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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
The Arab world should employ more women

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, a podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. The Middle East and North Africa region has a massive gender gap when it comes to employment. Arab women struggle to find jobs, or choose not to work because of cultural norms, gendered education systems, and the lack of finances. To address the problem and offer solutions, our guest on the show today is Bessma Momani, a nonresident fellow with the Brookings Doha Center in Doha, Qatar.

Stay tuned to hear Wessel's economic update, wherein he talks about the five big questions that economic policy wonks are contemplating in the wake of the recent failure of the GOP healthcare bill. And also, meet a new scholar in our Center for Health Policy, and find out what he thinks about two of the big questions in healthcare today.

My colleague Adrianna Pita, who hosts the Intersections show here on the Brookings Podcast Network, conducted the interview in my absence.

PITA: Bessma, welcome.

MOMANI: Thank you.

PITA: So, you work in our office that is in Doha, Qatar, and you work on Middle Eastern issues. Could you tell us just a little about yourself and your background, and what it is that you look into?

MOMANI: Sure, happy to. So I'm a professor of political science at the University of Waterloo in the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and I've been with Brookings on and off, at one point in the Global Economy program and now with Brookings Doha. And basically, my work is on everything from the Middle East to the international monetary system. I know they don't seem like they go together, but I've always been

interested in the Middle East from an economic perspective. And of course, as a political scientist, when we're talking about the Middle East, economics is very political in the region. And so that's really guided me to try to talk about this region through a political economy lens, which frankly isn't done very often because it's either done through a hardcore security lens or done through a very financial econometric lens. And bringing the two together has always been really my own personal research agenda.

PITA: Excellent. That sort of brings us to your current paper, which is titled "Equality and the economy: Why the Arab world should employ more women." And I liked the—sort of the fundamental basis of the report is not just that the Arab world should employ more women because it's good for women from a gender equity perspective, although that's of course a big part of it, but that it's better for them, for their economies, to employ more women. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MOMANI: Yeah, and that's really the point, right? Because I think we all want to talk about the normative side of things, that it's the right thing to do. And I agree with that completely in terms of the moral argument, the normative argument that we need more women because it is the right thing to do, particularly if they want to work. But one of things that I think our research has taken us, not just myself but others who are looking at diversity—whether we're talking about ethnocultural, whether we're talking about gender—that the workplace, the business case for diversity is really strong; that having more people of diverse views, of diverse experiences, is what makes an economy successful.

And you know, you can take it from many different perspectives, whether we're looking at it from the perspective of just thoughts, right? So if you want to have a

successful product, you need to have a diversity of thoughts in the room designing that product, testing that product, looking at the local applicability of that product. And if you don't have, frankly, 50% of the population in that decision-making, you're just going to have flawed production. And this is the reality from, whether we're talking about Google products or we're talking about state-owned enterprises, throughout the entire, I think, economy, you need to have all sectors—segments, I should say—of the population demographic represented to make sure that you have truly a productive economy. We also know that when you have different people in a, frankly, decision-making table, you have more innovative, more creative, more useful production processes. And that's where, I think, women can come in, and particularly in the Middle East where we see such very low participation rates of women. Of course, even in the most Westernized of societies we still have a long way to go. And we're starting to talk about this and find research that links, for example, that if you have more women in your board, if you have more women in the higher echelons of management, in the C-suite, you have different returns of profit and revenue that far exceeds your competitors. That's something. That tells us that having that knowledge and that experience is really valuable to the production process.

So in the Middle East, we need to have women involved. Again, I think it's really important not to say this is meant to undermine the normative or moral argument, it's to say that, you know, these economies could find themselves out of the desperation that some of them experience both with the economic malaise and lack of productivity, if they were to include more women in the production process.

PITA: It seems that if someone isn't buying the moral argument, you then have this factual economics incentive to then help to convince them, so it approaches the problem from a different angle.

MOMANI: And that's really, I think, the goal of some of the research that I'm doing on this project and some others—is to say that, you know, the business case is really important because I think governments are at a stage where, you know, there's all this international pressure. You can look at the UN SDGs, you can look at other sort of international normative pressure out there to get women involved. I think once we get the business community on side, that's a really important push. Once you have the private sector, who can really see the numerous quantitative and really good strong business case studies showing that there is a link between diversity and economic prosperity, that's when I think the hard the work is done, and we can start to see businesses be, now, the real normative champions of change. I think that's really important because we don't want to just rely on one aspect of this. If it comes just from government, particularly in the international sphere—if you look at the Middle East, frankly, it always comes off with great suspicions, and I think that if we can get the private sector on board, that would really, I think, push the needle in trying to get closer to gender parity in many of these countries.

