

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

HOW MILLENNIALS THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATIONAL DEBT:
LESSONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

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Keynote: Challenges and Opportunities:

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How to Speak Millennial: Debt and Climate Change:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BUTLER: Good morning everybody. My name is Stuart Butler, I'm a senior fellow here at the Brookings Institution. And I want to welcome you to our event today. I also want to welcome the many people that are watching this online and we will be able to take some questions from people online if you use the hashtag mobilizing millennials. It's a scary thought, isn't it? But anyway, if you use that tag, you can also ask questions which we can include during the discussion.

I'm going to be by far the oldest person that you're going to see on the stage today. I'm kind of a late baby boomer and for decades, I've been working in public policy really warning that there were certain trends that are very dangerous for future generations and urging action on particularly an area of economic policy and fiscal policy, arguing that we need to act now in order to forestall problems and dangers in the future. And there are two particular ones that I and others here at Brookings and many other places have been discussing for many years, climate change and the problem with the rising federal debt and deficits and its potential impact on us. And both issues, both climate change and the debt involve plenty of experts, warning of the problems of inaction. Both are examples, I think of the conventional wisdom in politics that it's very difficult to get people really riled up and moving on an issue where the impact is going to be many years in the future. And yet to take action involves pain right now. So, both of these are really classic examples of the challenge of trying to get people really engaged in these issues and both are likely to have particular problems for millennials and younger generations in the future, whether it be through rising taxes or inflation perhaps or other issues that the impact is going to be very much on these younger generations. But at the same time as we have and have had demonstrations outside of Brookings here on Massachusetts Avenue about climate change and speeches in the UN and plenty of action and online and on the streets. Somehow, the whole issue of the federal debt and deficits is a big yarn for so many people. We don't see demonstrations outside and so on.

So, what we're going to do today is to try to explore why this is so and to learn from each issue for the other in terms of the lessons of how to think about it and particularly how to encourage and to mobilize younger people to take action on these issues and particularly in the area of federal debt. And these we'll be describing in a panel just following shortly. Some of these generational differences in attitudes and feelings on these issues and we'll discuss what the research shows -- suggests in terms of

lessons, of how people in the public policy field should think about how to engage with younger Americans on these long-term issues and what we in the public policy field and particularly we, in the baby boom generation, that wonder about these things, what we should actually be doing.

But before the panel itself, we've asked Representative Derek Kilmer to join us to make some opening remarks. And Representative Kilmer is from the 6th district of Washington state. And there's several reasons why we've asked him in particular to come and share his thoughts about this general issue.

The first is though, although he doesn't technically meet the cut-off point for being a millennial, he's pretty close. And he has quite a reputation as one of the most dynamic young members in the House.

Secondly, he's a policy innovator. In fact, I first met Congressman Kilmer some years ago when he was working on a proposal to encourage savings among first-time savers and poor Americans using the behavioral economics of lotteries and raffles to design an approach to encourage to put into place a mechanism to enable people to save more effectively.

He's also a driver of congressional reform in the Congress. He was a member of the joint select committee on budget process, so he's very aware of these issues associated with fiscal issues and he chairs the House Select Committee on modernization which was recently set up. So, and finally last but by no means least, he's been one of the foremost members of using Congressional caucuses as a vehicle to spur thoughtful bipartisan discussion on major issues. He's a member of the future caucus which is for younger members of both parties and he co-chairs the House Bipartisan Working Group and I should say that the future caucus is supported by outside of the Congress by the Millennial Action Project which is co-sponsored and co-hosting this event with us today. So, I'm delighted that Congressman Kilmer is with us and invite you to address us.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Well, thank you for your tepid applies. It's good to be with you. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I want to thank Dr. Butler for the kind introduction and Brookings in the Millennial Action Project for hosting this important conversation.

It's an honor to be with all of you and I'm going to start by doing something a little bit dangerous given how early in the morning it is but hopefully, you've all had a few cups of coffee. Some of

you still seem to be working on it. But I want to start off by asking everyone to just close their eyes for a second. Just close your eyes and I want you to take a second and think about climate change and think about what it looks like to you. And now you can open them.

I want to tell you what I see when I close my eyes and think about climate change. When I close my eyes, I think about being on the Pacific Ocean on the coast in a little village called Tohla in Grace Harbor County Washington and when I close my eyes and I think about it, I think of standing there with a woman named Fawn Sharp who's the president of the Quinault Indian Nation and we're standing right on the ocean. And anyone of us in this room could throw a rock and land it in the ocean, we're that close and she says to me when I was a kid, the ocean was more than a football field's length away from our village and she said now it's our front porch. And she talked about the fact that now every time there's a severe storm, they live in fear that their seawall is going to breach and just fill their village up like a bowl.

Their village has been there since time in memorial but it's below sea level. And when I close my eyes, I see their village filled with water and I see one of their tribal members literally rowing in a canoe through the streets of the village which happened.

They've begun to see the impacts of climate change right now with rising sea levels and more severe storms, not to mention the threat of Tsunami and they're one of four tribes in the district that I represent that are in the process of right now trying to move to higher ground.

Sometimes when I close my eyes and I think about climate change I think of a young woman in my district who's a shellfish grower. In our region there are 3200 people in my region whose livelihoods are tied to that industry and she's working to follow in the footsteps of her father and her grandfather and working in that industry. And when I close my eyes, I think about her talking to me about the uncertainty that she and thousands of people like her face in dealing with ocean acetification, changing ocean chemistry and the inability of oyster (inaudible) form a shell as a consequence of changing ocean chemistry.

And I'm sure when you close your eyes you thought of other stories and scenes, ones that you can see and touch and feel in your lives.

So, now, I want to ask you to close your eyes again. Close your eyes and this time as

you sit there with your eyes closed, I want you to think about the national debt and what it means to you. Okay, you can open them.

If you're like me, most of what you saw is what you see when you're trying to fall asleep, kind of blackness or sheep jumping over clouds, perhaps you see one of those big debt clocks that are, you know, tabulating numbers or maybe if you're a guy my age, you saw Ross Perot wagging his finger while holding a chart or a graph. So, I was asked for -- in my involvement in this to share my thoughts on why some issues like climate change are compelling to policymakers and compelling to millennials while other issues like the national debt often fail to rise to that challenge. And I would argue that the exercise that we just all went through together to some degrees reflects some of the differences and dynamics that cause some issues to demand urgent action and some issues to be largely swept aside. First, we all respond when there's a personal connection. When I asked you to think about climate change, I would guess that almost everyone in this room thought of something personal to them, either where they grew up or a story that's been on national news like the burning of the rain forest in the Amazon. There's hardly a community that isn't being impacted in some way by the impacts of climate change whether you're on the coast or you live along ever increasingly flooding rivers or you live in the plains that are going through drought.

