THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
Brookings Cafeteria Podcast
“9 good policy ideas on Thanksgiving**”**
November 21, 2018

CONTRIBUTORS

FRED DEWS
Host

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews

It's Thanksgiving weekend here in the U.S., a time that marks the start of the holiday season. I'm pleased once again to present in this special episode a collection of forward thinking ideas and good news stories drawn from our podcasts and our public events. I hope you enjoy these excerpts. Links to the full audio from which they come can be found in the episode's show notes.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policypodcasts to get the latest information about all of our shows.

Happy Thanksgiving.

To start, here's Kathy Hirsh-Pasek describing an innovative public space in Philadelphia, a learning landscape for children at a bus stop.

HIRSH-PASEK: Urban Thinkscape is this lot that exists in a low-income area of Philadelphia, a low-resourced area of Philadelphia. It's a beautiful lot next to a church, and it happens to be a lot on which Martin Luther King made a really well-known speech during the Freedom March. So it is a lot that is treasured and cared for by the community. But it's also a little, teeny lot that is right next to a bus stop. And our image was that perhaps you could transform a bus stop into a kind of place making that would have learning potential. A learning landscape.

So we thought and thought about it. We called it Urban Thinkscape. And we went into that bus stop, and we designed wall puzzles; and we designed that hopscotch game I was talking about—we called it Happy Feet. But it is for, the big term is executive function skills of attention, memory, and impulse control. And we have stories. So we have these sloped inlets where you can go up and down on little slopes and you can go up and down the mountain. And you can then read the different pictures to create a story, to create a narrative. We have a hidden figures piece which is on four high poles and you look up and

you see a metal structure, but hidden in the web of that metal structure are pictures which then shine down on the sidewalk below, so the kids can try to find the figures.

Now what we've done, with the neighborhood, and with their idea about where it should be located, which bus stop it should be at, what should be on the puzzles, we co-created Urban Thinkscape. The neighborhood now owns that space. The neighborhood decided what they wanted to revitalize their neighborhood. Over a hundred children in that neighborhood helped us build the space, and today it is one of the prides of the community.

DEWS: Hirsh-Pasek is a Brookings senior fellow with the Center for Universal Education and co-director of the Infant and Child Lab at Temple University. She appeared on the "Intersections" podcast with Brookings Senior Fellow Jennifer Vey and host Adrianna Pita to talk about transforming public spaces with learning landscapes. Vey is director of the just-launched Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking.

Next up, a moving and personal call to empower young people to end Chicago's gun violence problem.

In March, former US education secretary Arne Duncan moderated a discussion at Brookings featuring three young men and their mentors from Chicago CRED, a nonprofit program to guide at-risk young adults into productive work.

After the event, I had the opportunity to interview Secretary Duncan and two of the program participants—Damien Flunder and Malik Tiger, who shared searing stories of growing up in violence, and their determination to disrupt the cycle of gun violence and transition to the legal economy. Here's Malik talking about earning certificates in job skills and then Secretary Duncan on how this training helps these young men get jobs.

TIGER: The certificates that I accomplished while I've been in the program have been … and my food sanitation license. And pretty much me getting the certifications do nothing but give me more credentials, help me better my resume, and help my specify

myself as an individual. Because, by us going to jail, or being incarcerated, getting felonies and stuff like that, society is holding us down. They don't want to give us a chance. Just like Arne said, they forgot about us. And this program, this ain't do nothing but just show us we ain't forgotten. There are still people out there who still believe in us, still believe that youth is our future regardless of the fact, or what you did two years, or a year prior—know what I'm saying?—that you still got a fighting chance to whatever you want to do.

DEWS: Well, Arne, how do you connect these men and the work they're doing in your program, the certificates they are getting, with employers?

DUNCAN: Yeah, so our goal is to work with guys for about a year, and we've been with this cohort—and a cohort for us is usually 25 to 30 guys roughly—and we've been with this cohort almost a year now, coming up at the middle of April. And just to really help them transition from a life on the streets to be able to go into the legal economy. And whether it's high school diplomas, whether it's certification, our guys have lots of different interests. It might be culinary, it might be hospitality. One of our young men is working at a law firm now. Deloitte, the conservative accounting firm, just hired one of our guys, which has been amazing.

