

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Brookings Cafeteria: On Brookings and its role in today's policy debates

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CONTRIBUTORS:

FRED DEWS

TEDD GAYER

Executive Vice President, The Brookings Institution

Vice President and Director - Economic Studies

The Joseph A. Pechman Senior Fellow - Economic Studies

Molly Reynolds

Fellow, Governance Studies

Marcus Casey

David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Economic Studies

(MUSIC)

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria—the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews and my guest today is Ted Gayer who wears many hats at the Brookings Institution. Since April he's served as executive vice president of Brookings and remains vice president director of Economic Studies. And he's the Joseph A. Pechman Senior Fellow.

We'll talk today about his career, about his new role at Brookings, and about some of the important issues that Brookings faces as an organization and its scholars are paying attention to.

Also in today's show, you'll hear about what's happening in Congress from Molly Reynolds who unpacks immigration and the competing factions in the House Republican conference. And also, meet a new scholar in Economic Studies, Marcus Casey.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policypodcasts to get the latest information about all of our shows. And now, on to the interview. Ted welcome back to the Brookings cafeteria.

GAYER: Wow I didn't realize we were on an anniversary. I'm delighted to be here.

DEWS: It's always fun to talk to you about economic issues. So let's start with that fact you're an economist by training. Earlier in your career you worked at Georgetown University—I'm a Georgetown grad myself—with stints in the government at the Council of Economic Advisers and also the Department of the Treasury. Looking back what brought you to a think tank like Brookings a set of remaining in academia?

GAYER: Well I've been thinking about this a lot. You mentioned in the intro that I now wear two hats and I am desperately eager to only be wearing one hat. I have recently become the executive vice president here Brookings which means I am trying to find someone to fill my shoes as the VP of Economic Studies. And in talking to them about the position it got me reflecting on what brought me here—which was in 2009 at the time co-director and then five years ago as director and vice president.

So with the apologies that it's been a long time in so my memory sometime is fuzzy, I would say that the motivation at the time was both the place and the job. And so I can explain both of those. I had been an academic at Georgetown with various stints in policy positions at the Council of Economic Advisers and at Treasury as you said. Those were exciting stints. Those were applications of economic research to real live current problems - very exhilarating. It was a good formative time in my life to be able to see how my understanding of economics could actually inform policy decisions.

I sometimes listen to sports radio and they'll ask an NBA player what was the first time you thought you could actually, you know, play professional basketball. They talk about that kind of realization, and for me that was a realization that the tools that I was bringing as an economist could actually be presented to really inform very important issues.

So when Brookings came calling the place appealed to me. It is a place dedicated to that. It is a place dedicated to using informed research in my case economic research to try and inform the public and actually come up with innovative policy solutions to the pressing needs of the day. So that was very

appealing to me. And then on a personal level the actual job appealed to me in a way that probably isn't typical of a lot of academics. I loved being an academic. I had a great career at Georgetown. I was there for many years. I loved the idea of academic research and dedication to independent expertise to inform your research. But for me as a personal matter at the time I was presented with an offer to become the co-director which had a heavy management responsibility and perhaps like a lot of my colleagues in academia that appealed to me.

I have had and continue to have an intellectual curiosity for how you do management and how you take complex organizations and you and I both work in a complex organization, how you can take the talent that exists in such an organization and help the people there achieve the mission the mission of informing bringing expertise to inform public policy research.

So that was intriguing to me to actually try and move a little bit away from the academic world which is almost strictly dedicated to research and teaching towards more of the organizational, operational, managerial, position of how to help an organization and how to help other people in that organization succeed. So that's what brought me here.

DEWS: So when you were at Georgetown, were you in the Public Policy Program.

GAYER: That's right, yes.

DEWS: So a big shout out to them. I'm a graduate of that program too. From a long time ago. Great program. So after almost nine years as leader of the economic studies program or co-editor of the program you've now become executive vice president at Brookings. Essentially the number two leader of Brookings after our new president John Allen. So I expect in the transition your day to day activities are changing quite a lot actually be doing less research maybe more on the managing of the organization. What in those buckets are you most looking forward to?