The ways in which we talk about debt though, are fundamentally different. And I'm not sure it needs to be that way. Debt remains a serious concern from millennials and younger generations especially when they're personally encounter the rising costs of earning an education and joining the workforce. Student debt in this country has now surpassed credit card debt. And I find myself thinking that perhaps if connections were made that personalized the issue of national debt that make it real to actual human beings rather than making it feel like an ethereal policy conversation, then maybe we'd see it have more salience as a political issue.

And let me just speak for myself for a second. I admit, I have generally preferred politicians with a sense of fiscal responsibility. I think I caucused for Paul Tsongas in 1992. I was the guy in Washington state who did that. But I will -- I don't -- I don't think I really thought about our long-term fiscal challenges in a personal way until my wife was pregnant with our second child. It was the first time that we went to go see a financial planner. And I acknowledge up front, I was lucky to have had the

ability to go see a financial planner period but I'll never forget how our financial planner began our conversation. She said I need to ask you a question that will dictate how all of the other questions we go through from here will go. And then she asked a simple question. She said, do you want to assume that social security still exists when you retire. The notion that social security might not even exist when I get to the age of retirement, let alone when my children do, is really daunting. And as we consider how to engage on issues, it strikes me that making them tangible and personal is actually important and I'm struck that the panelist that we hear from next may use data and science to rebut some of what I say but my observation is that young people are amazingly engaged. They are dialed in on so many challenges and frankly they face so many more challenges than other generations in many regards. But if we want to engage folks on the fiscal matters that Stuart asked me to speak to, I would argue that we have to make them real. We have to paint a picture of what action will mean to their lives to the things they care about. As Stuart pointed out, engaging people on personal consequences and personal actions can create buy-in. In my own neck of the woods, we have financial institutions that are engaging young people, not only on financial literacy but on practical actions they can take to ensure a sound financial future, it's being made personal.

And that brings me to the second point I want to make, that as we deal with the climate crisis there are powerful messengers painting the picture with a real sense of urgency. It's something that has broken through to the point where the weather channel just announced that even the weather channel is now going to ask political candidates to talk about it.

We've seen scientific data that makes clear that we're coming upon a point of no return when it comes to climate change. That we need climate action now and that there might actually be a sane area where our inaction leads to our demise. That in and of itself has created a sense of urgency. My state's Governor, Jay Inslee, I think says it really well. He says we are the first generation to see the impacts of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it. But our messengers on climate are not just politicians, they're notable experts, scientists and academics and entire panels at major world summits, focus on how to address the problem as a global community and you have you have young people themselves as messengers. Greta Thunberg led an international climate strike with over 7.5 million people in 180 countries and delivered a uniquely impassioned speech to hundreds of

world leaders at the United Nations. You have tremendous funding behind national and global advocacy groups that are demanding action and creating a class of climate specific voters.

Now, let's contrast that with the fiscal questions. I would argue that we haven't seen a similar dynamic. Make no mistake, this budget crisis is serious according to the Committee for Responsible Budget, today the national debt is more than 22 trillion dollars this year.

In 2019, we're expected as a nation to have 3.5 trillion in total revenue and 4.4 trillion in total spending, meaning we will borrow about 900 billion dollars. What that means is more and more of a young person's paycheck will go to just servicing debt and there's a real concern that debt will crowd out other priorities that young people care about including health care and environmental protection, education and other priorities. But I can't help but feel like there are forces at play that lead voters and particularly millennial voters not to make this a priority. For one, at this point to most every day Americans, adding a 900 billion to 22 trillion just doesn't -- that just seems like something that is so far out of their control that they hardly blink. It doesn't feel tangible even. The debt crisis doesn't feel localized. It doesn't feel personal. It doesn't to most people feel urgent.

We certainly have some great groups out there, fix the debt, that coalition, the Committee for Responsible Federal Budget who are doing amazing work, especially in this town, to try to engage people. But most of leading voices on this issue don't have as much credibility with young people. For the most part, those who talk about the debt are politicians who will say that the debt is an existential threat in one speech and then vote for a giant tax cut for the wealthiest Americans for their exploding the debt in the next breath. So, it's easy to be cynical.

Think about the only times you've seen the issue of debt break-through in our politics. I would argue the only time it really broke through in a real way was in 1992. At that time the national debt was just 4 trillion dollars, just 62 percent of our GDP. And at that time, you had a presidential candidate who was very much not a politician who made it his primary reason for running and make the issue compelling. And whenever that candidate, Ross Perot, got in front of a microphone he would say the debt is like the crazy aunt we keep down in the basement, all the neighbors know she's there but nobody wants to talk about her. And not only was he reacting to public opinion, he was actually shaping public opinion.

And as a consequence, you saw something during the Clinton presidency that now seems like a distant memory. Surpluses, I would argue that we need a virtuous cycle again of public leaders and public opinion reinforcing one another on debt. Public policymaking is like physics and object at rest tends to stay at rest. Hell, even when there is even motion and force as we've seen on the issue of gun violence there is still inaction by the US Senate and by the Whitehouse.

So, there's a fundamental question of how do we shape public opinion on this issue and I would argue part of the answer is talking about it. And toward that end, I've sponsored a bill to create something called the fiscal state of the nation addressed in which our nation's controller general, not a politician, would address a joint session of Congress, each year to try to elevate the issue of the debt.

Now, even that proposal, I will readily admit has its shortcomings. First, I would argue that the fiscal state of the nation (inaudible) probably unlikely to go viral. Not going to see a huge spike in C-Span ratings. Also, economists may also not be the most compelling messengers. I'm reminded of a sign that hung in the economics department when I was in college that said, there are three kinds of economists, those that can count and those that can't. But maybe the folks from the local credit union who are coming into the high school to talk about financial literacy and our financial stability, maybe those folks are the right messengers and maybe just maybe we should be building a grass roots effort on these issues that engage young people since it's their generation that will be damaged the worst by inaction on it. And some of that should fall on the shoulder of some of our younger public officials.

