. There's an important demonstration in New York being evaluated by NDRC. I think that one of the things it's going to look at is the impact on child support payments and I think that's another promising area of policy that this research suggests that maybe that would be another benefit that could be derived. The report, the study talks about child care. Children attending child care centers have

lower levels of food insecurity. Today, only one in six children in well income working families with incomes low enough to meet qualifications for child care subsidies of one form or another get any such support. I think this is one more piece of data or research suggesting that we ought to be investing more in decent quality pre-K child care and early child care education.

I was struck by the finding that children in immigrant families have significantly higher rates of very low food insecurity than other children. Jim also talked about take up rates, if you look at the data. Children in immigrant families who are eligible for things like snap have lower take up rates than other children. When you drill down, you find that in a number of these programs, although the children in the immigrant families who are overwhelmingly citizen children, born here, that there are barriers often in the application process, for Medicaid or SNAP or whatever, whereby, although the federal rules call for the process to be run in such a way that ineligible parents can apply just for their children without jeopardizing themselves, in fact, the actual processes don't always meet that standard. My colleagues at the Center on Budget over past years have taken every states' online SNAP and Medicaid applications and tried to test it, and apply for a child but not for the parent, and in a number of places they found you couldn't submit the application. The red flag would come up -- you haven't filled out all the fields. F&S has been very good in working with us in the states to address that. I think it's largely been addressed. We have more route to go in the Medicaid area, but these children are going to be -- they're citizens in most cases, they're going to be part of the work force of tomorrow, and the law says they're eligible; we ought not to put up barriers that prevent them from getting assistance.

The single area where I think there's the most bipartisan promise of progress, more state than federal level, is the growing belief that we have gone too far in incarceration. There are studies showing a variety of ill effects of over emphasis of

incarceration. This is one more. The children in families with an incarcerated parent have higher rates of food insecurity. There's also a briefer discussion in the report of housing. Food insecurity is higher when families have housing instability. This shouldn't be surprising. If you have to move frequently, you often have new expenses for the first month's rent and security deposit. The research on toxic stress -- there is likely to be some connection between that and families that are simpler and insecure. They don't know for periods at a time if they have a stable place to live or they constantly move and the kid is going to a new school. I think this is an argument for more Section 8 rental vouchers and a question of, is there a way, I don't know if there is, but if there's a way to possibly tweak some of the criteria for who comes higher on the list, who gets priority for rental vouchers, since we have only about one in four eligible low income families get any rental assistance, to focus on families where the children would be more likely to be food insecure.

Finally in the area of SNAP policy, the findings are very interesting, I would say very striking, of the degree to which childhood insecurity was reduced when the food stamp benefit, the SNAP benefit was increased during summer months for children. In the policy/political world where this is leading, is to proposals to expand the summer feeding program, and next year's Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill, which given the political realities, makes a lot of sense. But if you move out of the political reality world and you just talk about policy, I think what the research really suggests, since the progress being made from expanding summer feeding will be limited by the nature of the limits in that program. What the research really suggests is that when the political reality allows, we really ought to be taking a serious look at doing what was done in the study, which is to say, increasing SNAP benefit levels for families with children in summer months, when school is out. Or better yet, and I will close on this, looking at the basic SNAP benefit level itself. That benefit level was basically said in legislation, and

enacted in January 1971, every recalibration of the basic food stamp SNAP benefit level since then has started with the constraint that it must end up at no higher cost than the cost of the level Congress set in January 1971. Well what happened in January 1971 was that the Senate passed a bill with a 10 percent higher level. There were the votes in the house for a bill with a ten percent higher level, but the vote occurred on Christmas Eve. The House did not yet have its bill system. One of the most liberal democrats in the House had a Christmas party. People had a little too much to drink. Enough members didn't get back to the floor for the vote. On the key vote, only 245 out of the 435 members of the House made it to the House floor for the vote. The higher benefit level lost by three votes, the House provision prevailed in conference, and that's how we got the benefit level that we now have in SNAP today. The benefit level they would have passed would have been halfway between the thrifty plan and the low cost plan as Russ mentioned. At some point, we at least ought to have a demonstration project I think, to sort of test the effects of food insecurity and other factors of what would happen if we had a somewhat higher basic SNAP benefit level. I'll stop there.

MR. HASKINS: Craig Gunderson.

MR. GUNDERSEN: Okay, thank you Ron. I wanted to begin very much by thanking F&S for supporting this research. We very much appreciate the support. But we also thank Brookings for hosting this here today. And I want to thank all of you for coming. There are a lot of other things we could be doing right now, so I really appreciate you coming to this. It's heartening to me to see so many people interested in this issue, and I want to acknowledge Jim. Many of you already know Jim Ziliak and you're lucky to know him. I'm even luckier, because Jim and I have been working together for about 15 plus years now. He's fantastic to work with. I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to work with him on this. I'm going to just respond to, originally I was scheduled to go first, but I was going to say the same thing Jim was going to say, so Ron

put me last so I can respond to just some of the comments.