PITA: Speaking of the SDGs, the sustainable development goals, you mentioned that the Arab world has in recent years made a lot of strides in improving education outcomes for women, or getting more women into secondary and then post-secondary education. But there hasn't been a corresponding uptick in employment after getting these greater degrees. Can you talk a little bit about why that is?

MOMANI: Yeah, absolutely, and this is something I wrote about in a book that I published late last year called *Arab Dawn,* and one of the things that's really important to know is that the Middle East has done, by far, more than any other region in the world, the greatest gains in education for women. And in fact, they have the fastest rising attainment of post-secondary education than anywhere else in the world. And one of the things that made me very pleased is—when I went to the Middle East—is to see how women having a post-secondary education is a new status symbol. It is absolutely something that mothers and grandmothers are pushing on their children. It is not seen as, you know, a choice. It's seen as a mandatory sign of success for women, is to have a university degree. Now, what's really important here is not all women—and there is an issue of voluntary unemployment—not all women see that that's a requirement to go then into the workplace.

So this is key, because I think that's a very liberal feminist view, you know. One has an education and you must go and work with it. I mean, why pursue a graduate degree to frankly, sorry to be rude here but, stay at home with children? I mean, it just seems like it's against everything that as a liberal feminist we were taught. But in many parts of the Middle East, that's not the case. For them, it's a status symbol. They say, hold my head up high, I know that that changes the bargaining dynamics with my husband, and they don't want to pursue formal employment. And I think that's something we need to respect, particularly as Westerners. We need to sort of stand back and say, ok, that's a right. But that attainment of education has become the new status symbol, and I think that's really something quite remarkable.

But even if you take out those who are voluntarily unemployed, and there's a strong segment of society that is, there is a disappointing rate of female employment in the region. And of course, add to that many other aspects of the work environment that make it difficult and one of the most ironically difficult parts of having women participate in the workplace is transportation. Transportation—safe, clean, for back of better term, "respectable" types of transportation—are really hard for young women to find. And that becomes the real barrier.

Again, it's not so much some of the other aspects of it. It's not laws, in many cases, although one can point to sort of the traditional aspects of not enough maternity benefits, not enough daycare, all of that. And even in those cases, in many parts of the Middle East, you know, daycare—this one of the great parts of the Middle East, you know, very strong family values and so often they find mothers or grandmothers on both sides who are very willing to be a part of the daycare plan. But even then, I think that what you're finding is that the barriers are often even earlier than getting to the workplace. It's quite literally getting to the workplace, it's the transportation.

So there's a lot of, I think, aspects to this that need to be uncovered or explored, but at the end of the day I think there is real loss to the greater macroeconomic picture of not having women involved in the workplace. So one of the things I look at in the study is to say—and it's based on other researchers, primarily McKinsey and others who've looked at this—and point out that if you have women working at even a 25% increase of where they are, the benefits to the economy in terms of production, in terms of taxes generated from that workforce, would be really quite powerful. I mean, it would absolve the necessity of going to some organizations like the International Monetary

Fund in some cases in some countries. So it's really quite powerful. And so there's a lot that can be done by governments in the Middle East to really not just encourage women to go into the workplace but more importantly facilitate it through investment like transportation.

PITA: I was curious. The thought that occurred to me when I started off just reading the first executive summary before I delved into the report was a lot of these governments in these regions are concerned about unrest from the populace because there's very high unemployment in some of these countries, like Egypt, for example, especially among the youth. So I was wondering, how do you convince them that to take an already weak and now add a larger segment of the population who are trying to compete for those jobs—how do you convince them that that's a good idea, and then how do you also deal with public fears? You know, maybe backlash from men saying, well now why are even more people competing with me when I still can't find work? Whether it's me or my wife looking for a job, if neither of us can find it, it's still not beneficial. How do you overcome some of those barriers?