But each day I'm at risk of no longer being put in the category of young public officials but having said that I'm still proud to still qualify for a coalition in the House called the future forum and we're a group of younger members that have travelled the country engaging millennials where they are. And I'm so wildly impressed by the young people we've engaged. They're in so many ways more engaged, more open to new ideas, more embracing of diversity. We visited college campuses and have done town halls, we sat down with young military veterans, we visited technology hubs and I can promise you that 95 percent of the conversations we have are driven by the things that those young people are concerned about.

Young people engage us on the issue of student debt because they see it as personal, as a burden that will constrain their life choices. They talk to us about gun violence and climate change

because they see these issues as a clear and present danger. They talked to us about housing affordability because they're struggling to make ends meet. They talked to us about net neutrality because you will take streaming Netflix from their cold dead hands.

And as a younger elected, I'm dialed in and working on each of these issues because we're engaging with young people on each of these issues. And you know what I haven't done when I visit a college campus, I haven't gone through the Concord Coalition's budget exercise with students. I haven't run through the options laid out by fix the debt or even engaged them on the impacts of debt to their future. So, maybe that's on all of us. Maybe that's on me too. In the end, I come to the words of Abraham Lincoln who said, "Public sentiment is everything". With public sentiment, nothing can fail and without it nothing can succeed and I sincerely hope that on more issues, young people will engage because with their engagement we can make progress on anything. So, thank you for letting me join you. (Inaudible) thanks.

MR. BUTLER: Well, thank you for joining us this morning. I really appreciate your comments. I must say I'm a bit horrified to hear that the economists that don't have quite the standing among people that I think they should have compared to scientists and other -- and other people. But I think that's a very valid point that we need to think about very strongly. Sort of, who are the most likely people to have authority on talking about these issues? And you mentioned, maybe bringing in the credit unions and (inaudible) people from the locality and so do you want to expand a little bit on that in terms of when you think about who carries weight on these issues, who can get through to people, who are these people and why -- why are they not being mobilized right now?

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Well, I'll say up front, I think some of the most compelling voices on the issues of climate are actually young people themselves.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Right. You've seen Greta Thunberg, I think...

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: ...break through because she is a compelling voice speaking on behalf of the generation. So, I think there's opportunities in that arena. I think, we have seen in my region, an effort by financial institutions like the local credit union to talk to people, not just about their

personal finances, but to think more broadly about these issues and I think there's opportunity there.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm. I mean, I think -- I do think it's interesting to look at a climate change as a counter-example of how trusted characters, people have emerged in that area. I'm of an age where you -- you used to think about the weatherman or it's almost always a weatherman, the weather person as being something of a joke, particularly in England. I mean...

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: It's still raining. Yeah.

MR. BUTLER: It's always going to be raining. So, you just have to say that and you've got a 70 percent chance of being successful.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Same in Washington state.

MR. BUTLER: Yes, exactly. I know we shared something in common with regard to that, you know, and people would use diagrams and use a Sharpie, I guess that's still happens today but anyway, use a Sharpie and now it's all high science. It's all the -- you know, the American model, the European model and so on.

The weather person as an expert has really grown dramatically in this country and I wonder whether, you know, I wonder who else you imagine is playing this role in the area of the debt. I do think that local people making it personal and so on. And that kind of leads me to another question which is that, you know, when I was brought up, the experience of our parents and my parents was very vivid in these areas people remember the (inaudible) of course, but they remember the Depression...

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Mm-hm.

MR. BUTLER: ...and I remember when I went on townhall meetings many years ago, you would hear this all the time. People talking about the banks going under in the Depression. So, it was a very vivid thing, it was passed on from generation to generation. What is it the baby boomers have not managed to do in this regard? I mean we've not managed to explain to people -- to younger people that, you know, inflation, slow growth, stagnating economies and (inaudible) employment related to poor economic conditions was a reality that they should think about and debt being one of them. Was it we're - - what is it we're failing to do as an older generation?

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah. I think people are shaped by personal experience, you see a generation above mine that, um, you know, it's funny we were talking about this in my office

and when -- I do a ton of townhall meetings. When I go out and engage voters in my region...

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: ...if you tell me the issue, I can tell you -- I can usually guess with a pretty good confidence what is the age of the person who asked the question.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: And when I get asked about debt, it's usually someone in their mid-60's or over. And I think that's driven by personal experience from either they themselves or their parents going through difficult financial circumstances and having, you know, having that experience of having to navigate difficult economic times in a very personal way is something that shapes a person. You know, I don't know that that is unexperienced that -- even though the -- you know, the great recession is that -- not that far away, I am not sure that that is as shaping of experience from millennials and I also think that, you know, if you look at the personal financial circumstances of most Americans it's - - it's a datapoint that when you blow it out, helps understand our nation's financial difficulties by and large most Americans aren't able to weather significant problem whether that be healthcare emergency or disruption of housing or the loss of a job.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Most Americans don't have substantial personal savings. Most Americans are not ready for retirement.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: And so, you know, I don't know if that -- I don't know if that's a mistake of baby boomers, I don't sort of cast judgment on that but it's just a reality for many American families. And I think as a consequence, you've seen that probably shape the opinion of some young people.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm. I mean it's -- I think it's a curiosity that the great recession didn't have quite the same shock value as I think many of us would have thought it would have. I mean certainly in the years preceding the great recession, I think a general theory among those of us who really felt that the need to be much attention on these issues was that, a big drop in the stock market, a sudden shock like that would get people's senses together and that they would really understand the issue and

focus on it and yet it didn't -- that does not seem to have happened. It didn't persist for very long.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah.

MR. BUTLER: And I think maybe one of the reasons might be that again, going back many years, if you think of the periods of the 70's and 80's and 67 and 80's which was a long period of constant turbulence in the economy in all countries, in my country in the UK and here, slow growth, high inflation, lots of business cycles in a sense, lots of stop and go in the economy. And it really became like bad weather, something you all -- everybody was aware of and (inaudible) this short shock did not seem to have had the same affect, I think, which is intriguing because I think it perhaps undercuts the idea that if it was just a big drop in the stock market sometime soon, people would see the need to take action. So, I think it's an interesting -- how this little impact of the great recession on younger people. Tell me a little bit more about the fiscal state of the nation exists, you know, you are trying to take initiative to make clearer to people, particularly to younger people...

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah.

MR. BUTLER: ...these dangers. Can you explain what it is and sort of the logic behind it?

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah. It's a bill that actually came out of one of the groups that you mentioned that I'm a part of, called the Bipartisan Working Group.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Which is meeting right now actually, I walked out on the meeting to come here.