Rich's -- so these negative consequences, I think we really have to emphasize that negative consequences are associated with food insecurity a lot, because for some of us, a child going to bed hungry is a serious reason for us to be concerned about some of these issues. But for some of you, you want more evidence that these things matter. And we have to concentrate upon the negative consequences. Whenever we think about what are the benefits to using SNAP to reduce food insecurity, we have to remember these indirect benefits in terms of reducing the negative consequences. And speaking of SNAP, when you come back to SNAP a few times in this, is that, when food insecurity is not, as we know, is not synonymous with poverty, and you've mentioned this, our work points out some of these other things that matter, and the thing is, 60 percent of poor households in the United States are food secure, 50 to 60, right, 60, yeah, yeah, 60 percent are food secure. So looking at, we should also figure out why these households that are poor and food secure, that's also something worth investigating and I think SNAP and the whole panoply of food assistance programs is a key reasons why so many poor people are food secure. I think revisiting this SNAP formula is definitely worth doing. It's been set in stone for so long that to even tweak at it, I would even go so far as to argue, even if we're going to say, and I know some on the panel wouldn't agree with this necessarily, or Jim, I don't know if Jim would agree with this, even if you have to keep costs the same, even if you said, we're not going to spend any more money on SNAP, I think there's ways to change our benefit formula to redirect the benefits towards those who are in greater need and maybe in the process take it away from some of those with less need. Don't quote me as saying, Gundersen says slash benefits for those who are doing better. That's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying is that if we have to think about tweaking some of this, that we can think about it in that context.

Okay, I want to now turn into Russ's comments. Look at things at the case worker. You're talking about being at the -- looking at what happens at the case work. That's an underexplored area and it's beyond the scope of what we're looking at. But really, look at what happens at the case worker to client relationship is really important. You hear a lot of people saying negative things about those relationships. If you're going to, how that can work better I think is really an important thing to do this.

I want to talk a bit about this relationship between food insecurity and SNAP participation. The Wall Street Journal had an article about that, where somebody was saying, look, food insecurity rates stayed steady. SNAP participation rates are high, and then, why is that, and I'll say why it is, but also, this issue about states. Some states will have higher participation rates alongside higher food insecurity rates, in part because those are in greater need, (inaudible) the program, but also has a lot to do with, if you look at SNAP, the determinants of SNAP participation, if a state on average has higher incomes because the inverse relationship between SNAP participation and income, you're going to have lower participation rates and states with higher average incomes in comparison to other states. But the main point I want to make about this is, I mean SNAP is an, as we all know, as an amazing successful program, is that the best estimates show that at least 14 percentage points difference between SNAP recipients and eligible non-recipients, in terms of the effect of this program. So I think that that's -- I think that it might be stylized fact. SNAP leads to reductions in food insecurity, and so akin to some of these things. If we see other relationships, I don't think that vetoes these fundamental findings.

And Russ, you mentioned random assignment as the gold standard. There's lots -- I personally don't think random assignment is the gold standard in all cases. Random assignment can give us some useful information, but like in this report, almost all the things are not random assignment. I think we can view a lot of useful

information and like with PSID, that's not a random assignment, but there's a lot of really neat information, so we can have full panels on the advantages and disadvantages of associating with random assignment.

And I'll turn to Michael's comments. You know, you quoted a sentence of ours that wasn't clear. That's because John edited it. It was much clearer before we had it -- just exactly what we wanted to say, John had some crazy ideas with this, but so, and then, I'm glad that by (inaudible) you did find the work useful, so I think you for that. Is, you know -- I think part of the reason why, you mention this persistence over time of the ratio, I think you said that food insecurity was controlled in 2000. I think it's partly because we really haven't done that much new in terms of addressing food insecurity in the United States, over the last 15 years. Because we've changed things around at the march, but there hasn't been anything fundamentally new, so I guess my priority would be, that it would have stayed constant, that ratio.

So briefly talk about Mark Nord. Mark Nord is fundamentally -- if it wasn't for Mark Nord, I don't think food insecurity would be as high a profile as measured as it is in the United States. Mark Nord is just amazing. But it's in very capable hands with Alicia and Anita so it will continue to be a great measure. I'm sorry we didn't address, cite the paper with him and Mark Prell. I should note, at footnote 32 though, we do cite about eight papers, saying that SNAP leads to reductions in food insecurity. So we really do try to cite that literature. We probably overlooked a couple of papers. But footnote 32 -- one of the disadvantages, I mean, these Brookings and these Future of Children things are great, really useful. But the way they have the citations, you'd be better sometimes to pick out the names of the authors in parenthesis rather than in a footnote. But that's neither here nor there. But just when you see it --

MR. HASKINS: It ain't going to change. I know, I know.