MOMANI: Yeah, that's a great question. I think that's something that we saw, quite frankly, for a good part of the 1980s and 1990s. Debate was about, well, you know, we need to first meet men's development goals or the main, for lack of a better term, breadwinner in a traditional family, before we start talking about women who are going to be achieving a disposable income. I mean, that kind of rhetoric was very prevalent, I would say, from governments in the Middle East in the '80s and '90s. What I would say to that is two things. First, most families today—again, a traditional nuclear family, not that that's the only type—but traditional families in the Middle East today

recognize that you need to have a woman and a man working. They recognize this. Young people in particular recognize this. This is one thing that I found, again in my research with *Arab Dawn*, is that most couples, young couples today, want to be both working and expect to be both working. They have very different needs of a lifestyle, frankly. They're far more likely to be urbanize, they're far more likely to be cosmopolitan, they probably have far less kids than previous generations, and, again, back to the educational attainment of women, they're going to be educated.

And so all of that put together, there is a new, renewed, I think, push from within the nucleus family to want to be a part of the economy. And, again, that's often what I heard from young people saying that, you know, it's not enough to have one person work in a family. You need to have both partners working in order to provide, to give our children the lifestyle we want them to give. What our parents provided to us was fine, but it's not acceptable for a modern economy, for a modern society, and, again, for a very much urbanized one that is increasingly the case throughout the Middle East.

[MUSIC]

DEWS: Time for a quick break now to hear from David Wessel, senior fellow and director of the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy.

WESSEL: I'm David Wessel and this is my economic update. The collapse of the Republicans' long-promised vow to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Obamacare, is the single biggest policy development since Donald Trump won the election. Those of us inside the Beltway are spending a lot of time these days trying to figure out what happens next. The honest answer is, of course, we don't know, but that doesn't stop us from speculating. So set aside for a moment the continuing controversy about Russia,

its meddling in the election, and its communications with Trump aides. Let's focus on domestic economic policy. Here are five big questions that economic policy wonks are contemplating in the wake of the Obamacare debacle.

One, for now, the legislative war on the Affordable Care Act is over, but will HHS Secretary Price, a vehement Obamacare foe, use his administrative and legal authority to undermine the Affordable Care Act and its health insurance exchanges, or will the White House decide that contributing to the collapse of the ACA exchanges will hurt Mr. Trump politically more than it'll hurt Democrats?

Two, can Congress and the President avoid a government shutdown when the stopgap spending bill expires on April 28th? You'd think this would be easy given that Republicans have a majority in both houses of Congress and hold the White House, and my bet is that a shutdown will be avoided, but intraparty tensions persist. No one can be certain House Republicans will rally around Speaker Ryan or if the Speaker is prepared to lose a lot of Republican votes and to rely on Democrats to keep the government open.

Three, will the White House and Congress turn, as they say they will, to tax reform, which promises as complicated or even more complicated than healthcare, or will they, as I suspect, abandon reform and settle for simply cutting taxes? That's a much easier sell politically, even if it means adding to the already substantial federal debt.

Four, will President Trump press the case he made during the campaign for a big federal infrastructure spending initiative despite the lack of enthusiasm for the notion among many congressional Republicans? The answer, I think, depends on whether Mr.

Trump ever decides to seek Democratic votes for anything. Infrastructure spending could very well be the price that Mr. Trump is willing to pay for Democratic votes, particularly in the Senate.

Five, and then there are the open seats on the Federal Reserve, which not only sets interest rates but oversees the entire financial system. Who will Mr. Trump appoint to the three vacant seats on the seven-member Federal Reserve Board? And even more important, will he reappoint Janet Yellen when her term as chair ends in January? If not, who will he nominate? Appointments to the Fed are second in importance only to the appointments that Mr. Trump is making to the Supreme Court, and Fed appointees have a much more immediate impact on the lives of ordinary Americans.

For now, I'm very confident I've got the right questions, much less confident that I know the answers.

[MUSIC]

PITA: There were also some interesting regional differences in some of the employment statistics you were looking at—that while in some regions, in Saudi Arabia you cited there have been 21% of women have joined the labor force in 2016, which is twice as many as the previous years, so the Gulf was making some strides there—but for instance in the Levant, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, we're seeing very few gains. What's sort of the reasoning behind some of these regional differences?

MOMANI: Yeah, and I think it's a country-by-country analysis, mostly. So one, on Saudi Arabia, I mean, this is one thing. One can be quite disappointed by some of the foreign policy aspects of Saudi Arabia, I sure am, but one of the things that is really interesting is that they're making a lot of reforms internally, and that's become, I think,

quite promising for young women there. It's not fast enough for some of them, of course, but what's quite interesting is that we're seeing some really rapid gains according to many, whether it's relaxation on some of the very strict gender segregation laws, whether it's pushing women to join municipal election councils.