GAYER: Well so with the caveat that this transition is still taking place I'm new to the job and as I said before I'm trying to find my replacement for my old job so I can be fully on board as executive vice president. I think the thing that intrigues me the most is what I was saying earlier what brought me here in the first place. For me the intellectual fascination the interest in actually helping an organization succeed coupled with the fact that I believe in the mission of the organization you can help all sorts of organizations succeed and achieve ends that you don't believe in and that would not be gratifying. But in my time here in economic studies I found it enormously gratifying to me to see the success of what other talented people within that group from researchers, to the communication experts, to everybody on the support team, what they can do to actually really contribute to policy debates. So it could be the Brookings Papers on Economic Activity where we've done really formative work in array of economic topics from issues of monetary policy and if you look at what the Federal Reserve has done over the years a lot of it has been informed by what we've published through BPEA. They did great work as we talked about. I think that the time I was here on a podcast we talked about Angus Deaton's work on opioids to the work of the Hutchings Center where they've done great work on productivity and debt management. I mean there's all sorts of

work going on throughout economic studies on social policy. Richard Reeves had a fantastic book I recommend to all your listeners called *Dream Hoarders* and I get an enormous amount of gratification to seeing that I can actually in my little way play some part in having them achieve that kind of success.

And so what excites me about my new role is trying to do that building wide. This is a large place filled with just a large amount of really fascinating interesting experts on an array of subjects. I am in the learning phase now to try and understand all that we do here. And me being positioned in order to help everybody that are working on these key issues do a better job be more effective I think is very satisfying to me. I have this tradition in my current role in economic studies whenever we have a new employee you know from an intern to new distinguished senior fellow I always take some time to sit down and talk about what they hope to get out of the experience of being here and so it's actually a fun meeting to have and to hear from people what they hope to get out of it and I envision my new job as something similar. As trying to understand what the actual talents are that we have here what are the interests of the people who work here across the research programs across all the support business units and trying to figure out how as a team we can work towards success.

DEWS: You reference a minute ago the mission of the organization. What is Brookings mission as you see it?

GAYER: Well I should have a boiler plate down by hard right now. I can tell you in economic studies what I think the mission was and I think it applies to the whole institution broadly speaking. I think what we try and do here as we conduct policy research and we provide innovative policy solutions to diverse audiences. So that is the broad public, that is specific policy makers. We are trying to educate the world to the extent that we can on insights to improve social welfare.

That is I think the mission so is a mission that couples dispassionate research with various modes of communication dissemination. I think it is imbued with our values of values our dispassionate research independent scholars expertise. And what I also think is also very valuable about this place is civility and debate. This is a place where we don't have an institutional point of view we have different points of views. The more exhilarating moments at Brookings are when we disagree and we disagree in a way that we can each bring expertise or different people can bring the expertise to bear across disciplines even within discipline across perspectives and I think in the world we live in today there's a premium on that. I would say a lot of these things expertise, dispassionate research, civility, sadly I think is in short supply. So I think there's a high premium on that,

And then the final thing that I think isn't necessarily our mission but just excites me about being at Brookings is the breadth of what we do. So I come from the economic studies program but we have a metropolitan policy program as well who has deep insights and understanding of what's going on in various cities. We have a foreign policy and global economy development programs. So we kind of span the globe from local policies to national international. And I think that it's an exciting place to be. Again when I have my intro interviews with new people. I say you know even if they're here for a summer internship as they

you should take the time to look around. There's always something really exciting happening at Brookings. I frequently don't even know half the things that might be happening on any given day. Maybe I shouldn't confess that- but it's a place to learn and it's a place to communicate with other people who have different expertise and different interests and it's an exciting place to be and so to me that's what makes Brookings Brookings, that's what makes it an exciting place. That's what our values are and that's what I'm feeling invigorated to take part in my new role.

DEWS: If I could just underscore your comments on the values I've been here for 22 years and those values are really enduring and ever since I walked in the door in 1996, it's been civility in our discourse dispassionate scholarly research independence of our scholars. So it continues to be exciting to be a part of an organization that is committed to those kind of values. So thank you for that.

Given that Brookings is one of thousands of think tanks in the world and also there are other academic organizations are advocacy organizations. You might talk about that in a second. Why Brookings is not an advocacy organization. Beyond our enduring values, what is Brookings no additional value added proposition in this huge sea of policy analysis?

GAYER: Well I think you've touched on it. My last answer touched on it as well. I will hold that what I said before was in short supply was deep expertise and ability to communicate that expertise with civility and dispassionately. I think that is our value added We're not the exclusive realms of that by any stretch of the imagination but I think as you were alluding to those values run deep through us and I think there's a lot to be said about cherishing that. And that is different. We are not a lobbying organization. We do not advocate for certain legislation over other legislation or certain political candidates over others. We are trying to be impartial experts to inform the debate and one of the things the challenge quite honestly we can talk about challenges perhaps later to Brookings is making sure that we do have a kind of diverse viewpoints that we're not just reinforcing the views that exist among the community people that we expose ourselves to. And I think that's another thing quite honestly is that kind of environment should be cherished and something we need more of.

