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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
Best of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast in 2016

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, a podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. 2016 is finally over, and with it, another great year for the Brookings Cafeteria podcast. We had 52 episodes, over 60 guests, and covered dozens of policy topics. We celebrated the centennial of The Brookings Institution in a few episodes. The Academy of Podcasters, a podcast movement, honored us once again with a nomination as Best Education Podcast of the Year. Our team experienced some changes, but still turned out a terrific show every week.

To celebrate the closing of the year, today's show features my favorite clips from the past 12 months. I hope you enjoy, and perhaps take the opportunity to download full episodes that interest you, and also share the show with friends.

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Finally, I want to thank everyone who has made this show possible each week. The audio engineer producer is Gaston Reboredo, who took over from Zack Kulzer after Zack moved out West. Vanessa Sauter is the producer, and she replaced Carissa Nitchy, who left to pursue graduate studies. Bill Finan did all the interviews with the authors of Brookings Press books, and I look forward to more of his excellent interviews in 2017. Adrianna Pita is the host of our Intersections podcast, and guest-hosted some episodes. I want to pay special recognition to Governance Studies Senior Fellow John Hudak, who appeared on the show as a guest or contributor 11 times this year to update us on what

was happening in Congress, and then what was going on in the Presidential election. I've had two amazing interns this year, Sarah AbdelRahim and Basseem Maleki. Basseem helped me find all the clips for this show. Best of luck to both of them in their future endeavors. And also my thanks to Mark Hoelscher for his assistance with audio production, and to Jessica Pavone, Eric Abalahin, and Rebecca Viser for their design and web support. Thanks to Richard Fawal and my boss, David Nassar, for their leadership and support.

And finally, thanks to you, the listeners, for downloading, sharing, and I hope enjoying the program. And now, here's the best of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast in 2016. I've arranged the clips by policy area, starting with domestic policy and moving into global issues, politics, and finally some more personal reflections from guests.

The first episode of the year was my interview with Ted Gayer, the Vice President and Director of Economic Studies here at Brookings. I asked Ted what he was reading as 2016 began, and he talked about a study by Anne Case and Angus Deaton that was released in late 2015, and which, it turns out, had great relevance to understanding the 2016 presidential election.

GAYER: It's a shocking, shocking finding, and if you dig a little bit into what they've done, they kind of decomposed it to try to look at the causes, and what you're seeing is this mortality increase for these middle-aged whites is being driven by alcohol and drug-related poisonings; things like alcohol-related illnesses like liver disease; and suicides, which has gone up precipitously, so it's again a glaring issue, it's not – I think in the paper they even compare it to the AIDS epidemic in the eighties, but of course it hasn't gotten the media attention nearly, understandably in some sense, that the AIDS epidemic did. But it's a shocking increased mortality, and so to me it gets into some of the issues we were talking

about before, when we were talking about stagnant median wages. So I don't want to draw too much into it. There's lots of different theories about why this is happening, one of which could be some sort of economic despair, although then you wonder why it's hitting whites more than it is others, and they found it's probably hitting low-education whites.

DEWS: I also spoke with two other scholars about domestic economic issues that were very much in the news this year. Here are Jennifer Vey, a Fellow with the Centennial Scholar Initiative, talking about extreme poverty in Baltimore on the one-year anniversary of the disturbances there; and then Devashree Saha, an Associate Fellow at the Metropolitan Policy program, on how the drop in the price of oil affects state and local budgets.

VEY: The racial divides are very stark. You look at median household income over $62,000 a year for white Baltimore residents, versus not quite $34,000 a year for African-American residents. About less than 15% of white Baltimore residents live in poverty, versus 28% of African-American residents, and nearly half of white Baltimore residents over 25 have a BA or higher while less than 14% of black residents have a BA. At the same time, the geographic divides are also really significant. So overall, about one in five people in Baltimore lives in a neighborhood of extreme poverty, and these neighborhoods are concentrated mostly just west and east of downtown, and are largely African-American.