And right now, Fred, we're actually in a very, you know, privileged spot where we actually have more employers ready to hire our guys than we have guys ready. Now as we scale this year and start to work with a lot more guys that math with flip. We have about two dozen employers who've said, you know, we understand some of our guys might have some criminal backgrounds, they might have felony backgrounds, and frankly they might have violent felony backgrounds, but that doesn't define who they are. In a year working together, working through some of the trauma, moving to a different place, these men are smart, they are talented, they are hardworking, they are resilient, and many of the skills they've learned to survive and thrive on the street can actually translate into the legal economy.

And maybe it's a little bit of a different talent pool, but we have guys from our first cohort who have been on the job six, seven, eight, nine months, and doing fantastically well. So we're going continue to build those relationships across many different sectors of the economy of guys looking—again, I'm not looking for charity, we're not looking for a handout. We're looking to getting people to understand this a great talent pool that's going to make your company, your corporation better.

DEWS: And again, I want to clarify for listeners that these men aren't part of the program because they have been assigned by the courts, or legal system, right?

DUNCAN: No one gets assigned to us, no one has to work with us. These are all men who are looking to change. People often ask, how do you find them? They find us, there are so many guys out there looking for an opportunity, looking to get off the streets, looking to life safer, looking to have some stability. And we just have to continue to scale, to work with more guys, and give them that pathway to the legal economy.

DEWS: On October fifth, President Trump signed into law the BUILD Act. BUILD stands for Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development, and is bipartisan legislation that creates a new U.S. International Development Finance Corporation that will make loans and guarantees available to developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa.

On an "Intersections" episode about Africa's historic free trade agreement, Nonresident Fellow Witney Schneidman explained how the BUILD act, which was then still in Congress, would improvement U.S. investment in Africa

SCHNEIDMAN: So, the BUILD Act is really quite important. Number one, it's a bipartisan piece of legislation. It's passed the House, it's currently in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, waiting to come out. The Trump administration is fully on board. And once it's passed, hopefully it will pass soon, it will double the size of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which is currently a $30 billion U.S. agency that makes debt

financing available. And it will become a $60 billion agency that can take equity positions in investments. And this is a whole new dimension and for U.S. companies.

And it will also have a new name. It will be called the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation. And in many respects it will put the U.S. in the game, investing in Africa and other emerging economies in a way that it has not been until now. It will also make technical assistance available. The USIDFC will have the capacity to do enterprise funds that OPIC can't do. So it really has the potential to be a game changer once the legislation's passed and there's actually a tremendous amount of excitement about it.

DEWS: April 4, 2018 marked half a century since Doctor Martin Luther King Junior's life was tragically cut short. To commemorate his legacy, Brookings hosted an event featuring Dr Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and a screening of the documentary, Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise."

During the discussion, Brookings Fellow Nicol Turner Lee talked about how to change the paradigm of the black experience in America.

TURNER-LEE: We have to continue to employ strategies that worked in the past. Voting rights and the preservation of voting rights, even though the worst case of voter suppression came through Russian interference. Just trying to tell you. Because we couldn't even identify that was happening to us. That wasn't something we could take to the Supreme Court.

But we have to continue traditional strategies of what worked before. It's working with Black Lives Matter, and more coalitions around gun reform. We're actually seeing that catalyst where people actually are still getting out there. John Lewis says we're still getting out there and ruining our shoes to make sure that people hear us.

At the same time, I think it's really important for us to understand that explicit racism and discrimination no longer comes seen. It's unconscious. I could talk about it in terms of

black Ph.D.’s. We still suffer in the black Ph.D.’s. Less than five percent of us actually get a degree. We are seeing this upward trajectory of black women, for example, in education with educational opportunities, but that still suggests that we have more to do. We have to change the paradigm of what unconscious bias actually does to us. Carter G. Woodson said, if they don't create the back door, are you going to create it for yourself? That's essentially what many of us are doing, because we've not yet seen the impact of unconscious bias.