Again, to us on the outside it may seem cosmetic, but there are many people that I've spoken to in the country who feel that this is change that just is finally happening and it's happening faster than ever. And I would say that the deputy crown prince, again for—one can criticize his adventures in Yemen as I do, very much so—but one of the things that I think is quite impressive is that he gets it. His youth is probably helps him understand that Saudi youth are bored, frankly. Saudi youth don't have entertainment outlets. Saudi youth want to be active parts of the global community and economy, and they're increasingly educated.

This is one thing that again, has not been noted very much, is that Saudis are becoming extremely educated and Saudi women are taking the opportunity to not only just study inside their country but increasingly going outside their country. You know, we have in the United States last year, 90,000 Saudi students were here, 50% of which were women. That's a huge number. It was a program initiated by King Abdullah, the King Abdullah Economic Scholarship Program, and if you calculate it, we're talking about millions of young people who've come to the West to study. That's just 90,000 in the United States. There's 25,000 in Canada, there's about 15,000 in the UK, 15,000 in Australia. And again, the past three to four years we've seen gender parity of those numbers. So these are young Saudi women who are coming home with a university degree from the West and frankly have lived in the West.

This is really key to me, because when I spoke to them, you know, some of them would say, you know, I lived in the West and I obviously paid my own bills, I drove myself where I needed to go, I had all of the, you know, empowering aspects of a Western society at my disposal, and then I come back to my country and I need to have my guardian to help me change my cell phone plan. And that kind of stark change is pushing, I think, from the bottom up, the kinds of reforms that we're seeing. Again, not fast enough for some, and of course the driving aspect is one that stands out, and frankly safe transportation is the bigger issue for women. Again, in Saudi Arabia even, to get to work is a bigger issue than in some cases the gender segregation laws that exist in the workplace.

PITA: I think that makes a good transition to some of your recommendations in the paper. And some were on that practical level of improving transportation options and increasing flexibility in the workplace: maternal leave, daycare options. And then some were specifically on the gender equity and the law, some of the legal issues about allowing women to take out loans and that kind of thing. Can you talk a little bit about your recommendations for what different countries can do to help improve availability for women in the workplace?

MOMANI: Yeah, and so of course, you know, there are many aspects of the policy that can be changed. Again, some of the very, as you noted, some of the easy stuff that can be done. I think one of the things that I found from the study is that of course, there's always the bigger argument of the social and cultural changes, right? You know. And this is a chicken and egg question that many can argue and say, you know, can you really have all these laws in place first when the social and cultural is still

very much a patriarchal society? There's still a lot of misogyny, discrimination in the workplace, all of the other facets of challenges women face in the workplace. Frankly, that's universal, not just to the Middle East. And what I would say is that you need to start with the laws first, and you need to actually have, I think, the kinds of incentives in those laws—including, in some cases, punishments, whether it's fines or others for those who don't follow through on some of this. And in some cases where we have women who are highly underrepresented in the workplace, sometimes you do need to have quotas, and I think that's something that's, you know—it's a big debate over whether, you know, it's helpful, but I think it's quite useful.

And also, do you do this as well through having better mentoring program, putting women also in positions of power? Sometimes we've seen, for example, a strain of the criticism in the literature on this is that many autocrats in the region, for example, have a lot of women who end up being figureheads in Parliament. And you could look at, for example, Saddam Hussein's Iraq had I think 25% of the Parliament were women. Did that make, you know, frankly, that society a feminist society? Well I would say no.

And we see a lot of that, you know, a lot of appointing women for symbolic purposes. That has a bad rap, and I understand that, but still we do need to see more women in positions of power. It's really important. We know from many, many studies that young women, when they see a mentor, they see a woman that they can look up to in positions of power, and that includes all aspects of the spectrum of society, whether it's as principals, as deans of university, as professors; whether we're talking about, you know, on boards, whether we're talking about parliamentarians; all of that—in media—

all of that is part of changing the sociocultural underpinnings that can be very much still patriarchal.

So there's a lot of change to be done, and I don't want to sound preachy because I think even in the West we have yet to come to, frankly, that situation where we can really talk about gender parity as though we've reached it. I'm often reminded of this one statistic, which is really quite troubling to me still, is that there are far more CEOs named John than there are women.

PITA: Yeah.

MOMANI: Right? Throughout the Western world, there are far more men who are CEOs named David than there are women who are CEOs. So we've got a lot of work to do, and we don't want to be preachy. I think it's really important that we have an honest conversation that women have a long way to go in academia, in think tanks. Far too many male panels, far too many male experts who are on the media as experts and women as the moderators. I mean, we've got a lot work to do before we take on claiming the high ground here.