MR. BUTLER: I appreciate that.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: No, no, it's my pleasure. But the notion was in an effort to elevate the issue of debt, we have to start talking about it.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: And to bring in someone who is not a politician to address a joint session of Congress and just talk about, here's where we are as a nation in an objective way. I think the idea is to shine a light on the problem and at least get policymakers to start with the same fact base.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Some of the groups that have engaged on the issue of debt have suggested that at the very least, that should happen in the year before a presidential election...

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: ...at least to sort of tee-up the issue among the presidential candidates. I've watched most of all the presidential debates so far. I'm trying to think, I don't recall the issue of debt even being asked about yet. I may have forgotten but...

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: You know, to some degree you and I and I think everyone in this room could sit and acknowledge this is a problem but it very much is not a problem that is breaking through driving public sentiment as a consequence, you don't have that virtuous cycle of public sentiment driving public policy making.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm. I think that there's a lot of interest in the idea of the physical state of the nation here, some of work here at Brookings and lots of other organizations.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah.

MR. BUTLER: And I think kind of one of the reasons for that is the feelings that there's lots of information actually about the future. We see trustee's reports on the Medicare and social security program every year, usually painting a pretty bleak picture. We see the long-term CBO reports indicating that. There's lots of information sort of throughout the year. And it certainly struck us that the idea of the fiscal state of the nation might be an effective tool by taking so much of this information that is disbursed.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah.

MR. BUTLER: And comes out and sort of drips and drabs all through the year and have it in sort of one big bang with a lot of attention to it. That's the only way we've been thinking about it. It sounds like you're thinking along -- very much the same way.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah. I think that's right. Now, as I mentioned I think that is not going to be as compelling as Greta Thunberg presenting to the United Nations. Right? That...

MR. BUTLER: Probably not. (Inaudible).

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: ...that is undeniably true but if we're going to at least start engaging on the issue of debt and I think we should because the problem isn't going to get better simply

by ignoring it.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: One it means we have to start with a common fact base and two, we have to get the public more mobilized on it. And I would also argue that some of this, and I mentioned this, I think we have to personalize the issue to people. Now, I will tell you, I'm a stronger advocate now for the solvency of social security, having met with the financial planner and being asked whether it will be there and I'm also a stronger advocate for it now because I got to see my own grandmother benefit from it. My grandmother, we lost her earlier this year. She was 13 days shy of a 109 years old. Someone just asked me recently was it -- was her passing expected and I said, yes, every day for the last 20 years. But her husband, my grandfather died in 1981. So, I got to see 38 years her ability to live with dignity driven by what I consider, one of the most successful public policies in the history of this country, social security.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: And as a consequence, when it became personal it becomes something that I will, you know, hell no, I don't want to see that go away, I want to make sure that everybody can retire with dignity and I don't think that that dynamic generally exists on a lot of these large fiscal matters. There is a not a straight-line connection between the (inaudible) debt service payments and our ability to fund important financial aid programs that ensure that the doors of educational opportunity are open for everybody.

MR. BUTLER: Right. Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: There is not a straight-line connection yet between rising debt service payments and our inability to invest in clean water and clean air and investments that help us rise to the climate challenge. There is not a straight-line connection between (inaudible) debt service and our capacity to fund vital programs in the Department of Housing and Urban Development that drive urban renewal and ensure that people can afford to live in that community. So, and to some degree, that's on all of us collectively to try to connect those dots a bit better than we have.

MR. BUTLER: Right. Let me open up for questions from the audience. I know we've got just a few more minutes and we got somebody, let's see - just over there. And when I say a question, I

mean something short that has a question mark at the end and is related to the topic. Yes?

SPEAKER: My name is Michael. One of the simplest solutions to the debt problem seems to be to make the people that have a lot of money pay more in taxes and we're constantly going in the opposite direction, both Democrats and Republicans over the last 20 or 30 years. And the other thing is about removing the cap on social security taxes for high income earners. I think that would go a big way to solving some of that, so there's relatively simple solutions, it's just the politics isn't there to accomplish it.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: So, there's -- let me speak to both of those. One on debt, every bi-partisan commission, non-partisan commission think tank that has looked at this issue has pretty much concluded the same thing and that is the problem's too big simply to tax your way out of it, simply to cut your way out of it or simply depend on economic growth as a strategy out of it. In the end, you're going to have to have a comprehensive solution. That probably requires both parties to swallow a little bit of something that they don't want which to some degree I would argue, is an opportunity particularly in a period of divided government to perhaps, you know, come up with a grand bargain. I think that it is farther away now than it was 10 years ago. On social security, there's a bill that I think might actually see some traction in -- at least in the house called the Social Security 2100 Act that would largely do what you're suggesting which is asking the most well off to pay a bit more to address their ongoing solvency of social security and also to try to make sure that social security is more reflective of the cost that seniors actually face. That's a bill that now has over 200 hundred sponsors in the house. My sense is that bill could see some forward motion and if it does, at the very least, I think you might see at least some more public engagement on the issue.

MR. BUTLER: This gentleman here.

SPEAKER: Thank you. (Inaudible) could Congress perhaps through your new committee require every bill to be translated into individual or unit terms? For example, housing. I feel that it's not just about the cost per house if the life cycle maintain it.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Mm-hm.

SPEAKER: And in climate how much of the coastal areas would disappear in 50 years (inaudible) the analysis is often weak. Is that an act that's relatively procedural and you and I both

learned as McKenzie consultants to translate analysis in the terms that a client, in this case, the country could understand. I find very opaque most congressional bills.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Yeah.

SPEAKER: And many Brookings (inaudible), for that matter.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Well, I don't agree with the last part of that because we're in -- we're at Brookings. So, I never complain about the food at a dinner party. The -- you mentioned the -- so, I'm chairing this select committee on the modernization of Congress about every 20 or 30 years or so, Congress realizes things are not working that well and they create a committee to do something about it. This year's committee is called the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. I know it sounds super sexy. But one of the things that we're looking at is transparency with regard to bills to better engage the American people and have Congress better able to engage on things that solve problems for the American people. I would argue, if you've ever read a bill in Congress, it's mostly gibberish, you don't get to look at what's being changed in existing law, you only get to see largely, you know, sentence fragments. It's complete gibberish and so one of the things that we've already made a recommendation on and we're hoping to see it move soon is to actually, as most state legislature's do when you have a bill be able to look at what is current law and what's being added or stricken from current law, not just to make that more understandable to public policymakers but to the American public too.