My colleague, Andre Perry, and we talk all the time about paradigm shifting. Instead of looking at the glass half empty let's look at it half full. Let's stop painting these portraits of black men who are incarcerated and let's talk about the number of young men from Morgan State that actually get engineering degrees. That's a shift of the paradigm of the black experience.

And then I also think it's important that we look at our economic wealth. We have a trillion dollar capacity as African-Americans, as consumers. We can decide, as African-Americans, where to spend our dollar. We can shut down businesses. I was telling somebody Starbucks to me was reminiscent of the Woolworth counter. Waiting while black happened in the '60s, waiting while black happened just a couple of days ago. But we can make that decision to take our dollars elsewhere.

And I would say the last thing, what I focused more on, is we've got to get access to new tools. Technology is the driver for recreating the narrative of the 21st century. If you are no on line you're not in the conversation. To date there are 11 percent of Americans who are offline, disproportionately people of color, people who are disabled, poor, less literate, older Americans. Those 11 percent sit in this space called digital invisibility. And that digital invisibility creates this pathway where they're excluded from what we saw. Michael Harrington talked about the other America when he talked about the war on poverty, about people being under counted. I'd say the new war on poverty is against the

digitally disconnected who cannot engage in civil society, cannot find a job, cannot get the healthcare, simply because they lack access to the technology. So I would say there we've got to level the playing field to ensure that they have access.

DEWS: Turner-Lee is the author of a recent photo essay on the digital divide in rural America that disproportionately affects people of color and the poor.

According to this next expert, 40 percent of all families in America have a woman as the primary breadwinner, including single-parent families headed by women. What kind of policies matter to women in the workforce, in family formation, and in childbearing?

Senior Fellow Isabel Sawhill has long been an advocate of policies that improve opportunity for women and families, and that can help reduce poverty and increase opportunities for all Americans.

SAWHILL: I think that the first thing we need to talk about is birth control—being able to have a child when you are ready, and not before. And the way to do that is to make sure that women have access to affordable birth control, especially the most effective kinds of birth control. And unfortunately not too many women in America, even people here are Brookings—I have young professional colleagues who approach me in the elevator and say, oh, I didn't know what you said in your last book about birth control. But what I said is that the most effective form of birth control is called a long-acting reversible contraceptive. We call them LARCs for short. And they include IUDs and implants. And they are many, many times more effective than, say, condoms or the pill. And the reason for that is not because if you use normal forms of birth control very consistently and with discipline they wouldn't work—they do and they are far better than nothing. It's just that we're all human, we make mistakes, and we forget to take a pill, or we don't use a condom in the heat of the moment. And so, in practice, the most common forms of birth control are not nearly as effective as the long-acting forms, which are also safe, by the way, and highly-recommended by all the professional groups now.

DEWS: And it strikes me as a way to empower women, especially young women, to be in control of their own reproductive choices.

SAWHILL: I'm so glad you put it that way, because I think that's exactly right. We need to understand that 50 percent of pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, not wanted at the time they occurred by the parents themselves. So we really are talking about empowering women to achieve their own goals, their own aspirations with respect to child bearing. We're in no way suggesting that if a woman wants to have a baby she shouldn't have one.

And so, in addition to making sure they have the means in the form of effective birth control that's affordable to meet their goals, we also have to give them the motivation. And the motivation comes from making sure that they have access to education, and to jobs, and to various kinds of social supports that's going to make it possible for them to have a decent life, and a hope of becoming middle class.

DEWS: You can also read on our website Sawhill's essay, "What the forgotten Americans really want, and how to give it to them," as well as find information about her new book on the Forgotten Americans.

Did you know that 1.7 million people work in America's water workforce? These aren't just the people who maintain the pipes and pumps, but all the workers at the local, state and federal levels who design, build, operate, and govern U.S. water infrastructure

In an episode of the "Brookings Cafeteria Podcast," I spoke with Metropolitan Policy Program expert Joe Kane about the water workforce and the economic opportunities the water sector holds.