SAHA: The stunning fall in oil prices from a peak of $115 per barrel in June 2014 to under $45 at the end of July this year has been one of the most important global macroeconomic developments of the last two years. The reason for crashing oil prices boils down to simple economics of demand and supply. Oil production remains high, the United States' domestic production having nearly doubled over the last several years. To counter this, traditional oil-producing nations have flooded the market with oil to make US

production less profitable. On the demand side, the economic slowdown in Europe and China has reduced the demand for oil. At the same time, vehicles are becoming more energy-efficient. The result is a massive price drop. While the average consumer is enjoying the benefits of lower costs at the pump, the dramatic price drop has shocked the world economy and is having negative impact on some state and metro economies in the country. For states that are top energy producers, the crash in oil prices has led to a loss of tax revenues, and big budget shortfalls.

DEWS: It turned out that a lot of my interviews on domestic policy topics had to do with issues in the development of children and youth, and policies to improve their lives. The next four clips feature Melissa Kearney of Economic Studies talking about her research on income inequality and the decision to drop out of high school; Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, who directs the Hamilton Project, on why we need to invest more in children; former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on dealing with youth violence in Chicago; and finally a pair of psychologists, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Golinkoff, who led me through a fascinating conversation about their book, Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us about Raising Successful Children.

KEARNEY: The punchline is that boys who grow up in economically disadvantaged homes are more likely to drop out of high school if they live in a state or metropolitan statistical area, a city, that has a higher level of income inequality. Right, so, if, you know, low-income kids are more likely to drop out of high school than high-income kids, but conditional on being low-income, the kids who were growing up in states or cities characterized by high levels of lower-tail income inequality, so a greater gap between the bottom and the middle, they’re more likely to drop out of high school. Significantly so, six

percentage points more likely. So this is a big deal, and to our mind it's one of the first pieces of evidence suggesting that income inequality can exacerbate the consequences of growing up in a low-income home. Kids from low-income homes are more likely to drop out of school; they're even more likely to drop out of school given aggregate level of income inequality around them.

SCHANZENBACH: I think that we're dangerously under-investing in children today, and you know, there's emerging research that indicates that, you know, if we spend more on schools; if we, you know, make sure that families have more income; or if we alleviate food insecurity, that has a payoff not just today but down the line in terms of more productive people when they grow up. And so, I think the evidence points to – there's still a lot of worthwhile investments to be made and it is a shame that we're not making them, and I hope that we'll start making more of those investments.

DUNCAN: I talked to high school students and middle schools students all the time who – it's both heartbreaking and hopeful – who tell me that it's not safe for them to go outside anymore. They literally can't go outside to go to school, to go home. They stay in the house, and as crazy as that is, that's their reality, and despite that they are still working hard and still getting good grades and still working hard. So there are so many good people out there who aren't numb to the problem, who aren't hiding from the problem, who aren't hopeless, but who every single day in their own ways are trying to create something better. That's how we're going to get there: listening to kids, partnering with kids, empowering kids, and helping them drive us to the solution and to the sense of peace and community that we need. So it is a scary time, it is an unstable time, it is frankly an unsafe time, but it is a time I am convinced in my heart and my bones, of tremendous opportunity as well, and I'm

definitely hoping that working together the next couple of years would be much better on not just for the entire city of Chicago but those neighborhoods on the south and west sides and for the children who live there. I hope these next couple years will be much better for them than the past couple.

HIRSH-PASEK: What we're trying to do here is to really switch the paradigm by redefining success. Now on the one hand, in a traditional model you can think of success as doing well on your reading test, your math test, and maybe your science and writing tests. In our new system, I think we really do need to incorporate a breadth of skills, and so we suggest that what we really want – and we're borrowing this from the Canadian educational revolution, which has taken place over the last six to ten years –

GOLINKOFF: We love Canada!

HIRSH-PASEK: Is that you should be happy, healthy, caring, social, and thinking as a child, so that you can become a collaborative, creative citizen in the society tomorrow. This isn't really about individuals, it's about grooming societies of the future.