So we've got a lot of work to do. The region, the Middle East, has a long way to go as well, but what's important is to have the conversation open as to what can we do to improve women's lives that's better for everyone. I think once we start talking about gender parity not as just what's good for women but what's good for everyone, what's good for the economy as a whole, what's good for the family as a whole; what's good for, I think, individuals including men, who I think do not have to have the burden of being the "breadwinner" and all the family, social, cultural pressures that brings. So I

think this is really just the tip of the iceberg in terms of having a conversation about women in the Middle East.

PITA: What about the informal economy side of things? In your paper, you had mentioned—I believe it's in the North African states—there tend to be women working but in unacknowledged areas, so as street vendors and housekeeping and a couple other sectors. How do you take that culture of women, yes, working outside of the workplace, and then make that count towards the GDP, count toward these metrics that people look at and that also get more accepted across society?

MOMANI: You know, there's been a lot of research done on the informal economy. You know, one, of course, as long as it's informal it doesn't have nearly the same value—and not just from the state perspective but even, frankly, from the household perspective. And often it's obviously in what we call pink-collar services, which seems as though it's an extension of a woman's work. So if they're going to clean, you know, someone else's home, it's seen as though they're cleaning their own home; again, has the same lack of value to the economy.

You know, in the case of the Middle East, one of the things people don't recognize is that, you know, this is still a predominantly cash-based society. So it's going to be difficult to turn that into a situation where the informal economy can become more formalized, and have it as part of the GDP calculations at a point where state can extract taxes from it. But of course, that makes the job of governing even more difficult, and governments in general. This is an untaxed portion of the economy, and so when you have a large segment of the population, as is the case in parts like Egypt and Morocco and some others where there's a high informal sector that can't be taxed, you

know, the government ends up, frankly, with very little tax base. It can of course resort to looking to corporate and to tariffs or to some sort of import/export type of situation, but it does, I think, diminish the tax options for governments, and that's really not, I think, healthy for an economy overall.

But again, how to do this is by giving, I think, an opportunity for women to have access to—better be able to open up bank accounts. In some cases, like in Egypt, for example, we need to go even further back because they don't have, necessarily, ID cards and we don't have ID cards because sometimes they're illiterate. We have 40% of the country that's illiterate, still, and so if you're looking at Southern Egypt, for example, these are people that don't have a national ID card. If they don't have a national ID card, they can't get into the formal economy, they can't open a bank account.

So, you know, I think you have to really have a country-by-country, you know, assessment of what's the problem. And often, you know, one will find that it's not nearly as simple as, you know, this is a way of tax evasion as often as written, or that this is just something that's done as part of the black market and could never be stamped out. There are many different aspects to this, and if we don't kind of have a very serious investigation, country by country, for what is going on, we don't get to some of the remedies that could be put in—or the policy recommendations to make things better.

PITA: I think lastly, obviously all these countries—different countries have different situations, economic situations, political situations—so it's not quite fair to compare one to the other, but which countries would you say are making some of the greatest strides in this area?

MOMANI: Well, we all look at Tunisia because, obviously, it really survived the Arab Spring with at least a functioning democracy. I'm always trying to be very careful about this, because, you know, one country may do really well on one aspect of things but not on the other. So for example, Tunisia may be doing very well on a couple of aspects, Morocco as well, Jordan in other cases. But then, you know, in the case of female employment Jordan's not doing so very well.

So there needs to be sort of a precise assessment of each country. There's a lot of room for improvement, frankly, in all countries of the region. And, you know, I say that with—I'm a bit humbled here because I think we've got a long way to go here too. We've got a long way to go in the United States, we've got a long way to in Canada, in my country, and a long way to go in Western Europe. So, you know, we really cannot talk from, again, that high ground as though we've got it all right. I'm not saying that it's not better here, it is better here for women, but we've got a long way to go.

PITA: I was struck, you had mentioned that, in the report, something about how most Arab countries don't meet this—I can't remember whose standard it is, but the standard for 14 weeks paid leave for women. I'm like, yeah, the U.S. doesn't have that either, you know, so—

MOMANI: Absolutely.

PITA: We've all got a lot of work to do.

MOMANI: Absolutely.

PITA: All right, Bessma, thank you very much for your time. Can I ask if you have any final thoughts you want to leave with our listeners on this issue?