DEWS: Well let me follow up on that then. So again we're not an advocacy organization. The IRS code 501c3- we're nonprofit organization but there are other organizations that are either lobbying or advocacy. There's even some think tanks that have a part of them which is a what we would call if I go and see for they do advocate for legislation. One of the goals or missions of Brookings is to have impact in the policy debate. How does Brookings have impact in the policy debate without expressly lobbying for policy outcomes or lobbying for legislation.

GAYER: Yeah I think there's so much to that question and see how we can break it down. One of the things that I consider when I think about my role and the role of Brookings is in many ways what I'd like to do is I try to - I come from academia and there are some values that are held dear in academia that I think are really important that I think we should emulate. But there's other aspects of academia that distinguish us from them. And so the idea of having a community we're a scholar can be independent and pursue

topics as he or she pleases based on their expertise I think is incredibly valuable. That is different than a lobbying organization which is going to be much more top down. We are in favor of this. Please help us make that case. It's an important thing to be doing. I'm not saying we shouldn't have that but we are an organization that tries to attract people who have deep expertise who have the freedom to actually pursue that expertise takes them in their recommendations for what policies should look like. So that is something I hold dear. We are different from academia. We don't just write the study. And this is maybe uncharitable to some academics. They're not all like this. There's a lot more to it. How do we communicate that? How do we reach different audiences? How do we speak to these issues in a way that can be convincing? How do we use modern communication technologies. And I can turn the question to you and how we do that as well beings that were sitting in the communications department your Brookings.

And I think this is a tough negotiation or space for us to negotiate. And I think we're not alone in this. We've seen an enormous explosion in the means of communications. And with that comes a lot of opportunities to expand your reach and your dissemination but also comes risks because ultimately the quality of our work is our brand and our credibility is the most important thing that we have. And so we don't want the means of communication in anyway to distort what we're doing.

I'll give you a little personal story if I may because it's fresh in my mind from yesterday. I have three sons 15, 12, and 7. And with the especially the 15 year old but also the 12 year old we have a lot of conversations in the household about technology about smartphones, about social media. As often happens when you have a gap between your children might 7 year old is sort of ancillary to these conversations but increasingly picking up. And out of the blue yesterday he was sitting on my lap and said 'Is technology good or bad?' which is actually pretty deep question. And he may have actually said why is it bad. I think he probably heard me hectoring my older son on some of these issues and so the conversation I had with him. Which is a conversation I think to some degree we all have both in our personal lives and here Brookings is what I told him it's technology is neither good or bad right. It is how you use it. It can be for what we try and do here Brookings and I again I turn to you on this having the modern abilities and technologies of communication can be enormously powerful but we also - just like I counsel my children - we also need to be aware that sometimes the misuse of technologies (we can talk about Cambridge Analytica we can talk about other downsides of social media) and how that sometimes leads to the distortion and kind of the sacrificing of quality understanding and research that also is something we have to be vigilant against.

One thing I love about my job here since I've been here and now in my new role is trying to figure how to balance those, how to negotiate that, how do we uphold our values of high quality research but yet also explore different modes of technology in communications without undermining the former. And it is an enjoyable challenging puzzle that's changing by the day. You and I earlier were reflecting on our time here Brookings and how long we've been here. It wasn't that long ago that I remember having a Brookings wide discussion about 'should we have a blog'. It really wasn't that long ago. I haven't been at Brookings

that long and we had that conversation. And so things are moving fast. But anyway I think that's just a challenge not just Brookings but a lot of institutions like ours face.

DEWS: Yeah I had very similar conversations with my 12 year old daughter about technology and the Internet especially and it's a very challenging as a dad to try to help her negotiate the jungle that is the Internet and what's good and what's bad and really trying to help her understand what's out there what's good and what's bad. It's really hard.

GAYER: Can I get your opinion and I turn the question on you about Brookings right as a communications expert here Brookings. How do you feel we should negotiate that. How do we get maximum exposure to our work to the right audiences without distorting or in any way undermining the quality of the research that we do?

DEWS: I think it's a great question and in my time here I have been involved in nearly all of the conversations about new technology new digital platforms. And I think it always turns on the question of: who is the audience? Even before I started probably the main methodology of reaching policy audiences was the book, the policy paper, and a big event in our auditorium or maybe private meetings and you know the kind of contacts that scholars already have. And those were I think communications channels that fit the time and also fit the audience. Maybe journalists would show up at the auditorium and they would report on it. But even back then there was a conversation about whether the media was an audience and whether or not the general public was an audience was a conversation that took a long time to happen and come to fruition.