DEWS: Many Brookings cafeteria guests share their insight and recommendations on a wide range of global economics and foreign policy topics. In the next set of clips, you'll hear from four scholars on why the world should care about industrialization and poverty reduction in Africa; on how Sesame Street exemplifies a global learning model; on the problem of quality education around the world; and on the case for free trade. First up, John Page of the Global Economy Development Program, then Jenny Perlman Robinson, followed by Rebecca Winthrop, both of the Center for Universal Education, and finally Mireya Solis, from our Center for East Asia Policy studies.

PAGE: This is a tough question to answer because there's an easy answer which

I'm not fully comfortable with, and the easy answer is one that both high-level aid officials and political leaders tend to pull out, and particularly when they confront increasing skepticism on the part of their voters for aid and develop assistance, and that is our security fundamentally depends on the prosperity of other countries. I do believe that that's true, in the very long run, but I don't believe that a story which in a sense is a security-based story, is all that much more attractive than the rationale that was offered in the sixties and seventies and to some extent is still offered in some countries like Japan, which is that our prosperity depends on the prosperity of other countries, and if we want to export, we need countries that are capable of importing, and we need to have a wider range of richer countries in order to expand the global economy and provide new opportunities for Americans. I think that's true as well. But I think there's a third reason, which is that, and it may go back again to the origins of my interest in economic development, in a world in which the disparity in incomes between people living in the poorest countries and people living in the richest countries is actually greater than the disparity of income of people living within the borders of any country – so we're worried now about income distribution, worried about the distribution of wealth at the national level – if we look at the global level, it's even more extraordinary, there's also a compelling argument that the richer countries have some obligation to think in terms of what they can do, not just in their self-interest but also in the interests of the global economy and of global citizenry to help reduce these disparities.

ROBINSON: The core elements that we outlined in the report are all very much demonstrated in Sesame Street. It is heavily research-driven, you know, from the very start, from when they're thinking about the programming, from when they're working within a country, the evaluations that are done – it's very much this notion that we talk about a

flexible adaptation where you have a model where they have, you know, the Muppets, they have the target age of children 3 to 5 years old, they have a particular approach focusing on the whole child, but then they really leave it to their local partners and country to design the programs based on the children's needs there and based on the national education goals. So it might be an HIV/AIDS-positive character in the case of South Africa, it might be a girl child actor – Muppet, rather – in the case of India. So they're really tailoring it to what are the educational challenges and needs in those countries.

WINTHROP: There's been a lot of progress on children's education around the world in the last 15 years, in getting kids into primary school. Nine out of ten kids around the world are in primary school, which is actually a great achievement and been a big push. We've talked about this before with the millennium development goals. But there's a lot to be done. A lot of kids are dropping out before they finish secondary school. There's a sort of horrifying statistic –75% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa enter primary school, but only 8% finish secondary school. And a huge reason why kids are dropping out is that there's really poor quality. Kids are not learning. They're getting but they're really not learning what they should be learning to move forward. There's about 250 million kids around the world who don't have basic literacy or numeracy skills. The vast majority of them have sat in school year after year for four years, and can barely read or write.

SOLIS: We need to think anew as to how we make the case for trade. I think that the arguments are all correct, but they don't resonate. We need something else. Why I say this, because I find that, you know, people that want to see the Trans-Pacific Partnership become a reality always talk about the gains from trade, you know, percentage of our GDP and so forth, and they always mention that the gains clearly surpass losses, and that, you

know, for the people who are not doing well we have trade adjustment assistance. These are all true things, but they're not going to make a difference.

I think we should not just focus on the gains, we have to focus on the fears, and unless we have that conversation, unless we realize that in a country that has seen income inequality rise the way it has, that's just on the recovery from the Great Recession, where there were major cuts in employment, you know, telling them the truth is not to blame is not going to make it. You have to fix the root problem for people to be willing to look outside, to be outward-looking. They're not going to seize the opportunity when they feel stuck, and they're stuck, it's very true.