MOMANI: Well, I mean I think that often in my work I try to talk about some of the real things that need to be changed in the region for the entire society. But, you know, one of the reasons why I went into political economy of the Middle East was that, you know, I was really frustrated with the Middle East only seen through a securitization lens. And that's not to say that there isn't a lot going on in terms of looking at it through that lens. It clearly has always been, in the past at least 50-60 years, been of great interest to those who are security specialists.

But I don't want my writing on the Middle East to ever be seen through this very pessimistic lens, because I think that the region is increasingly far more educated, far more cosmopolitan, has increasingly more progressive values if one looks at it and takes the time to talk to people in the region, look at surveys. And I think that's very impressive, and so for all of the sort of analysis that's been done by myself and others, I don't want any sort of listeners to take away the view that I don't think this is a region that is stagnating, because on the contrary I think the region is progressing very much—and needs to go even faster, but is progressing. And most importantly, the people, not the governments, the people in those regions are hungry for change. And obviously, the Spring was the great reflection of that.

PITA: Wonderful. Well, again, our listeners can find your paper, "Equality and the economy: Why the Arab world should employ more women," on brookings.edu. They can follow you on Twitter @b_momani. And thank you very much for your time today.

MOMANI: Thank you.

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DEWS: Finally today, another Coffee Break, in which I ask a scholar where they're from, how they came to pursue a career in public policy, and what book they would recommend.

FIEDLER: My name is Matt Fiedler, I'm a fellow in the Center for Health Policy and Economic Studies at Brookings. I grew up in Rochester, New York, which is in upstate New York on the southern shore of Lake Ontario. It's wonderful in the summer. It's actually, you know, fun in the winter too if you like snow, I guess.

You know, my path to being an economist was—you know, early in my time in college I found that I really liked math. I really liked quantitative work, I really liked solving sort of technical problems, but I'd also had a longstanding interest in public policy and sort of the problems of the world. And so the question I started to grapple with was how was I going to merge those two interests of sort of solving problems that really matter to society, and public policy problems in particular, but also being able to sort of fill that quantitative need. And the way I ended up doing that was becoming an economist and becoming an economist who was sort of working on very applied problems, and that was sort of my path here.

I'm an expert in healthcare, and so I'm not sure I can speak to sort of the most important problem is, across every domain, that our country faces, but I can—there are sort of two big questions, I think, in the healthcare space that we're ultimately wrestling with that are, you know, if only because healthcare is such a large fraction of our overall economy, 17-18%, are quite important. So I think question one is, how do we deliver healthcare in a way that's efficient and high-quality? We know, we have a lot of evidence, that there are many instances where our healthcare system fails to provide

necessary care or provides care that's not necessary at significant cost, and that even when it does provide necessary care, often the quality of that care is not what it should be. People end up with infections in the hospital, they end up being discharged from the hospital and coming back to the hospital soon thereafter. And so figuring out how we create the incentives so that medical providers have a framework within which they can provide more efficient, high-quality care I think is big question number one.

I think big question number two is, even if we got the answer to that first question person, healthcare would still be really expensive, and so I think there is a question then of how do we share that cost across people with higher and lower incomes, across people with worse and better health status? And that is sort of the, you know, debate that Congress is having right now over the Affordable Care Act and potential repeal and replacement of the law.

So I'm going to go on the sort of super nerdy end of the spectrum here, which is, you know, any sort of quantitatively-inclined listener who's interested in understanding the methods that social scientists use to disentangle cause and effect and understand the, sort of, if you implement a policy what is the causal effect of that policy and outcomes. I recommend a book called *Mostly Harmless Econometrics* which—it may sound quite esoteric but is actually a very engagingly written overview of the methods that modern social scientists use to address these key questions of, you know, if I changed this policy what will the actual effect of that be, separate from, sort of, whatever might be correlated with that policy but might not actually be a consequence of the policy itself.

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DEWS: Hey listeners, want to ask an expert a question? You can, by sending an email to me at bcp@brookings.edu. If you attach an audio file, I'll play it on the air, and I'll get an expert to answer and include it an upcoming episode. Thanks to all of you who have sent in questions already.

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DEWS: And that does it for this edition of the Brookings Cafeteria, brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. Follow us on Twitter @policypodcasts. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo, with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. Vanessa Sauter is the producer, Bill Finan does the book interviews, and our intern is Kelly Russo. Design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone, Eric Abalahin, and Rebecca Viser; and thanks to David Nassar and Richard Fawal for their support. You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on iTunes and listen to it in all the usual places. Visit us online at brookings.edu. Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.