Later on as we started thinking more expansively about who is the audience for Brookings research and ideas, we started expanding our definition of the audience from policymakers and government officials and academics, to the media and then we started talking about the interested public or the general public and with that expansion we start talking about: well what are the ways that those kinds of people are getting information today? And as the conversation happens and as the years roll on we start to see well there is this thing called Facebook. There's this thing called Twitter. And then there's this thing called Instagram. And then there's this live webcast thing and now there's podcasts and all these different people are getting information in all the different ways that they can possibly get information. So then our Web site grows up at the same time as a primary vehicle of communications. But then on top of that we start to attach all these other different communications channels, and even now those communications channels are detached from the Web site our home in cyberspace as it were. So I think it's really kind of a parallel conversation about who is the audience and what are the best ways of reaching that audience. But underlying all of that is back to what you said one of the principles are core values of Brookings is that question of scholarship. How do we make sure that in all of these channels that we are using to communicate with various audiences that the core idea the essence of the research the thing that the scholar needs to have said is actually conveyed accurately. And I've seen all kinds of discussions about that especially on Twitter like how can you possibly convey what a scholar is saying in 140 characters.

GAYER: It brings up another tension I think a healthy tension that we deal with frequently here. Brookings what you're talking about on the communications of preserving our values. Which is lots of organizations have this challenge, but in a particular place like Brookings which is dedicated as we started with to informing the public and actually shaping ideas for improving social welfare, is the question and the problem of groupthink. So you have an organization that's trying to attract people that are highly expert in what they do and put them in an environment where they have a fair amount of freedom to pursue that expertise for good social ends. But you don't want them to be insular. Right it's a wonderful place or lunch cafeteria is a wonderful place. I learned so much from my colleagues. But communications channels need to be sought after also as a means of actually exposing more people to our ideas critical people to our ideas and informing and getting us exposed to other people so that we can be more informed in what we do. And I don't think we've done this perfectly well. I don't think any organization does it perfectly well but it's something that I think we need to keep front and center in our mind. And I think historically I would have rated as not particularly good and even recognizing that is an issue. I come from the world of economics if you look for example of the population of Ph.D. economists it's an enormously undiverse group of people based on gender based on race based on them frequently on life experiences. And if we are trying to do research it is dispassionate research it's very data driven. But behind every data point are people and if you're trying to do dispassionate research that really affects the lives of various people coming from varied backgrounds with very kind of diverse understandings diverse experiences helps us see things that we ordinarily would not see if are an insular community that is relatively homogenous. It's an enormous challenge in the economics profession. I think it's an enormous challenge for Brookings as well and something that I would put on I'm high on the list of priorities of things that we need.

DEWS: And now here's Molly Reynolds with another edition of What's happening in Congress.

REYNOLDS: My name is Molly Reynolds and I'm a fellow in the governance studies program at the Brookings Institution. With immigration again making national headlines thanks to President Trumps implementation of a so-called zero tolerance policy, and the associated separation of families at the southern border Congress also finds itself embroiled in an immigration fight. The Capitol Hill version of the story like most things in Congress, has several moving parts.

On one hand we have a legislative fight in the House of Representatives that's been brewing for months. Back in January a group of House conservatives threatened to vote against a temporary spending bill over whether House Republican leaders would schedule a vote on an immigration bill sponsored by House Judiciary Committee chair Bob Goodlatte. In May the same faction threatened to vote against the reauthorization of agricultural and nutrition programs known as the Farm Bill. Most House leaders first held a vote on Goodlatte bill and then followed through on their threat with the farm bill failing on the floor.

A different faction of Republican lawmakers led by representatives from places like Florida and California used a procedural tactic known as the discharge petition to try and force the House to hold a series of votes on a set of immigration proposals. The discharge petition allows 218 members of the House

to signify their support for a particular approach here holding a series of votes on different immigration bills in order to force action, even when the speaker of the House who controls what comes up on the House floor disagrees. The proponents of the discharge petition came within two signatures of the required number before agreeing to stand down in exchange for a scheduled vote on a so-called Compromise Bill. It's a compromise among Republicans only. One persistent feature of this debate in the House involves the degree to which members from both ends of the Republican conference have been willing to exert leverage to try to get what they want from their party's leadership. Importantly in this case what they want may not mean actual policy change. Certainly from their perspective, in an ideal world both factions within the House Republican conference would see their preferred immigration policies signed into law. But given the difficulty of getting 60 votes for any immigration proposal in the Senate including the one most expressly advocated by the White House actual completion of standalone immigration bill has been unlikely for months.