DEWS: Few topics dominated headlines this year like the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis. In one of the most poignant interviews I've ever done, a Syrian refugee named Qutaiba Idlbi shared his personal experience participating in the Syrian Revolution, and the torture he endured because of it. In another episode, guest interviewer Bobby McKenzie, who was also part of the interview with Qutaiba, spoke with Leon Wieseltier about the moral consequences of Western inaction in the face of the refugee crisis. Here are Qutaiba Idlbi and then Leon Wieseltier.

IDLBI: Going out to protest means either getting killed, or worse, getting arrested.

MCKENZIE: Wait, why was getting arrested worse than getting killed?

IDLBI: Because when you're arrested you wish to be dead, every single moment you're in there. I was detained later in April 27th, the first time. I was taken into one of the Air Force intelligence bases on the outskirts of Damascus because I was delivering aid into a besieged area.

I was the first time – I was, that time, the first one from Damascus to be detained, so

they were a little bit curious and kind of like, more careful with me, but still, when I got in there I remember seven difference security personnel were beating me for more than five hours. Not for anything, but this is what they call it – a reception. So when they detain anyone, they just – so they like, use different methods that you use, like lashes, they use electricity, they use something called the flying carpet which is just two pieces of wood tied like to, uh, one piece tied to the legs and the other piece is tied to the back, and then they close them together so that when they beat me they would like, hit the head and the legs at the same time.

WIESELTIER: We are further and further away from the political settlement that we want in Syria, primarily because we refuse to use the military force that would change the facts on the battlefield. That would actually be the condition for the diplomatic solution that they want. We are standing by idly as atrocities multiply. We are – we have allowed the Russians to exploit the vacuum that we created in Syria, the big power vacuum, I mean, and we're watching Putin almost unbelievably emerge as a regional power and even a global geopolitical power, and Syria is one of the places where he's, shall we say, signaling his intentions for the next period in Russian history.

The refugees continue to pose a huge threat to the countries around Syria, that in which they found haven. The refugees in Europe continue to seem to be marooned in various places, and as a consequence -- you know, one way to think of it is this, as the direct or indirect consequence of American inaction in Syria – we have witnessed the following: a secular tyranny, a religious tyranny, chemical warfare, barrel bombs, the torture of children, the displacement of 11 million people, the destabilization or potential destabilization of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the refugee crisis in Europe, the emergence

of Russia as a geopolitical power, and the resurgence of fascism in Europe. I mean, our inaction is the gift that keeps on giving.

DEWS: Two other foreign policy issues stood out in 2016. Changes in Cuba, and Brexit, Britain's vote to exit the European Union. Here are Richard Feinberg and Fiona Hill, both scholars in the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, sharing their expertise on these issues.

FEINBERG: I think the Millennials generally have respect for Fidel Castro and the revolution, and what it accomplished for their society, but for them that's also history, and they want to move on. They want to see younger leadership; they want a more relaxed political atmosphere; they want more opportunities economically to exercise their own profession, to develop their own talents; they want to be able to act and easily move about at the international level; and they certainly want and expect fully normal relations with the United States, and when they say normal, that would mean to them that they could travel freely back and forth. If they want to take a job in the US, they could. If they wanted to return to Cuba, they could. If they wanted to have joint ventures or collaborations with people in the United States or elsewhere there wouldn't be any obstacles. That is what their view is of a normal relationship, and they both hope that that will happen, and actually in the Millennials that I've interviewed, they all expected that to be in their future in the medium run.

HILL: British politics is a bloodbath. This referendum was the result of British politics, Conservative Party politics, and, you know, what it has done instead of resolving internal strife inside the Conservative Party, it's basically, you know, thrown it out into the whole country. You know, it just shows again that if you decide to have a referendum, you should

be very careful, because the question that you might be asking might not be the question that everybody is responding to, and it may also not resolve the issue that you want to actually put out to a broader vote. So What we've got now is a bloodbath inside of the Conservative Party that was, you know, the inevitable result of a jockeying for power among a group of people who all come from not just the party itself, but of similar backgrounds, who have all known each other, some of them seem to have had rivalries since their school days, Boris Johnson and David Cameron, but also Michael Gove, the education secretary, and again part of this kind of tight group of people, all of the same roughage and again, of similar backgrounds, and they're all essentially fighting with each other.