KANE: By defining and measuring the water workforce, not just the water utility workforce, which I'll describe in a minute, the study reveals the enormous economic opportunity that water infrastructure as a whole offers the country. At a time when many Americans are struggling to access economic opportunity and many of the country's

infrastructure assets are at the end of their useful life, we know infrastructure jobs offer considerable promise, which I've covered in some of my previous work. But water jobs are particularly emblematic of this opportunity. This is especially true when it comes to the competitive and equitable wages that water workers earn, and the specialized, in-demand skill sets they develop over time. But it's largely up to employers, workforce leaders, policymakers, and other national organizations and federal agencies to further support workers in this sector and ultimately seize the opportunity at hand.

DEWS: A lot of the great public policy content at Brookings comes from guests on one of our stages during the hundreds of public events hosted here each year. Audio of all of these is available on our site and also in podcast form, which you can find on Apple podcasts or wherever you like to get podcasts.

In June, the Brookings Center for Technology Innovation, along with the Data, Women's Impact, and Brookings Networks, celebrated the achievements of women pioneers in the field of civic technology, highlighting barriers that women face in the technology and civic sectors, and offering examples of policies that promote diversity. Panelist Melika Carroll, senior VP at the Internet Association, talked about why it is important for women to be in the tech space

CARROLL: Well, one thing, I've helped co-found a group called GlobalWIN, the Global Women's Innovation Network. And it was a group that was meant to help women interested in innovation and policy to network with each other and grow our careers. Through that group, I think we've also done some stuff together through that group. We met with a female VC, again, to talk about the challenge of how do we get more female-led startups funded. And if part of the problem is talking to people with money, then let's find more women with money, and so we met with a female VC. And she was talking about trying to encourage young women to get into tech early and these hackathons that are popular—popping up throughout the country. And the young women who are participating

in the hackathons really didn't like the mixed hackathons very much because what happened when talking to them, they found out that a lot of the things the guys decided to put their time and energy on, you know, a problem to solve or a game to develop, the young women weren't interested in spending the time on that. And so they started doing young women-only hackathons and these women started developing different tools, different programs, different games. And they were to address societal problems and some of the stuff we've talked about today. And so, to me, that's the reason you need to have more diversity, whether it's gender or ethnic. And technology, if you think of technology as something that's transforming every aspect of the economy and society, we need everybody's perspective in that transformation. And so that's the reason we need to do better.

DEWS: Be sure to listen to the entire event from June 27

And now, how to make infrastructure work for people. In another episode of the "Intersections" podcast, guest host Tanvi Misra talked with Brookings Fellow Adie Tomer and Route Fifty's Mitch Herckis on historical patterns of urban and suburban planning that separate communities. Here, Tomer and Herckis talk about using data for public good.

TOMER: What really resonates is instead of saying does internet matter, it is quite literally sometimes a picture of those students sitting outside a library, or a McDonald's, in their family car, they're downloading data to do their homework, right? And that just touches a nerve. And how are we going to—now all of a sudden infrastructure, in this case telecommunications, is actually creating fissures between opportunity for people, right? And that is tough to hear.

On the flipside, and it's not a problem, per se, but is about solutions, Tom Schenk, the chief data officer from the city of Chicago, he talked about how they can use data again to effectively predict which houses are most likely to have lead paint, so we can get in there to mitigate and effectively—back to creating those fissures of opportunity—and

remove them. So the kids who are more likely to be exposed to lead paint, who can have a lifetime of reductions, of course, in their IQ, they can get that out of there, and create more pathways to opportunity for people. And that kind of stuff makes you smile, right? The paint was there, there's nothing you can do about it now except get rid of it. And the idea of using data for public good like that is really exciting. But again back to what you talked about, Mitch, right, you've got to have the right staff, you've got to have the right systems in place, right, and you've got to have the right alignment or it's not going to happen.

HERCKIS: And Stephanie Gidigbi actually talked a lot about some of the things that are harder to quantify and measure, but kind of very similar in line with that, you know, with Spark, they are working on supporting regions on racial equity, health, climate. Those are things that disproportionately affect the poorest among us, the most vulnerable populations among us. Whether it be around emissions, and asthma, or issues of just economic gain when you're talking about racial equity and who is having access to jobs in their neighborhood. Food deserts are a real thing in many communities, and not having access to fresh foods impacts your health. So being able to kind of stitch that all together, utilizing data to identify some of it and make it clear to people and tell that story, is part of it, but also kind of finding ways to change those norms sometimes through investment, sometimes through infrastructure and transit—it's not a small problem, unfortunately we probably won't solve it on this podcast—but I think it was a good conversation, I'm glad we started it.