You mentioned a separate issue which is actually looking at as we take on legislation, trying to help define what it means to the average American. I think that's -- that can happen by mandate but I think largely when someone brings forward a bill the important thing is to make that connection to the American people. That's actually how you help move legislation through the legislative process. You know, it was mentioned -- I worked on a bill to try to help poor people save money and it was based on Harvard research from an economist up there that suggested that by and large asset poor people don't have savings and they disproportionately gamble and play the lottery and this economist came up with the notion called prize-linked savings where you could take the excitement of gambling and have it apply to saving money and as I went out and talked about it, like that's something that people could generally say, like, oh, I kind of get that right. And so, our task on every piece of legislation that we introduce is to try to make those connections.

MR. BUTLER: Let me ask which I think will be the last question because I know you have to get back to the -- the caucus, this is from Twitter and I think it, you know, summarizes a lot of questions that we have and then it goes like this, "given very low interest rates is there a case that we can afford to wait to solve our fiscal imbalance while the dynamics of climate change are quite different".

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: I think it's undeniable that we need -- we're passing a point of no return on climate. And it's why you see a sense of urgency by millennials. It's why you're seeing a sense of urgency certainly out of the House in terms of driving, you know, one of the -- when you're in the majority, the first nine bills are set aside for your priorities and there's a reason that the climate action now bill is one of the priority bills among house Democrats is because it requires significant action. I think we're playing with fire a little bit when it comes to the debt. In that right now interest rates are low but when they go up, debt service is a component of the total budget.

MR. BUTLER: Rises sharply.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Will rise very significantly.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: And the concern is if we wait until then to take action, we're either going to be facing very significant cuts or very significant spikes in taxes. And as I mentioned to the gentleman's question, if we're going to get a handle on our fiscal challenges, we're going to have to put a whole lot of levers, those levers get a lot tougher to pull and the solution set gets a whole lot less attractive.

MR. BUTLER: Mm-hm.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: The longer we wait and all of those things are more -- all of those pills are more bitter to swallow if you're doing it in the midst of a recession.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Right. If we wait until difficult economic times, that is not -- that is not an ideal time to raise revenue and it's not an ideal time to substantially cut government spending and as a consequence what you've seen is unfortunately, even during a period of economic growth, you've seen Congress largely acting (inaudible) right where you've seen to the gentleman's question tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans in a period of economic growth and substantially increased

spending in a period of substantial economic -- of economic growth.

MR. BUTLER: Okay.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: I would argue if we were going to be more strategic about this, we would probably be acting (inaudible), you know, pushing money into the economy when we're in a period of down-turn but making some tougher choices during a period of economic growth.

MR. BUTLER: Okay. Thank you so much for joining us.

CONGRESSMAN KILMER: Thank you. Thanks everybody.

MR. BUTLER: Thank you again, Congressman Kilmer.

MR. KILMER: Thank you.

MR. BUTLER: Now we're going to move to the panel where we're going to discuss in a bit more depth some of these issues that came up and explore a little bit more the approaches and attitudes of younger people and different generations on these issues and sort of what the implications are for thinking about public policy in the future.

And to begin, we're going to have two short presentations about the views of younger generations and some of the techniques for communicating with different generations on these long-term issues.

And our first speaker will be Alec Tyson. I'll ask him to come up in a second. Alec is a Senior Researcher at the Pew Research Center and the Pew Research Center he is involved in all the stages of the Center's research, from designing surveys, to writing and presenting survey results. So he's very experienced on all of these issues. After him will be Nat Kendall-Taylor. Nat is the CEO of the Frameworks Institute. And Frameworks is an institute that uses the methodology of social and behavioral sciences to measure how people understand complex issues and test the ways to reframe these issues and to drive change.

So we've got two presentations and then we'll be joined by three other people, which I'll mention after that, who will come up and we'll have a conversation about the research work.

So let's begin with Alec. (Applause)

MR. TYSON: All right. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for having me. I'm happy to be here.

As mentioned, I'm at the Pew Research Center. I primarily work in public opinion, how people feel about issues, what their attitudes are on issues, and that will be most of the data included in my presentation today.

So the first place I want to start is with some of the contours of these generations. And some of the contours of these generations. And some of this may be familiar to the audience, but I think it's really important to anticipate the discussion we're about to have. What are some of the key characteristics of these generations and how might they inform their opinions on the topics we'll discuss today.

First place to start is how much more racially and ethnically diverse the youngest generations are. Millennials and now this emerging new youngest generation of gen Z. They're much, much more racially and ethnically diverse than the older generations. You can see a comparison here where early boomers, this young cohort of individuals, only 18 percent were nonwhite in 1968. In 2018, you can see that almost half of gen Z at that same age range was nonwhite. And you know, that has a lot of implications. One of the things we know about racial and ethnic identities, it's closely tied to partisanship. And so one of the factors that drives the Democratic imprint of these younger generations is the racial and ethnic diversity of these youngest generations. And you can see in this middle slide the party composition, which is a really important starting point for I think all of the reasons that we know. Gen Z and millennials, about 6 in 10, or almost 6 in 10, identify as Democrats or leaning toward the Democratic Party. Partisanship is a bit more mixed in those middle generations, gen Z and baby boomers, and the silent generation tends to be a more conservative generation, the generation that leans towards the Republican Party.

A lot of the work that we do at the Pew Research Center that I've done talks about political polarization, a concept or a theme you might be familiar with. And I think it's worth acknowledging that partisanship operates in a different way today than it did even 10 or 20 years ago. Great research by a lot of folks, including Lilliana Mason and others in academia, or in our survey research field, that this identity is supercharged. It is more powerful than ever before in terms of that the attitudes that correlate with it and how it informs your attitudes on other issues, and that includes the deficit and climate change.

And then just a brief point on the left here, just to show that the composition, which informs the partisanship, and the partisanship which informs overall attitudes, we find big differences on a lot of policies by generation. This is a very simple question, gets at your underlying views of the role of government. Should the government do more to solve problems? The other side of the question, or basically it should do less and leave more to businesses and individuals. We find that large shares of gen Z and millennials say they want to see a more active government, as sort of a democratically aligned viewpoint. More mixed views in the middle generations, and more conservative view among the silent generation.

Other important differences among the generations that I don't need to go in depth here on, but of course the youngest generations are less religiously affiliated, less likely to attend religious services. A lot of important differences here, but these are some of the primary ones that I think will help frame the conversation we're about to have over the time we have here today.