MR. GUNDERSEN: But still, when you see footnote 32, I just want to

acknowledge that we did mention this. And I have a funny thing to say about the Canadians. So -- I mean, not about the Canadians, but here's the thing, is you mentioned the Nord and Hopwood paper, is that the interesting thing is that I'm on a project that's funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research with a colleague at University of Toronto of (inaudible), and the Canadians are looking, and part of the reason is, I'm the U.S. PI, she's the Canadian PI, part of the reason is, they want to use the U.S. experience to address food insecurity in Canada. Because we -- Canada doesn't have a wide array of food assistance programs, whereas in the United States we do. So they want to investigate how these programs can be interesting. And we can learn a lot from Canada, but they also recognize that they can learn even more from us.

Then the final thing is, Bob had a lot of great ideas as he always does regarding policy and I just want to echo those. I can't add or subtract to what you're saying, but I do agree with it, and thank you for closely trying out some of those policy implications that we didn't have the space in this to do. And I can't think speak for my -- I concur, I'm not sure Jim does, but I do and I think they got some neat ways to extend that. So, and I'm done, and I'm within my time frame. Thank you.

MR. HASKINS: Anybody on the panel want to claim his remaining 15 seconds? I want to ask a question that I think a normal citizen that was somewhat well informed would ask. They might say, wait a minute. We spent a hundred billion dollars on 15 different food programs and we have, what does it say in this paper, 46 million people on SNAP, and we still have 16 million kids who are in, who have food insecurity? How can that be? What are we doing wrong?

MR. GUNDERSEN: I would respond -- it would be a lot worse if we didn't spend that hundred billion dollars, and that's using, that's what I use as --

MR. HASKINS: That's not much of a response, though.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I really disagree that that's not much of a response.

MR. HASKINS: Okay.

MR. GREENSTEIN: If people have long memories, go back and read the studies from the late 1960s on child hunger and malnutrition then. Food insecurity with all of the problems it brings is not the same as what was found by many studies then, of actual significant rates of really serious nutrition related diseases, marasmus, (inaudible) and the like, in many parts of the deep south and Appalachia at rates not that different from third world countries, and that's extremely -- we have unacceptable rates of child food insecurity but those more severe kinds of child hunger and malnutrition are largely gone and there's a lot of research suggesting that the development and maturation of the food assistance programs gets the majority of the credit for that.

MR. HASKINS: The essence of my question is not, whoa, shouldn't we just abandon these programs. I'm not interested in that at all. I'm interested in, how can we spend this much money and have such an array of programs, even more than the Canadians, I didn't know about this until Michael talked, and still have more food insecurity among our children? How can that be? Russ.

MR. SYKES: Well, I think for one thing it points out to, and I don't disagree with what Bob and he said, but I think it shows that maybe money again is not really this whole factor governing why we have food insecurity. There really is at the individual level another level with many other attendant problems that we don't probably address well. And I think also, it also may demonstrate that we don't spend 100 million as correctly as we might. There might be ways, as you suggested Craig, to think through and differentiated some of the eligibility and benefit rules for people. I also just want to say one other thing that I think is somewhat controversial, that I know will get negative reactions from people.

MR. HASKINS: He might throw you off the Commission, so watch it.

MR. SYKES: Well the Commission is probably going to suffer from the

same gridlock as Congress, because we're five Republican appointees and five Democratic appointees. But I do think both for political and other reasons, I think even it might exacerbate food insecurity. Every other USDA food program has a prescriptive package of allowable foods for purchase, whereas the food stamp SNAP program does not. And I think to the degree that one wants to make any argument that we might expand benefits, as Bob and I both talked about and really look at reasonably, I think they're going to have to counterweight that with some other kind of changes to policy. And the Commission has been prompted as part of its mission not only to look at the issues of food insecurity but also to look at ways to make programs public and private more cost efficient.

MR. HASKINS: Anybody else want to comment on this? Yeah, Bob.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I'm going to take the other side from what Russ just said. He said and I don't disagree with this, in comments and everything, but the other side of the coin is that the SNAP program increasingly, the rest of the cash assistance or near cash assistance safety net, particularly for low income families that don't have significant earnings, has eroded and SNAP is now the basic income support before. And it can't do everything. There's an interesting question, I hope there's research on this, I think there's some underway. Other people would know better than I. It would be interesting to know, if you actually were to enhance income, I think there's some experiments, maybe Greg Duncan, or others know, starting to look at various effects of you know, what if we gave families with young kids X thousand dollars more per year for when the kids are below age five or six or whatever. I'm hoping those studies will look at the food insecurity effects as well as other effects, but you know, it may be that part of the answer, particularly for very young kids, this will actually do more with cash income, on top of food stamps, rather than having SNAP having to carry so much additional load.

MR. SYKES: That's often called a job.

MR. HASKINS: And what?