At the end of the day getting a bill signed into law may not be the goal of Republican House members have ever reasonably expected to achieve here. Going in the discharge petition champions may well have been willing to settle for forcing a vote that they can claim preserves protections for children brought to the United States by parents without documentation and for which some can claim credit as they run for re-election this fall. The conservative faction meanwhile is likely trying to continue to prove that they have the numbers necessary to dictate what happens in the house. A dynamic that is increasingly important as House Republicans face a coming leadership battle with the retirement of Speaker Paul Ryan. In addition, if Republicans hold control of the House in November they are likely to face a smaller majority than they have now which would only increase the power of the conservative bloc. In part because of these divisions within the Republican conference, and because the high profile nature of the issue, Republican leaders have found themselves trying mightily to keep control of the process in their hands - a phenomenon that political scientist Jim Curry calls legislating in the dark. We've seen for example significant confusion among the House Republican Conference about exactly which proposals the chambers will take votes on. Republican leaders also have to use a particular procedural tactic known as a self-executing rule in order to make changes to one of the proposals before it was brought up for debate on the floor. A drafting error meant that rather than authorizing a one time sum of twenty five billion dollars for a barrier at the border, the bill would have provided 25 billion dollars *a year* for five years actually taking a vote on correcting the error would only have added more chaos to the debate on the floor, so leaders used one of many tools they have to maintain control over the process.

Even with these efforts to exercise control, the fact that the more conservative Goodlatte bill received more support on the floor than many expected suggests that leaders too maybe in the dark on some issues. While the House's debate over immigration has been contentious and messy. It's largely reflected persistent dynamics within the House Republican Conference in recent years including internal disagreements and efforts by leaders to maintain control over their agenda. The Trump administration's

decision to implement a family separation policy, his inaccurate insistence that only Congress could fix it, and his subsequent executive order only increased attention to the issue. Because substantial legal and policy uncertainty remain. As a result of the president's actions so far Congress isn't off the hook. But the challenges facing congressional Republicans will continue to be difficult to make anything on the issue happen in Congress.

DEWS: Well something I've seen in my time here is more and more scholars are what I would say for lack of a better term out in the field doing research. I don't want to discount the possibility that scholars were doing this kind of out in the field work you know back when I was a young pup at Brookings and just kind of paying attention to my narrow lane. But it seems to be more and more at the forefront of what a lot of scholars are doing. I'm thinking for example Isabel Sawhill, who has been out doing focus groups in three cities around the country to inform her research. I know Andre Perry is doing that kind of research. Vanda Felbab-Brown who is a foreign policy program she's been all over the world doing field research. It came to my attention more in her recent Brookings essay on the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico. I mean she's been down to those communities. So it strikes me as an example maybe of what you're talking about where our scholars are more and more interacting outside of the proverbial Washington Beltway to inform their research that they then publish through our channels.

GAYER: So that's a good point. I think there's two related issues. One because piggybacking on what I said before is what experiences are you're bringing to the table as a researcher. And I just don't want to over interpret this, but we talked about it earlier this really important paper that we published by Anne Case and Angus Deaton on the increase in mortality risk for certain populations of middle aged populations due to overdose, alcohol related disease, and suicides. And it's fantastic work. They published a paper before they published with us. I think it was in 2015. And what they're finding there is this really sharp increase in mortality rates. The change in the trend basically led to hundreds of thousands of more deaths based on what the original baseline was around 1999. So they published in 2015. One could ask that if we had different experiences among the academic economics community people who were more familiar with what was happening and in various communities when it came to opioids and suicide as they call it death of despair.

We may have been a little earlier to that we should have been a little early to that with all due credit to Anne Case and Angus Deaton, so the experiences that we bring the backgrounds that we bring before we do the research to the research I think makes a big difference. And then as you were suggesting are saying also what we do the efforts that we make where we are today to actually get outside this building and I think this gets back to what I started with one of the exciting parts of being a Brookings is you know we have scholars in our metro program who are deeply familiar with what's going on in many different cities and have various level of understanding the connections there that I wouldn't know where to begin. And so the ability to not just do the research but to inform it and to actually presented into the various communities that actually can kind of open the black box and try and actually: 'okay if you're

interested in social mobility what are the different mechanisms that we can use in this particular locality to actually advance social mobility'. Same thing with our foreign policy and our global colleagues who are involved worldwide in various policy making and actually understanding what's going on in the world actually being there physically actually knowing the people there physically I think it goes a long way.