Okay, so let's get to some of the subject matter of the panel today. Starting with climate change, now this slide shows your attitude about what you believe is going on. And you can see that 54 percent of gen Z, 56 percent of millennials think that the earth is getting warmer and that it's due to human activity. And then you look down the slide and you see well, that belief is a bit less wide held among Gen X and Boomers and much less wide held among the silent generation. And then if you look at these other categories, you know, some share thinks it's getting warmer, but it's due to natural patterns. Some share thinks there's no evidence that the earth is getting warmer. And I think it's worth noting the sizeable share that says they're not sure. You know, that's an indication that this topic, or the cause or the drivers of this phenomenon are not necessarily well known to all members of the public.

And the other thing that I would say here is even among the youngest adults, gen Z or millennials, 54 and 56 percent is not 95 percent. There's not unanimity, even among the youngest generations, that the cause of global warming is human activity. And that may or may not be surprising to some folks, but I think it's important to say yes, they're more likely to view the issue in these terms. But even still, these shares are far from overwhelming, right.

I want to talk a little bit about the politics or partisanship of climate change. A very simple question should dealing with climate change be a top priority for the President and Congress. And this is

shown over time. You can see that among Democrats, about two-thirds of Democrats say it's a top priority for the President and Congress to deal with climate, and that's up significantly over time. A little bit of fluctuation, but it's a very clear trend line. And then just a really different story among Republicans, right, that only about two in ten Republicans say dealing with climate change is a top priority for the President and Congress. And there's not a lot of slope to this line, it's a pretty flat line. We're not seeing a lot of change over time. I mean maybe if you squint at it you can maybe see a few points of change, but this is a pretty flat line, it's an uptick line, and Democrats -- and one thing that it's doing, and it's consistent with the partisan atmosphere we're in now, is the gap between Republicans and Democrats is bigger than it's even been in the past, where it's becoming a much higher priority for Democrats, it remains a low priority for Republicans, and they're further apart, or as far apart as they've ever been on that.

I want to talk a little bit about -- okay, you've got generations, you've got partisanship, what about generations within partisanship. Are young people within the parties different or the same? And the dots on this chart show generations among Republicans and the richest blue dot is young Republicans, millennial Republicans. Thirty-six percent of millennial Republicans think the earth is getting warmer mostly due to human activity. That's significantly higher than older Republicans. About half of millennial Republicans say the government is doing too little to address the effects of climate change. That's greater than the share of older Republicans who say that. And young Republicans are less likely to favor expanding the use of oil and gas offshore drilling, or oil and gas drilling.

So it is true that within Republicans, younger Republicans tend to have a bit more liberal attitudes on climate and environmental issues. But you have this reference group over here in the shaded highlights. This is all Democrats and Democratic leaders. It's important to remember that young Republicans are still very different from all Democrats. The younger Republicans still have more in common with other Republicans than they have with Democrats.

And you might ask, well, what about age differences among Democrats. The reason they're not shown here is that they're very, very modest, you know, very similarly sized large shares of all Democrats across age cohorts take the views that we have shown here in the highlight. So you ask are their age divisions with the GOP -- yes, are younger Republicans a bit more liberal -- yes, but they are

certainly not normatively liberal or pro-climate when you look at a reference point like the other party.

So I'm going to pivot over to the national debt and deficit. Starting on the left side of this slide, there's some consensus, or there is consensus, across generations that the debt will grow over the next 30 years. And you might think that well, that's kind of an obvious thing to say, but increasingly in this environment, sometimes we see true disagreement between partisanship or other groups on what the facts of the matter are. Here at least we can start off and say that all generations agree that they expect the debt to grow larger in the next 30 years.

But then we start to see some differences across generations in terms of prioritization. And the pattern you'll see here is that it's older folks, not younger folks who put the highest priority on addressing the debt and deficit. This middle slide, percent saying the national debt, it's a top priority to reduce it for the quality of life of future generations. I mean this question is even cast forward looking. You might think it would prime some younger folks to assign higher importance to it and it really doesn't. You see that the silent generation and the oldest generation is the most likely to say this is a top priority. And it's actually millennials who are the least likely to say that this is a top priority for future generations.

And then it's a very similar slide on the right panel here, which is a close cousin of the slide we just discussed. Percent saying the federal budget deficit is a very big problem for the country today. If only to just reinforce the same pattern we see, if you word the question slightly differently or with a slightly different emphasis, you get the same pattern.

I want to talk a little bit now about the politics of the budget deficit. I think it's important to say that there's a regime effect over concern about the budget deficit. These lines show among Republicans and among Democrats the percent who say each should be -- it should be a top priority to reduce the budget deficit. And in the Clinton era, not a lot of difference between those two lines -- could reflect any number of things, less intense partisanship, maybe a better fiscal environment. But beginning in the George W. Bush era, these lines diverge. In the Bush era Democrats were much more concerned about reducing the federal budget deficit. In Obama's administration, these view flipped. Concern over the deficit among Republicans skyrocketed and you really start to see a big gap between the two parties.

We're in a moment now where both parties aren't really that concerned about the deficit, but you do see a beginning of a change in the trajectory of that Democratic line, ticking up toward a bit

more concern, where that Republican line continues to slope down.

And so I think that's just a reality, that the concern over the budget deficit vacillates depending on the partisan makeup of the White House or Congress. And that could be one reason why it's hard to get sustained momentum on an issue where well, it really depends on who is in power -- that's related to how much I care, how much a partisan would care.

And then the final slide. I want to make -- well, maybe I'll pause back on this one just for a moment. We talked a little bit about intraparty generational differences on climate, are younger and older people different within party. There's not a lot of that on the deficit. And to the extent that it is, it's that older member, older Democrats are a bit more concerned than younger Democrats, and it's even fainter among Republicans, but to the extent that there's a pattern, it's older Republicans more so than younger Republicans who are concerned about the deficit. So that piece of context for generation partisanship.

And then I'll wrap up with this slide, which may be obvious for those who work closely in Washington, or maybe on the Hill. Public has very little appetite for spending cuts. And periodically we ask about some specific areas, including something like assistance to the needy around the world. You might hypothesize, well, okay, the public might be willing to cut there. You might have your own ideas, but maybe that's one area they'd be willing to cut. No, only 28 percent would be willing to cut funding there, a majority, about 68 percent say they want to keep that spending the same or increase the spending. So a little bit of a reminder of the very limited public appetite for specific spending cuts, which of course would be at least one piece -- one piece, not the whole picture, but at least one piece of program to address the debt and deficit.