MR. SYKES: And that's often called a job.

MR. HASKINS: Yes, okay, well, speaking of that, go ahead.

MR LUCAS: Well just, I mean, just to echo that, I'm not sure anybody here, I suspect not anybody here, I know that the people I work with at the department would not disagree that the best way to enhance food security and everything else is to have earned income, to have a job. The secretary is often heard saying that we like to get people off the SNAP roles the right way, by making them no longer needed, because they have their own earned income. And certainly the projects that we're working on under the farm bill are going to see if we can find ways to better make use of the opportunities in SNAP to encourage that. But I think that in the end, this issue of giving folks what they need in the short term for acute needs is critical. No question that being able to target them better, being able to make sure that they contribute to a healthy diet are all important things.

MR. SYKES: Right, well, and one of the biggest successes of ARA and the contingency fund was actually the issue of subsidized employment. And I know there's a great deal of controversy on both sides of the aisle about that going all the way back to JTPA and WEA and everything else, but in fact, the residual kind of programs in some places are still running, like San Francisco and other places, on subsidized employment, have huge retention rates and permanent employment, and you know, when you have a job, along comes the earned income tax credit, a child tax credit. You're basically, it's indisputable, but you're better off economically when you're working. So if there isn't an unsubsidized job out there, I think we should really look at subsidizing one.

MR. HASKINS: Well just to clarify this for the audience, because this is a really important point. I think Bob will agree with this and I think there's a lot of room for

bipartisanship --

MR. GREENSTEIN: I'm in strong agreement with Russell on this.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, well what happened is that Congress gave five billion dollars in supplement to the TANA program. And they said to the states, you can spend it in any of three ways. First, you can have regular welfare like you do now, pay it every month. Secondly, you can do one time payments, so if someone needs to make a house payment, or make a car payment, you can do that with it, or third, you can subsidize jobs. Now the democrats, they were against work and trying to kill off the reform according to all kinds of PR from primarily from the right of the aisle, put this work thing in and what happened was, amazingly, the states created 260,000 jobs. They subsidized mostly in the private sector. And what Russ was saying, some of those 260,000 jobs are still in force and some of the people way back from that time, still are working. It wasn't a short term effect. They're still working even now, much later. So let me ask you this. Why are the work requirements and food stamps so weak?

MR. LUCAS: They shouldn't be, and hopefully these pilots --

MR. HASKINS: Well why are they?

MR. LUCAS: Well, I don't know. I mean I've never been sure of that. I mean part of it is, you know, you have a lot of children in the program. You have a lot of people who are ostensibly, whether they really are or not, disabled by SSDI and SSI standards, and so you have a --

MR. HASKINS: You have exempt people who were disabled but --

MR. LUCAS: Yeah, right, I mean, the TANA core requirements were very strong, and I think they should be fully strong in food stamps. So far all we've gotten are these ten, up to ten pilots that are going to test, you know, states are going to compete for different ways to test mandatory, voluntary and other kinds of programs. I'm sure they can test subsidized employment in those pilots as well.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I've got to jump in here. I think --

MR. HASKINS: A lot of sharp eddies Bob.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I think it's a caricature and just say these requirements are very weak. There's a whole different range of requirements. Requirements I would argue on single individuals not raising minor children, are in fact excessively harsh. You're limited to benefits for three months out of every three years. Job, whether you, unless you're working or in a training program, at least 20 hours a week, most states do not provide training slots or any kind of job slots of at least 20 hours a week. If you search for a job 20 hours a week, that doesn't count, you're thrown out after three months anyway. With regard to the rest of the population, to the degree that they're on TANA, they're subject to worker requirements in TANA if we don't need dual work requirements -- one of the issues is that there is not very many resources in the food stamp employment and training program and there aren't really training or job slots offered by states or programs by most of these people. To the degree that states do things, and many of them do, they're mainly very light touch, little assistance job search requirements without assistance to help people in the job search, and if you look at the data, significant numbers of people, I think it's in the tens of thousands are actually sanctioned every year and have their benefits taken away for failure to meet those requirements and do the required number of job searches. So the caricature that there's no work requirement there, I think is not accurate.

MR. HASKINS: No, no, I didn't say no, I said weak, and it's not -- it's implemented indifferently. Go ahead.