DEWS: Darrell West, Vice President and Director of Governance Studies at Brookings, is the author of the new title from Brookings Press – Megachange: Economic Disruption, Political Upheaval, and Social Strife in the 21st Century. In a conversation with my colleague Bill Finan, Darrell talked about how recent dramatic disruptions and trends, such as the rise of Donald Trump and Brexit, are challenging institutions and societies.

WEST: I'm optimistic in the sense that, when you look at past megachanges like the early 20th century, when we shifted to an industrial economy, we managed that. It did take several decades to work through a lot of those issues, it required government to implement new types of social programs to ease the anxiety, but we did that. After World War II, the globe was in shambles. European economies were devastated. We redrew the national boundaries in a lot of different places around the world, but we dealt with it. But the difference between those areas and the current one was, there was more of a sense of bipartisanship in public policy. So you could get Republicans and Democrats to kind of see

these changes, work through possible solutions, and actually adopt them. So far, that has been absent from the contemporary period. So if we don't get our act together, we may end up with a more negative future than otherwise would be the case.

DEWS: When we look back on 2016, perhaps the single most important event was the US presidential election which actually started the year before, which featured a bitter battle with a startling outcome. Starting in September, the podcast team here put together a string of 10 episodes focused on issues related to the presidential campaigns and elections. We tried to focus on policy matters rather than the horse race. I think we succeeded. Next up, six clips that showcase some of the most interesting conversations we had during the political season.

Jon Rauch, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies, set the stage with a terrific discussion of his Atlantic article, How American Politics Went Insane. After that, you'll hear clips from two episodes, one about the most important economic issues in the election, and then the most important foreign policy issues in the election. These feature Senior Fellows David Wessel and Mike O'Hanlon.

RAUCH: The thing about political machines and parties and backroom deals and all of what I call middlemen – all of these people who work in the background to organize politics – is when they work well, we forget that we need them. We just assume that what happens is, we vote and then the politicians go vote, and the problem's solved. We forget all these multiple things that have to go on. Someone has to recruit and vet the candidates, make sure they're competent people. And then they have to organize these people when they get in government; they have to direct money; they have to move the coalitions around; get people together; get them on the same page; strike compromises within the

coalition; then go out and compromise outside the coalition. That's the hard stuff. When it works, it's like our immune system. We take it for granted. We figure we don't particularly need all these, you know, smoke-filled rooms, so we started holding up each and every one of these things that people were doing to the light. We said, "well, that doesn't look necessary, it's not democratic, seems kind of corrupt," and one by one we reformed away all of the elements that professional politicians have to use in order to organize their world.

WESSEL: Look, the economy is growing painfully slowly. We all wish it were growing more rapidly, and there is a lively debate about what government policies might lead the economy to grow faster. Donald Trump is relying on, I think, a discredited view that if you cut taxes enough, it will somehow unleash a burst of economic activity and that will mean more tax revenues coming to the government, so you can then have a smaller deficit. But that didn't work very well in the Reagan years, and also even economists who are sympathetic to this view think that aiming for four percent, while certainly an admirable aspiration, is not something that we should be counting on.

O'HANLON: I think the overall danger is pretty low, but I do think that candidates who would, and presidents who would, support current policies of taking in refugees should probably spend a little more time explaining to skeptical and scared Americans why the mechanisms that we have in place are probably pretty good for finding anybody who would be a threat. Reminding them that so far we haven't had that problem here in America even though the French and Belgians have, and then try to explain what else they're looking to do to reduce the risks even further, and then maybe the innately charitable and generous spirit of Americans can really come through and we can consider taking in even more

refugees, which is what I would prefer. But I think we do need to explain to people, here are the vetting procedures and they're pretty good.