So I'll leave it there for now and I look forward to the panel discussion and questions further down the panel. (Applause)

MR. BUTLER: Okay. Thank you.

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: All right. Hello and good morning, everyone. How is everybody doing? Good.

So, first of all, I want to thank Stuart for allowing me to be part of this really awesome panel. Those first two presentations were great and I promise to do my best not to make you second

guess the wisdom of that decision.

But I'm going to start by telling you a little bit more about myself and where I come from. And that's not because I think you care, but that kind of -- my disciplinary background, where I come from, is really important in understanding why I'm standing up and here and about to take up the next 12 minutes of your lives.

So I am by training what is called a psychological anthropologist. And there are some knit brows out there, but what that means is that I study culture and how it influences the way that people think, how people use culture to process information to make meaning of messages, and importantly, to formulate and reach decisions. At Frameworks, the organization that I lead, I study two different things. So I study how people understand complex social issues, like the budget, like the economy, like addiction, like climate change, public health issues. And I also study how the way that we communicate affects those understandings, which is really the science of framing. And I've done this work for 12 years now and I counted this morning, I've worked on 40 social issues over those 12 years and I would say that almost each and every one of those issues is plagued by the difficult task of communicating about prevention. So it is exceedingly difficult to get people pumped about doing a lot of work and spending a lot of money so that we see nothing.

So what I'm going to do today is I'm going to take a step back. I'm not actually going to talk about millennials at all and I'm not only going to talk about budget and climate change issues, but I'm going to take you through a very quick answer to the first question of why I think the issue or the idea of framing is so important in this discussion, and then I'm going to quickly go through four things that I've been thinking about that I think are really important as we are asking these questions about how to frame, about how to create motivation to act now for future effect.

And so the reason that framing matters is quite simply that the way that we understand issues is highly frame depending, and understanding is frame dependent. And I realize that's kind of academic-ease, it's kind of gobbledegook that someone with a Ph.D. maybe once said, and it is. So this is quote by one of the founding fathers of the field of framing, whose name is Shanto Iyengar, but what this means, in a way that makes more sense to me in a more direct way, is that it's not just what you say that matters, but how you say it that is of incredible consequence and can frequently determine how

whether the stuff that you have to say, the knowledge, the information that you have, actually does the things that you want it to do when you are trying to communicate it.

So I'm going to take one quick example of this that's related to prevention, kind of related about how we talk about now to affect the way that people support future issues and actions. And I'm going to tell you about some work that we've done around the issue of framing child mental health. So this is an issue where most Americans don't even really believe that very young children can have mental health. So that's one challenge we're trying to conquer here. The other one is that there's very low public support for policies for using public funds to do things now that would support the mental health of children such that it has future effects and impacts on things like education, health, well-being.

And so our task here in this experiment that I'm about to show you is those two things. So how do we take child mental health and make it more of a salient issue for people and how do we increase people's support for a set of, in this case, about 15 evidence based policies that support child mental health. So this is an online experiment, it's conducted with about 6,000 Americans selected to be nationally representative. And the way that it works is each of those 6,000 people logs onto the experiment, they get randomly assigned to hear one of two different messages. That's what you see along the horizontal axis of this graph. So some people log on and they get randomly assigned to read a message that is about a child mental health program that's framed with the value of future progress and social prosperity. So they would hear something like it's important that we do a better job supporting or dealing with child mental health because -- and we wouldn't say it in this way -- children are our future. The things that we do now to support their solid and stable mental health will determine our ability as a society to be successful in the future.

Another group gets randomly assigned to read basically the same description of the program, although the lead in, the frame on the issue is different. So instead of what you just heard, the frame of vulnerability would be something like it's important that we do a better job of addressing child mental health because children are our most vulnerable citizens. They deserve our empathy and our compassion and we must do better.

And then there's a third condition who gets no message, the control condition. And the control condition is the way that we compare and see the effects of those messages.

So what you're going to see on the next click here, what I think, and what I imagine Alec will think based on your presentation, two gorgeous green bars are going to appear on the screen, and those green bars are going to show you the effect of hearing those different messages on people's perception of the issue salience, how important it is, and the degree to which people are supportive for these evidence based solutions.

So I know where we are, but I don't know the statistical acumen of this audience. So I'm going to give you a quick stats lesson. Up is good (laughter), and down is not so good. So you see two bars and you notice two things. First of all, that value of future progress and social prosperity is increasing the issue salience, it's boosting people's support for those policy solutions. That is the good news. But you also, I'm sure, had your eyes wander towards the right hand side of the screen where the news is less good. So the value of vulnerability is not only statistically indistinguishable from the control, which is no message, but rather it depresses people's support for those policies. It makes people less willing than those who heard nothing at all to support the things for which these scientists and experts are advocating. That is not our goal when it comes to how we use our communications resources.

So the kicker is that in a subsequent piece of analysis, where we look at all the fields, external facing materials, over a two year period, all their websites and pamphlets, and newsletters and op-eds, guess which value is used in over 90 percent of those materials? So we'll let that be a rhetorical question in this audience. So it is the value of vulnerability. So what people had been doing for a long time, with retrospectively is a shocking amount of resource, is advancing a value that not only wasted those resources, but that used those resources in a way that was antithetical, that was opposite to the direction in which they were advocating.

So that's all to say that framing matters. Hopefully we can say yes, if I had more time, I have many awesome examples with other colored bars that I could show you, but I'm going to move into the second question now, which is some things that I've been thinking about recently -- well, I shouldn't say recently, because some of these are about 12 years old -- about recommendations, ideas that we can think about, and many have been mentioned in the previous two presentations, for framing now for the future.

So we're going to spin through these really quickly, but I want to first just highlight -- and I

imagine most of the people because of the room that we're in, know a number of these challenges and are familiar with them -- but communicating about the future, about acting now to do things for future benefit is an exceedingly difficult task from a cognitive and cultural perspective. So there are things like normalcy bias, our tendency to see the future in terms of the way that things are, delayed discounting, our willingness to always accept less now than wait for more later, as well as more cultural things, the cultural model, the cultural thread, stream of thinking very fatalistically about the future, and of thinking of issues in terms of individual willpower and choice, which makes kind of changing those situations exceedingly hard to engage with.

But the first thing that we can do is -- and Congressman Kilmer talked about this -- to be really careful to consistently and persistently connect actions now with outcomes later, and to repeat that. So there were a number of comments in Congressman Kilmer's presentation that were about repetition. And I will just say that 60 years of communications research has found the single thing that is most predictive of how people think is how many times they've heard something.