MR. GUNDERSEN: So I was just going to make two comments about that. And first of all, I think we always have to remember about SNAP is, the main goal is to alleviate food insecurity in the United States. It's not designed to be a work program. I mean, with TANA, if we can make an argument whether or not that should be, but SNAP

really was designed to be addressing food insecurity. If you want to encourage work, there's other ways besides having work requirements. Right now, there's -- earnings are taxed differently in terms of the food stamp benefit, so for each additional dollar you earn, the deduction is 80 cents, right, rather than a full dollar, when calculating net income. So if we wanted to encourage work, we could change that formula to make, to reward work more. So there's others ways to do it within the existing structure as opposed to imposing work requirements, just make work pay more for SNAP recipients.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I think the area of agreement though, that's emerging is we could put resources, probably not through the SNAP program but it would affect a lot of SNAP recipients, into the subsidized jobs you mentioned, Ron. I would add one piece to the little history you gave, which was, we had, I think 260,000 I think was the figure you mentioned, subsidized job slots, mostly in the private sector, by late spring or early summer 2010, resident that funds that funded these slots was originally funded through September 30th, 2010. The President proposed extending it. I think it was as little as one or two billion dollars he asked for. The Republican governors used this. Democratic governors used it. Haley Barbour of Mississippi was one of the strongest proponents. And what happened was the Republicans in Congress refused to accept it, not primarily on the merits, but because anything that was part of the Obama recovery act was bad and couldn't be extended. And so although we had bipartisan agreement at the state level that this was good policy, it was allowed to die at the federal level. And the question is, if we have agreement at least among the policy analysts from a variety of political perspectives that this was really a good thing to do, can we get agreement to putting subsidized jobs back and then a lot more of these people can be put into work and hopefully, that can put them on a trajectory where they have better attachment and involvement in the labor force for years to come.

MR. HASKINS: The most amazing thing about history, which you have

left out, is that several of us wrote letters to the Congress and they ignored us. Can you imagine that? Okay, let me ask you one last question before we go to the audience. A lot of the explanations that you have given and that are in the report, about why food and security is high, have to do with things that don't have anything to do with the food, any of our food programs. They have to do with mental health, they have to do with non-work, they have to do with drug addiction and so forth -- all kinds of personal responsibility issues. Has it occurred to anybody that we're not likely to solve those issues anytime soon, so under current policy we're going to continue to have high rates of food insecurity and so forth? Because unless we can figure out ways to address those issues, it's going to be very difficult to reduce food insecurity. Is that right or not?

MR. GREENSTEIN: Almost impossible to eliminate but we ought to be able to reduce, I think a variety of policy changes in the certs we're talking about here. Getting back to the issue of drug abuse, clearly a major part is personal responsibility, but there is a governmental role and more and more effective substance abuse treatment. One of the opportunities, not yet realized, still a challenge, of the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, is whether states can construct their systems so that more people earlier on, including people being recently released from jail or prison, can be connected to mental health treatment and drug abuse treatment with the potential -- we'd have to see, we'd need research but with the potential that if we rely less on incarceration but don't just release people and replace it with nothing, but actually tie it into effective mental health and substance abuse treatment, can more of those people become employed? Fewer of them return to prison and more of their children make progress in reducing food insecurity. Things like this I think have promise, and we ought to investigate and see if we can make progress.

MR. HASKINS: I'm sure you know that we have tried many many prison release programs, and every time they have been evaluated by random assignment

studies they produce very modest effects and sometimes none.

MR. WISEMAN: And I think treatment programs as well, I mean, ICADA, but --

MR. HASKINS: Yes, and drug abuse programs too.

MR. WISEMAN: The rate of success is limited.

MR. HASKINS: This is a very (inaudible). All of our social programs stink.

MR. WISEMAN: I think there's some disagreement as to whether the characterization the two of you just gave of the research here is complete. I've seen some things that suggest some promising results.

MR. HASKINS: Right. We'll have an event and invite you in and we'll yell at each other about that. All right, audience. Raise your hand, someone will come and give you a mike and then ask a question. We don't want long statements. We want questions. Right here on the aisle, right there on your right.

SPEAKER: So obviously there's the issue of SNAP receipt, but then there's also the issue of how, I'm sorry, I said obviously there's the issue of -- I have a really tiny voice, sorry -- there's the issue of SNAP receipt but then there's also the issue of how SNAP is used at the household level. For instance, I did some qualitative work with low income mothers during the recession and they talked about their experiences where they would double up with family members within households and they would parse out responsibilities like, you pay for the rent, we'll use my benefits to buy food. So I'm wondering if some of the ambiguity and the research may be due in part to what's happening at this household level, and I was wondering if any of you could speak to that?

MR. ZILIAK: I think intra-household allocation issues are enormously important, whether it be how SNAP is distributed, in terms of these decisions and other things. It's an underexplored area. We really don't have much information about how

household decision making is done in this context, as opposed to like some low income countries, we have a lot of information about intra-household allocation. But it's definitely a fruitful area for research.

MR. HASKINS: Anybody else want to comment on this?

MR. SYKES: Well just that household compensation rules and the composition rules and that are different than they are in many other programs and that in itself I think causes some confusion, as to what constitutes a household for SNAP as opposed to something else.

MR. HASKINS: It's food preparation unit, right, is the people that's eating it?

MR. LUCAS: That's right, that's driving the SNAP.

MR. HASKINS: Next question. All the way in the back. There you go.