I think there's an hour or two, or three, of interviews, you know, any given would-be refugee entering into the United States. We obviously do every kind of background screening we can, from whatever databases we might have on people, although those are often lacking for some of the individuals, you know. Maybe we need to think harder about how to track some of their communications once they're in the United States. I think some of the law and order concerns are legitimate. So I'm 99% on the side of Obama and Clinton, but Trump's not making up the – even though he's exaggerating the dangers in some ways and implying that so much of our violence in the United States is either from immigrants or Mexicans or Muslims, he's not totally inventing the concern, and we should speak to its direction.

DEWS: We stepped back to look at the big picture of the American presidency in Bill Finan's interview with Elaine Kamarck, about her new Brookings Press book, Why Presidents Fail and How They Can Succeed Again. Elaine is the Director of the Center for Effective Public Management here, and a frequent contributor to the show.

KAMARCK: The old system, which certainly had its, ok – in the old system, you won the nomination by negotiating with other powerful people in your political party, and so what the old system tested was the ability of a candidate to negotiate, cut deals, whatever you want to call it, but the ability of a candidate to operate in a system of shared power, which ultimately is what our democracy is. It tested also the candidate's ability to speak and communicate, but that wasn't nearly as important as the candidate's ability to work with their peers in power. We got lucky with some presidents, President Roosevelt could do

both, right, he was a master communicator but he was also a master dealmaker, manipulator, whatever you want to call it. He got the job done. The new system tests the ability to communicate, ok, it tests the ability to inspire people, to make speeches, to do well on television, etc. There is no point in the system, however, where it tests whether or not someone can actually govern.

And again, it's worked out for us sometimes, you know. We've gotten some – we've gotten some very good presidents. President Reagan, President Clinton both had the ability to communicate well, and they had the background and the experience as governors to govern well. But we also have a situation here sometimes you can get someone who can only do one thing. So Donald Trump has shown us to be very, very good at communicating and tapping into people's fears and hopes, but we have a lot of people who are nervous that he could not, in fact, govern. And so, that's the – that's what we've lost with the new system.

DEWS: Finally, two issues in the election and its aftermath that continue to be talked about – the role of the white working class in selecting Donald Trump, and the President-Elect's conflict of interest issues. To address these matters, I spoke with Senior Fellow Carol Graham, who's an expert on happiness economics, and Norm Eisen, a Governance Studies Scholar and former US ambassador to the Czech Republic, who was the chief ethics advisor in the Obama White House.

GRAHAM: When we compared three cohorts, poor whites, poor blacks, and poor Hispanics, and we measured life satisfaction, optimism about the future, stress which is a marker of ill-being – people who are under high levels of stress have difficulty planning ahead, which I've sort of hinted at before. And what we found was remarkable. When we

first found it, which was incredibly high levels of optimism among poor blacks, almost higher than any group, rich or poor, in the data – this is based on Gallup daily data for the US – reasonably high levels of optimism among Hispanics, which I expected, and then deep desperation among poor whites. And when I found this, it was at the time that Ferguson was blowing up. All of the new dialogue about what's going on with poor whites didn't exist yet, and I was quite surprised. And then, as I started to dig into this and try to explain it, I found two very different directions of findings, which we can talk about more in detail. But one was just incredibly high levels of resilience and optimism among minorities, and then this deep desperation among poor which, which is also now link to new findings that we have on mortality rates going up among middle-aged uneducated whites.

EISEN: For Mr. Trump, what he needs to do first and foremost is focus on the business of the United States, not the business of the Trump Organization. So his involvement should end the moment he signs these interests and operational responsibilities over to a respected independent trustee. And really, the search for the right independent trustee should be occupying him as profoundly as the search for any cabinet member now. And then it will be up to the trustee to untangle issues like, well, the children have an interest in these businesses, is it appropriate or not for the children to exit; should we do an LBO; what should be the role of the kids of Mr. Trump's executives in LBO or leveraged buyout; should we bring private equity; and should we do an IPO. Those issues really are, I think, for the trustee and for the children to discuss with the trustee, not for Mr. Trump.