I would just add what I started with I think we have a ways to go to be better at that. And step one of solving the problem is identifying the problem and I think this is something we've done a good job identifying and so I'm hopeful that we can continue to make progress.

DEWS: Well that's one of my favorite parts about hosting this podcast is because I've been able to in the course of 200 episodes speak with people like yourself and like many other scholars most of our other scholars who have been in government or have at home or abroad. I got to talk to Javier Solana for example one time he was the secretary general of NATO. So that was pretty fascinating conversation, or our own Strobe Talbott who you know was a high government official and was there when the Soviet Union broke apart and advised President Bill Clinton.

GAYER: It does make for an exciting work environment.

DEWS: It does! So well let me ask you as I mentioned earlier Brookings is one of many hundreds in this city and thousands of think tanks around the world and also we have media we have other institutions who are putting out policy ideas. Do you see other think tanks as our competitors?

GAYER: I'll give you an honest answer all the way around. So the short answer is No. Although my confession is there have been a few times where I've tried to recruit people here Brookings and I'm definitely happier when they say yes than when they go to one of our sister organizations out there. But aside from that selfish self-interest, no, I don't see them as competitors at all to the extent that there are more people in this world dedicated to bringing expertise to inform policy in order to improve social welfare. People that come with different perspectives and come with different backgrounds who can bring evidence to bear and bring their life experiences to bear on these issues, and who are most importantly as an organization are dedicated to advancing those goals. Then there my partner in arms. I have great fondness and there are a number of think tanks in this town and particular people that think tanks that we've had both professional involvement with personal involvement with. We share happy hours every once in a while with our friends at AEI for example, and I think I can speak for them as well when we interact. It's a way for us to learn appreciate what each other are working through and the goals that we share in common. So I actually find quite a bit of camaraderie with our various think tanks.

I confess also I'm not signed up for the softball team here at Brookings so some of the tension may come out. It is a ferocious thing when two think tanks compete on softball, I'm sure.

DEWS: Yea the Think Tank League, I used to be heavily involved in that.

GAYER: Is that right! Did it end ugly or..?

DEWS: Too ugly for our socks. We lost all the time but that was only when I was the coach!

GAYER: I have to check in, maybe I'll put that on my VP priorities.

DEWS: And get the team t shirts because they like that.

Well recognizing that the scholars of the institution have their own research portfolios and they are as diverse as you can possibly imagine and the topics that are research what are the organization's top priorities in the coming years.

GAYER: So first even the way you frame it I think gets at what I call healthy tension. One of the things that when I said the phrase healthy tension this is another way of saying something that I really enjoy about my job. The world is complex, and being able to kind of understand and negotiating complexity is rewarding. This is one of the healthy tensions we have at Brookings. As I said before in many ways we have academic roots which is individual scholars with independence pursuing the research agenda. But we're not just a collection of individuals. We actually as an organization. It is a team effort. We publish things under the Brookings Website. We try and actually shape the agenda to some degree. And so this gets back to what I started with. I am currently recruiting somebody to replace me as the head of the economic studies program and what I tell all of them is it is really useful to come in a role like that with a large amount of credibility as an academic doesn't have to be from academia but someone who's done academic quality research in one of the most important reasons you want to have that is because in that role, which is also the role that I play in my new position, you have to safeguard and protect the independence of scholars. But you also have to ensure quality. And so if you don't have the credibility of expertise then you're just management that's going to be perceived as interfering with independence. But if you come with credibility and you come with the ability, with the understanding that you share the same values as the scholars and the protection of independence you're able to work with them to talk with them to actually shape I think an agenda collaboratively. I am bottom up kind of guy. So I don't have the predisposition or inclination to work in an organization where I kind of say you do this and you do that.

Certainly when it comes to research I have too much humility to think that I not only don't I know the answers I don't know all the questions. And so being able to set up an environment where those experts across a range of issues and perspectives can help form an agenda for the institution that can work collaboratively with me so that I can understand and I can shape it with them. I think it's enormously rewarding. If you want to get a little bit specific, I'll put on my little operations hat. Ultimately there are resources that the institution brings to bear on certain issues. There are resources where we try and grow our focus as an institution. That should be informed through that collaborative process and that's what we're doing here.