DEWS: Finally, here's senior fellow Rebecca Winthrop, director of the Center for Universal Education at Brookings, from an episode of the "Brookings Cafeteria" on the skills children need to succeed in life and how to improve the quality of learning for the most marginalized children and youth, including girls and children affected by extreme violence. In this clip, Winthrop talks about a program in rural India that helps middle school children gain skills they need to succeed.

WINTHROP: So, we spent a lot of time learning from innovators, and educators, and policymakers who are on the front lines doing this work, every day, day in and day out, talking to them, looking at their models, and actually collated a big catalog of global education innovations. Maybe we can dive into that later, but what we did find was lots of really cool examples. And there are all sorts of examples. There are examples of an innovation that can come alongside the standard school system.

I'll give you a couple of examples. One is a hybrid learning program. It's called Hybrid Learning Program in India run by an NGO called PRATAM that basically targets upper primary students, middle school students who aren't in school in the morning, they are only there for half a day. And they give them tablets, offline tablets—they are not connected to the internet; these are in very, very remote rural villages that they have generators and power, but no internet connectivity. And on the tablets there's lots of things. They've put games, they've put videos, they've put reading materials, they've put all sorts of things. And they initially were just trying to conduct an experiment and see what would happen. And not only did they hack in and bypass the passwords immediately, even though these kids had probably not seen more than a flip phone before, their literacy and numeracy scores massively increased, their English language scores increased, and then they started creating content. And they were much more savvy—they learned digital navigation skills very quickly, even without the internet, a lot better than their peers at more affluent schools who were sitting in computer labs and sort of learning how to type, et cetera. So that's one example. There are other examples that are government-led, where whole sort of systems leapfrog. There are other examples where schools have a model that helps leapfrog. So there are all types.

DEWS: You can learn more about Rebecca Winthrop's research on leapfrogging education at brookings.edu/universal-education.

The Brookings Podcast Network is excited to announce Dollar and Sense, the

Brookings trade podcast hosted by David Dollar. You can subscribe to it on Apple Podcasts, and listen wherever you get podcasts. Here's the trailer.

DOLLAR: Hi, this is David Dollar, a scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. This is "Dollar and Sense," the new Brookings podcast on global trade. We're going be looking at how trade works, the evidence on its effects, and the role that it plays in all our lives. From tariffs and trade wars to the new Trans-Pacific Partnership and NAFTA's replacement, trade has been making a lot of headlines recently, especially since the election of Donald Trump, who has redefined America's role on the global stage with his America First posture.

In this podcast I will try to make sense of that shift and dive deep on some of the perennial issues of trade politics. I'll talk with experts from D.C., across the country, and around the world about trade and jobs, currency manipulation, Congress's role in setting trade policy, China's economic cooperation, and so much more. And we're going to start with breaking down President Trump's trade war with China and his upcoming meeting with President Xi Jinping of China on the sidelines of the G-20 summit. I'll be talking with Eswar Prasad and we'll break this down for you. New episodes will be released every other week. So subscribe today on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts and stay tuned for more on trade.

DEWS: And that is all I have for you in this special Thanksgiving episode of the Brookings Cafeteria. Thanks for listening.

A special thank you from me to Communications interns Megan Drake and Emma Russell, who scoured scores of episodes to help me find this selection of clips.

My thanks also to audio producer Gaston Reboredo and producers Brennan Hoban and Chris McKenna.

Our audio interns are Tim Madden and Churon Bernier

Design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone and Eric Abalahin

And finally thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their leadership and support.

You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get podcasts, and listen to it in all the usual places.

Follow us on twitter at policy podcasts

Visit us online at brookings.edu.

Until next time, I’m Fred Dews. Happy Thanksgiving.