DEWS: In a show that features such diverse topics, some conversations can't

usually be put into domestic or foreign policy categories. Some of my favorite moments are when guests share from their personal experience to illuminate deeper truths. These last three clips showcase this approach. First up, National Book Award-winning author, Phil Klay, who authored a Brookings Essay this year on the moral dimensions of military service, shared a deeply personal experience of his wartime service in Iraq with me. Then, Senior Fellow Shadi Hamid discussed his own personal experience as an American Muslim, and the complexities of his faith. And finally, former Brookings President Bruce MacLaury reflected on the value of a perspective based on both knowledge and experience.

KLAY: There was one guy and, you know, I don't know, exactly, his history, but people said that he was a veteran of the Iraq invasion and that he'd killed somebody with his hands, or he'd bashed an Iraqi soldier's head in with a radio or something like that, and I don't know whether that was just the, kind of, the scuttlebutt, or just something that somebody had made up in relationship to the kind of posture that he took to us. But, you know, most of the times during inspections, you know, "Why'd you join the Marine Corps?" "To lead Marines!" You know, this is sort of straightforward and simple. He'd ask us, you know, def guys questions like, you know, do you think you could order your men into an assault where, you know, some of them were going to die, right? Or if you'd be talking to the guys for the contract to become a pilot, you know. Do you think you could bomb a building knowing you might kill, you know, children, women and children? He gets to me and it's this involved thing where it's like, you know, you've called in air support because you think there's insurgents there, and there's no insurgents, just this dead Iraqi, and there's a kid at his side. The guy's brains are out on the pavement but his leg is still

twitching, and the kid doesn't understand his father's dead, and he's asking you why his father won't get up, and what you're going to say to that Iraqi kid? And it was, you know, the kind of question that you don't necessarily – there is no right answer to. And I appreciated that there was somebody in the midst of all that where, you know, a lot of it is kind of very rah-rah, you know, pure aggression – that there was somebody asking us to think about, sort of, hard choices that people themselves facing in war.

HAMID: One thing I really came to appreciate more is that Islam is a really complicated religion. When you dive into the theology, history, and culture, it's not the easiest religion to understand. I don't think it's conducive to sound bites, and I think that's what a lot of people on both sides of the debate want. So I have Muslim friends who will insist that Islam is a religion of peace, which sounds nice, but what does that really tell us? What does it really even mean to say Islam is a religion of peace? It also doesn't make any sense to say Islam is a religion of violence. Like most things, it's somewhere in between. It depends what interpretations we're talking about. Muslims are different, they have different views. So we can't say that Islam is entirely one thing or entirely something else, and that's why I think that we have to appreciate complexity, and those of us who don't know as much about Islam, I think it's important to try – for Americans to learn more, to read more, and to resist the temptation to pigeonhole Islam as one thing or another.

MACLAURY: I know from my own governmental service at the Treasury Department and at the Federal Reserve that when one was on the job, one does not have time to think big thoughts. It is what's happening today and tomorrow that overwhelm one's psyche, if you will, as a government executive. So providing perspective based on both knowledge on the one hand and experience, and I emphasize both of those, knowledge and experience.

Knowledge is not – alone, is not enough. People, I think the best of Brookings, the Alice Rivlins of the world, and there aren't many of them, have been and served in government. They know what the issues are, and the pressures that come to bear, both political and intellectual, in a government job. And Brookings, to me, has the luxury of a training ground as well as a spokesperson role in helping public servants keep perspective in their daily journey and job. So that's one continuing, I think, value that a Brookings, a think tank can provide.

DEWS: And that's all for this edition of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast. I hope you enjoyed this 2016 year in review of the show. Thanks for listening and thanks for sharing. I look forward to bringing you more great conversations about ideas and solutions in 2017. Happy New Year! Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

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