There are so many kind of key issues today that are front and center we just had not just I have a new role our new president has started with has been here I think seven months and he brings his interest as well. A couple of things that are just occupying my substantive kind of agenda working with John our new president now: one is artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. The way I see this is it's the fast changing we can get back to the good and bad of technology this definitely comes with benefits and risks

and it is moving quite quickly. And so I think it shapes or will influence our agenda in a number of ways. There are a host of issues that we've covered here at Brookings for a long while, all of which are going to be impacted by these new technologies whether or not it's education or health or what's going to happen with the labor force as we get more automated and we move more into artificial intelligence. There's a host of policies that impact or will influence the emergence of these technologies. And we've seen this in the public debate. How do you provide data access but also safeguard privacy? Is there a regulatory role there? And if so what will that mean for the development of these technologies?

And then putting on my academic hat one more time. There's also how these technologies actually affect the research that we do and speaking as an economist. There is a kind of a growing area of work in empirical economics about using things like machine learning to actually get high level predictive abilities and apply those to various policy applications. So you can have a policy application of the viability of financial institutions you want to have a prediction there or if you're looking at health insurance or public risks sharing for health insurance you want to be able to predict health outcomes. And so, the access to large amounts of data and machine learning techniques proves your predictive abilities which therefore can make us better researchers on these key issues.

So there's a whole host of questions there that I think are shaping the institution and in my new role I'm excited about doing my part to help us succeed.

DEWS: And I'll tell listeners that we very recently had Darrell West on this program to talk about his new book about AI and robotics and the future of work. Fascinating conversation. So kind of from a leadership perspective as well Ted. How do you look at the range of possible topics and say: Well AI is one of the big areas of emphasis. Is it because it just touches so many of our policy areas?

GAYER: It's sort of the yin and yang I was referring to before there is so much going on here and there's so much learning that I do every day about what's going on across the institution. And that to me leads to this collaborative kind of process where I learn what people are working on. I get as best as I can well informed about the issues of the day and how it kind of overlaps with what we're working on. But then in my previous role or my outgoing role as head of Economic Studies, try and shape the institution or the program on where we should focus our resources our efforts and try and kind of where we get the most bang for the buck as a collection of individuals. In our leadership change here at the institution, with John coming on. He brings us deep interest both in AI and we should also talk about the middle class broadly speaking on issues of social mobility and opportunity. I think he's rightly diagnosed there are two huge issues of the day that it's affecting us AI. For all the reasons I said, it is permeates all the work that we do. It's going to be hard to imagine you looking being a labor economists and not having an appreciation for what a peer health or education or any of these fields cybersecurity and so that is something that as an institution I think we need to be well equipped for. There's the other aspect of AI which I think is underdeveloped I think in the think tank world which is we are in many ways an institution dedicated to governance issues of governance. And as we've seen with advances in different kinds of technologies it is

affecting how we do governance. So again going back to something like Cambridge Analytica, the actual coding that takes place on Facebook years down the line has an influence on how we go about campaigning, how elections are determined but it actually changes the governance structures of our country. And so that is happening every day. There are many ways a lot of what we're doing is being kind of mediated through digital technology and in a weird kind of way coding decisions will actually lead to these kind of real differences in our governance outcomes.

So as an institution dedicated governance we sure as heck should be well skilled and well versed in on technology and what these new technologies will bring. And so I think that's an important aspect of the direction of where we're headed today. And then finally on the focus on the middle class I touched on the case and deed on paper. There's all sorts of efforts that have gone on across the institution on issues affecting the middle class in particular on issues of social mobility and opportunity. It is a hugely important issue. It overlaps as I said before with diverse expertise that we have here in the institution and figuring out a better way to kind of aggregate that expertise, getting us working well as an institution, preserving the independence of individual scholars but putting them in some collaborative method of actually advancing their goals and the goals of informing these important decisions is a high priority and one I'm excited to take part in.

DEWS: So we live in an era where facts seem to be considered interchangeable with opinions. I mean that's just sort of the landscape we find ourselves in these days. How does a think tank like Brookings that prides itself on academic rigor and fact based research kind of communicate its ideas so that they have impact in this era.

GAYER: So let me just start with saying I think the idea of facts being confused with opinions is probably not a new one. I think it gets back to what we were talking about before which is as we've had kind of advancements in technology and communication abilities. For me I become perhaps less of a techno-optimist than I would have been five 10 years ago. Some of my libertarian roots were probably 'oh if you have kind of open communications and you have something like the internet- I don't think I was using the phrase social media at the time but sort of free information – it should not be mediated through any sort of central aspects, that would be on net a positive, that would be more truth revealing than truth hiding.'