MS. SULLIVAN: Thank you. Lucy Sullivan, A Thousand Days. Was wondering about sort of the opportunity for research around the consequences of food insecurity on human capital formation, so the consequences of food insecurity on brain development specifically and then the economic impacts therein?

MR. WISEMAN: I mean, I haven't seen any work done on that. My hunch would be that food insecurity has serious health consequences. I'm not -- I'd be speculating if I decided how much they had in terms of two people's future, due to the capital accumulation due to food insecure at younger ages. I don't know.

MR. GREENSTEIN: There is one piece of research but it's not really on this. Jim and Craig, you probably know it in more detail than I do, but the research by Hilary Hoynes and Diane Schanzenbach and there's a third author, Almond I think?

MR. WISEMAN: Doug Almond.

MR. GREENSTEIN: Doug Almond, which looked at the roll out of the food stamp program in the early 1970's and it compared children growing up in counties

that had program with children growing up in neighboring counties, similar children that hadn't yet instituted the program, and it did find that the children whose mothers had access to food stamps and pregnancy and then the children had access in childhood, had I think an 18 percentage point high or high school graduation rate, lower rates of metabolic syndrome as adults. And among the girls, but not the boys, when they grew up, higher rates of I think employment and earnings, self-sufficiency and things like that. It's a fascinating study, but it's not on food security per se.

MR. HASKINS: Next question. Okay, questions? All the way up here.

MR. POST: Todd Post with the Bread for the World Institute. Something Bob was saying about the Affordable Care Act, and I wanted to ask, I mean what, would the conversation be different if we were talking about these programs as health programs? I wonder. I've talked with people in the health care field about the Affordable Care Act and they told me in one anecdote, somebody told me, well we can't send people home anymore, you know, to households with empty refrigerators, because if they come back in three weeks, you know, having suffered maybe diabetic shock or something like that, we get dinged for that. So the health care field now realizes they've got a vested interest in prevention. And there are people -- there have been people in this field talking about this -- Debbie Frank, John Cook, Maryann Chilton, but if we were able to maybe change the discussion about food insecurity from welfare to health and saw these food programs as maybe medicine, we would never talk about denying someone medicine if they can't meet work requirements.

MR. SYKES: Well I have a quick response. Interesting you mentioned Debra Frank and Maryann Chilton. They're both on the National Commission on Hunger as well, in fact Maryann is the co-chair. But I think you can very reasonably talk about a program like WIC as a health program, because it is a health program. It's prescriptive if it's based on nutritional need. And again, going to this controversial issue which I think is

optics as much as anything else, you can't call the food stamp program a health program. It's contraindicative in allowing people to use public money to buy things that we know are negative for public health consequences, cause childhood obesity, diabetes, the overlay of purchases by food stamp recipients and certain kinds of foods allowable in the package, such as soda and other things, with those diagnosis and diseases, is enormous and in fact it prompted the state of New York, which was denied by F&S to submit a proposal to test a limitation on the food package, and to test whether or not people would simply substitute their own dollars for food stamp benefits and have the same habits, while the Springfield, Mass program was going on to test incentives. And so I think until you grapple with this issue of the fact that you know, allowing people to purchase items with public money, that cause some of the worst kind of disease and costs and Medicaid program, it's hard to call the food stamp SNAP program a health program.

MR. LUCAS: I must briefly disagree with you.

MR. SYKES: I knew you would, I'm sure Bob will too.

MR. LUCAS: And so let me just say a couple things about this. First of all, is that SNAP, if you compare SNAP participants with eligible nonparticipants, carefully done studies have shown that SNAP is neither associated with reductions in obesity or no effect on obesity. So in that sense, I think it's unfair to blame SNAP for these health outcomes.

MR. SYKES: I don't think I would blame it.

MR. LUCAS: Okay, well, so that's the first thing I wanted to say. But we also know that, I'm not going to call SNAP a health program, I'm not going to make that claim here. That's not the claim I would be making. But I think that it does have, if we think that giving people greater resources to consume more, we would say, I mean, a health program in the United States could be alleviating poverty. A health program is giving people more resources to purchase more items. I mean, I think it's wrong to

make -- people who are choosing to use SNAP benefits, whether it's public money or anything else, I mean, we talk about restrictions. When I worked for the USDA, nobody told me how I could spend my public money. That was putting on weight, and nobody assumes that Bill Gates is a wealthy man. He must be the largest man in the country. So nobody's -- I'm a little reluctant to make negative criticisms of SNAP along those lines.