I think we've now seen that that is perhaps naïve, and that there are definitely some risks associated with some of these communications technologies and so I would turn back to the answer that you provided me you know 10 minutes ago, which is a key aspect of what we're trying to do here, is stick to our values of dispassionate research not be insular. Expose yourself to different opinions different experts different experiences but still nonetheless be dedicated to deep work and actually having a level of understanding that other groups or individuals might not be able to have because we're committed to it. But it can't be all within the confines of your four walls of an office. We need to be able to use the algae to

harness communication technologies to best expose our work to the world, but always having an eye and protecting the quality of what we're doing. It is something we have to negotiate. It is tricky but I think it's vital. Ultimately the quality of our work is the central aspect of our brand and our ability to actually have the right people or to people listen to us and trust us. And so we always need to make sure that we're safeguarding that and using the tools that we have at our disposal to communicate without undermining what is our core values of high quality work.

DEWS: Well I want to thank you Ted for sharing your time and expertise today and all the best to you and your new role.

GAYER: Well thank you for having me. It is a pleasure to be here.

DEWS: You can learn more about Ted Gayer and the Brookings Institution on our website. Following in today in our coffee break segment- meet Marcus Casey a new scholar in the economic studies
(MUSIC)

CASEY: I'm Marcus Casey. I'm a Rubenstein fellow in the economic studies program here at Brookings.

When I was a young child, I lived in Chicago on the South Side, and moved around quite a bit, so I lived in various neighborhoods. When I got a little bit older, my parents worked out an arrangement where I would live with my father in Texas— East Side Fort Worth, TX, to be specific— during the school year, and I would spend summers and vacations back home in Chicago with my mom. So I lived in both Chicago and Texas.

To be honest, I'm not really sure I can pinpoint any particular thing that inspired me to become a scholar. When I was a child I was always intellectually curious. I used to read encyclopedias and books, and I always had an interest in historical fiction and things of that nature. When I got older and went off to college, I intended to be a lawyer, as most undergraduates who don't have a clear path seem to think. But later I did a summer program, the American Economic Association Summer Program, where I was introduced to using social science tools, specifically quantitative tools, to look at a lot of societal issues and problems. That really intrigued me, so I decided on a whim in the last year of college to go on and become an economist.

If I was going to say one important issue, it would be inequality. I think inequality is one of our biggest issues because it feeds into a lot of things, politically, socially, and other aspects of society that some people have considered problematic. It feeds into those issues in part because inequality creates this sense of pessimism for many people. If you look at a lot of the major cities in this country, the relatively affluent can effectively wall themselves off from the less affluent by virtue of nothing necessarily nefarious, but just by virtue of the fact that we use prices to determine who gets what in this society. As a consequence, the more unequal our society is getting, the more people who are on the less affluent side of the divide feel like they have very few opportunities to get to the affluent side, which is typically seen as the American Dream. As a consequence, I think it contributes to political dysfunction, tribalism, and a lot of

the ills that people have talked about.

I have my feet in a number of buckets, so to speak. My primary area of research is looking at neighborhood amenities, how people value them, and how changes in those amenities affect individual decisions.

I've also been looking at the consequences of the intensity of violent crime on various aspects of neighborhoods. For example, my colleague and I have looked at how violent activity can affect school accountability measures and teacher sorting across schools.

Some other work I'm doing is looking directly at inequality both from a current perspective, like the Earned Income Tax Credit and other transfer policies, and to what degree they can mitigate the inequality that we have in cities and urban areas, and also looking at some of the historical determinants of inequality and social mobility.

In terms of other work, I'm also looking at school choice and charter schools. Some work that I've recently done is looking at the structure of charter school markets, and whether it fosters quality improvements among charter schools. Some of the extensions to that work include studying the long term effects of charter school attendance, as well as whether charter school entry actually has any effects on local public schools.

If I were going to recommend one book, it would be the *Twilight of the Elites* by Chris Hayes, the MSNBC host. I think what he does in that book, and the reason I recommend it, is that he describes in a very cogent fashion what is driving the lack of faith in the principal institutions in the United States, feeding hopelessness and translating into what some people have described as political chaos. It came out several years ago, but it's one of the best analyses that help explain some of the things that we see in the news.

DEWS: You can learn more about Todd Stern and his work with the cross Brookings initiative on energy and climate on our Web site at Brookings.edu.

Special thanks to Mark Hoelscher for running the audio booth this week. Thanks to our audio engineer and producer, Gaston Roboredo. Brennan Hoban and Chris McKenna are the producers. Bill Finan does the book interviews. Jessica Pavone and Eric Abalahin provide design and web support. Thanks to Camilo Ramirez and David Nassar for their guidance and support.

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