MR. HASKINS: Bob.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I think this is a really complicated question. Jim and Craig talked and research supports the finding that take up is important. You want to have very high share of the eligible poor families with children actually receiving the benefits. We know that in much of the SNAP program's history, stigma precedes stigma on the part of recipients is a factor reducing take up rates. Evidence is pretty strong that when we went from food stamp coupons that people behind you in line saw you ripping out of a book to these debit cards that look similar to credit cards other consumers have, that that seems to be one of the factors that has helped the take up rates become higher in recent years. So our real challenge in the question of restricting the foods that can be purchased with SNAP is, is there a ready way to do it in the checkout line that doesn't increase the identification of who is buying food with SNAP and potentially adds a stigma and potentially adversely affect take up rates. That's one complexity. The second complexity is a practical political economy complexity which is, if one were to move in that direction, would it result in a reduction in the degree of political support for the program from elements in the food industry and how much difference would that make? I'm very cognizant of the fact that this is really the only safety net program we have that covers virtually all the report. And so there are some tricky questions here. The third is one Russell eluded to himself, which is that since, for most people, SNAP benefits are only part and are only expected to be part of their food purchasing budget -- you're supposed to spend 30 percent of your own income on food in the SNAP benefit

supplements. If you had these restrictions, would people buy less soda or candy or whatever, or would they simply reorient which pocket you pay it out of. I'm loud about careful demonstration projects to try to answer some of these questions. But it's not a slam dunk. There are some very complicated questions in this issue.

MR. SYKES: And Bob, if I could just comment just quickly on a couple of things you mentioned and on the take up rate. I mean, I think your points are well taken. Can you do it without going back to the days that you create stigma and I think we probably can be wise enough in this era to figure out how to do that. And the counterpoint to the notion about the food industry would be, would there be more broad public support for the program and would it be more viewed as a public health program if it wasn't across the board allowing to purchase. The substitution issue is something that would have to be studied, you're right. So I want to also talk something about the take up rate and ask Rich to amplify for me. I found in my time in New York that the issue of the take up rate had two flaws. One, the USDA data that looked at participation rates is out of date, number one, and so it didn't capture the real participation rates except on some variances in the immediacy, but it was often two years behind. The other more important thing that I think in take up rates is that, we were of the firm belief in New York and some states where there were so many other avenues such as the nation's largest earned income tax credit at that state level, other avenues for people to supplement their food budgets when they were working at least, that the transaction cost of applying for food stamps were so high for such a low benefit at some of those levels, that people just didn't bother. And this is where I'd ask you to amplify Rich, a bit, because the USDA data shows that about 89 percent of all possible food stamp benefits are being issued now. Is that correct?

MR. LUCAS: It's actually higher than that at the latest data, which is from 2012.

MR. SYKES: Which means frankly, that sort of bolsters the argument that contrary to those who argue that there's so many people being left out, and so many millions of federal dollars being forfeited, it really doesn't come up to that, because what people tend to do is they say, okay, 30 percent aren't participating and then they multiply, turn that into a number, they multiply it by the average benefit rate, but in fact, those 30 percent of people aren't going to be getting anything near the average benefit rate if you're already issuing 90 percent of all benefits.

MR. LUCAS: I think in the, on the average across the country, there is certainly some truth to what you say, but there is also a wide variation in snap participation rates from state to state, so in some of those places, folks are leaving substantial money on the table.

MR. HASKINS: You wanted to make another point I think?

MR. LUCAS: Just to close out the food restrictions issue, I mean, I agree with both what Craig and Bob were saying and frankly first, I agree with you Russ that this is an important issue. It's not an issue that the department is not grappling with, but we've to this point, focused on incentive based approaches. Part of what I would say specifically to the point about SNAP as a health benefit is that I could see the public health argument for sort of taking the handle off the pump if the problem was that that SNAP was resulting in significantly worse diets. What we're seeing is that there's more similarities than differences, when you look at national survey data, national nutrition survey data. There are more similarities than differences between SNAP and everybody else. So really it goes more to the resource issue.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I just want to make a quick note, maybe aimed Russ at the Commission, more than anybody else. One should use the 2012 Participation rate data with caution because it's data for a year in which the basic SNAP benefit level had been significantly increased by the recovery act. Important research

that Jim Ziliak presented in a different conference here in Brookings within the past year, suggests that the increase, significant increases in the SNAP benefit level, increased participation rates. What we don't have yet are data on, is the participation rate going to come down, now that the higher benefit level is ended. So just, there's a caveat on the 2012 rates that they may not be characteristic of where we'll be three to five years from now when people get used to again the somewhat lower benefit level that's the permanent law benefit level.

MR. LUCAS: Yeah, I think that's a fair point.

MR. HASKINS: One last question, right up here.

MS. WISEMAN: Good morning. My name is Nora Wiseman and I'm a student at George Washington University. No relation to the Dr. Wiseman, unfortunately. Quick question, Dr. Ziliak, you mentioned the statistic about mothers with -- children of mothers with depression, it was 50 or 60 percent to 80 percent higher chance that their children were food insecure. Two quick questions, one, what is that measurement of depression, and two, does that upper limit of 80 percent, is that including only the self-reported depressants, so that would be, obviously much underreported, and then really briefly, all due respect to Mr. Sykes, I think it's important to understand that we're talking about a population that has young children. We need to keep in mind, we're leaving completely out of the discussion child care costs. So the solution to quote, "get a job", at ten dollars an hour, four hundred dollars a week if you get full time before taxes, is completely being ignorant of child care costs, so again, all due respect, I think we need to not be ignorant in that department.

MR. HASKINS: Let's let Jim answer this. Go ahead.

MR. ZILIAK: So the data set that was used was an early childhood longitudinal study, their birth cohort. So the measure of depression itself is SAS, okay, so not a medically diagnosed depression. And you'll have to forgive me. I don't know the

exact wording of the question on the survey to give you more detail. There might be somebody in the room that does.

MR. HASKINS: So your basic point is any conclusion based on that survey is a little suspect because of the question.

MR. ZILIAK: No, I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying I don't know the exact wording of the question. To --

MR. HASKINS: But you're saying it's not --

MR. ZILIAK: It's self-assessed. That's right. This is not a medical diagnosis of depression. I don't know. That's a good question about -- I don't know if we have much evidence to suggest about the quality of data measurement on areas such as depression. We have a lot more work on income under reporting, but not so much on other medical diagnosis.

MR. HASKINS: Anything else?

MR. ZILIAK: No.

MR. HASKINS: Okay.

MR. GREENSTEIN: I just wanted to respond to the child care issue because I come from a New York perspective sometimes and I know it does skew my point of view, but in New York we very carefully put together two different charts that we showed to everyone that came in the door who was looking to be, apply for TANA and who we could get a job. The average placement rate in New York, wage placement rate was about \$9.00 and it's even higher now since I was there. New York also has a refundable child care and dependent care credit which is very much unlike the federal credit. It means that for people that use formal care, and we all know that formal care is a better avenue for child care rather than informal care unfortunately, too many people choose informal care among low income populations. But we actually were offsetting more than two-thirds through that credit of their child care costs. It's just so dramatically

clear that when you look at a wage at \$9.00 an hour, when you look at the still continued food stamp allotments and that allotment and when you look at the earned income tax credit, the child tax credit, the additional child tax credit, you are taking someone who would have been resigned to an income between TANA and food stamps, even in a high benefit state, of about \$15,000 a year and raising it to \$33,000.

MR. WISEMAN: May I raise one other issue?

MR. HASKINS: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. WISEMAN: The comment is that, you're right, you put them together. There's substantial resources. But the planning, this sort of strategic requirements of doing that, are really problematic. That gets back to this issue of what are we asking people to do as they pull together their package of support just to save themselves and especially to confront shocks, when they have, and I think part of the success of other systems is better integration. I'm not sure about. I want to point to one thing that Bob said that really struck me as important and it gets to something in this paper. He referred to a little test they've been doing, applying for food stamps in various states, and seeing how many of them, if you had citizen children, but you were not self-certain how many you go in. There is one of the obligatory comments in these things is always that we, these states, these evil jurisdictions that are only open during working hours and you have to make the choice if you're working, you have to make the choice between leaving jobs and applying and putting your job at risk or you just do without food stamps. I know that that's in some places a significant problem. But if we're looking for opportunities to create an apparatus to better understand what's going on, participation rates may be one of them. But I'm suspicious of participation measures because we base often our judgment of who's eligible on the basis of response to things like the current population survey where you're talking about income not over the previous month but over the past year. You're not signing the little thing that says that under penalty of

law, I understand that the answers that I give you are, can be checked and verified. I'm really uneasy with the nuances of participation rates, especially for comparing one state to the other on the margin. What I would like to see would be some sort of administrative survey that began to address in particular these operations issues. Tell me how many, instead of saying that many jurisdictions do this, tell me how many jurisdictions. Tell me within the average one mile radius of the average low income person in Arkansas, what is -- is there or is there not the opportunity to apply for food stamps in SNAP at night? Let's think about these administrative futures and let's think about the designs for server for accessibility survey, that give us hard numbers about what is and what is not a problem. To me, our surveys concentrate on the recipients. We ought to think also about those doors. How do we survey the doors that are the access points to these systems and judge whether or not they're open, locked or known?

MR. SYKES: This is so much fun that I'm just not going to let you stop yet.

MR. LUCAS: I hope Bob shares this one feeling. I think one of the biggest disappointments of ERA was how few states took the option of -- the systems option of seeking the 90 percent money to more closely integrate all of the other systems with Medicaid perhaps as a platform, which would have dealt with your issue to a degree of better integration.

MR. HASKINS: That by the way is why Bob supports Ryan's most recent proposal to create a super block grant out of these -- oh, not supposed to say that. Okay, well please join me in thanking the panel.

MR. ZILIAK: Can I get that report back? They're so -- they only gave us one copy.

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