And so the field, in which we've done a lot of work, of child mental health over the last 15 years has been really successful in this connection between now and later and really, really successful in repeating these kinds of messages. And a lot of that has been through this familiar metaphor of brain architecture. And once people hear the idea of brain architecture, which is a metaphor, what we call an explanatory metaphor, a number of things start dropping into place. So they start thinking about early childhood issues as the word "early" being really important as in building the foundation now that shapes everything to come, the importance of the inputs now and their quality in determining the quality of outcomes. They think about the importance of timing, they think about it as an active process, and over time the repetition of that metaphor has come to shift the policy discussion and increase people's support for investments now shaping outcomes later.

It's also come out of work of a very famous economist, James Heckman, who has done a lot of work around kind of the wisdom of investing now dollars in terms of the payoff later.

The second thing that we can do is -- and this has already been talked about as well -- is what's called legacy framing. And so this is work that's really about forcing people, priming people to think in a personalized way about the future. So it's asking people to think about things that you do now

and their effect on the future and the future that you care about. So there's a series of studies by the authors that you see in the lower right hand corner of the screen which has shown that when you prime people, when you activate this kind of legacy thinking, in this case in an experimental study that asks people to write and think about what you want future generations to remember you by, people who are primed in that way were to a statistically significant degree more willing to engage in what's called pro social actions, actions that would solve climate change, and behaviorally they are more likely to donate to organizations doing that work. And this is the only priming that's going on. They write a paragraph that asks them to imagine the effects that they would want future generations to experience because of actions that they are performing now.

We've also seen this in our work on climate change, where among other messages we've tested two messages. The first being the kind of dominant message that's falling out of favor slightly now, but was certainly dominant I'd say for most of the last 10 years, the kind of science says message for why climate change is important. And, unsurprisingly, this did not produce findings of statistical significance.

But a different message that asks people to think about acting now, in this case to prevent or protect the health of future generations, has dramatically higher effects across a number of outcomes that people care about when they communicate about climate change.

Third is to spend time on solutions, not just problems. And this is one that I think as social communicators across issues we fall victim to and are guilty of. And there's really interesting work by a group of social psychologists that work on a model of decision making called extended parallel processing model that looks at this. They look at the way that variations in terms of how urgent an issue is presented to be, cross or relate to how efficacious people can see themselves as being on the issue. So efficacy is the idea that you can do something to remediate, to fix a problem. And they find, unsurprisingly to me, maybe surprisingly for people who do urgency based messages, that when you have urgency, urgency, urgency, urgency, and very low efficacy, very limited sense of solutions, you have fatalism. You have peace, I'm out. I'm not going to engage with that. I know there's a big pile of social problems over here, I'll just put yours in there and I'm out. You don't get my cognitive resources.

Unfortunately, as was discussed earlier this morning, the answer is not just to flip the script and kind of go all woo, woo, hope you change these solutions, rainbows and unicorns are

everywhere, because when you do that, in line with what Congressman Kilmer said this morning, you get snore and bore. Very low motivation.

This research has found -- and this is the most interesting thing for you all, for all of us here today, that there is this kind of magical persuasive combination where you're able to balance senses of urgency. This is a problem, it is real, it matters to you, it needs to be addressed with equally robust senses of efficacy, that there are things that can be done, solutions are there, this is not an intransigent problem. And when you do that, you have these magically -- this is being a bit dramatic -- but these incredibly persuasive messages that get people to lean in, that start to move their thinking about solutions.

So, last but not least, is the importance of explanation. That I think when we think about these issues, too little of our attention gets focused on explaining and making people smarter. And I don't mean that in a patronizing way, I mean that in a respectful way, about how these issues work. And so we've done some work in the UK on issues of the economy, and I'm going to show you just one really quick finding about this in which in an experimental setting we had a control condition that was exposed to nothing but asked questions about the economy. And we found overwhelmingly they had naturalistic understandings of the economy, that it just is this thing that does its thing by way of nature. They were therefore very fatalistic about the future and very disengaged.

So another group of participants were randomly assigned an exposed to a metaphor about the economy as being something that is programmed and can be reprogrammed, s kind of a computer based programming metaphor. And the results of that were unbelievably different. They saw the economy as something that was intentionally designed and that could be redesigned. They were efficacious about the future, and they were much more willing to engage in order to fix it.

And so I will end there just with one of my favorite quotes about framing that comes from a philosopher at the University of Chicago, Richard Rorty, who said that a talent for speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument for cultural change.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. BUTLER: Thank you, Nat.

Let me ask all the panelists to come up, including Alec, and let me just quickly introduce

the panelists who haven't already been introduced.

Sitting roughly in the middle is Layla Zaidane, who is chief operating officer of the Millennial Action Project. And as I said before, MAP is a co-host of this event today. Prior to joining MAP she was the managing director at Generations Progress, which is the youth advocacy arm of the Center for American Progress.

At the far end is my colleague, Molly Reynolds, who is a Senior Fellow here at Brookings in the Governance Department. And her emphasis of work at Brookings is on how Congressional rule and procedures affected affect policy outcomes, and is very much involved in our work in budget process reform.

Then in addition, next to her is Eric Harris, who is senior advisor and communications director for the Office of California Representative Jimmy Gomez. And Eric has led professional development workshops for Congressional staff and has worked as a public affairs strategist with a range of nonprofits, political campaigns, and cause oriented initiatives.

So I'll join them and we'll have a conversation.

Thanks. So I'd like to start with getting our most recent panelists, our three panelists who just came up, to get their reactions a little bit to what they just heard.

And maybe I could start with you, Molly. From what you've heard, what specific, in terms of speaking about Congressional process could capture what you've hear from Nat and from Alec on this?

MS. REYNOLDS: Thank you, Stuart, for having me.

I actually think for me what both Nat's comments and Alec's comments and representative Kilmer's comments really highlighted are some of the ways in which Congress may actually not be the right messenger for thinking about how to convince younger Americans of issues around the gravity of the debt. And I say that for a couple of reasons. One is that Congress is simply not very good at legislating to solve long-term problems. Some of this has to do with one of the points Nat made about how his work and the work of others in his field highlights the need to focus on solutions over problems. That's not one of Congress' kind of core competencies, particularly in the public discourse.

Representative Kilmer talked a fair amount about the credibility of members of Congress and other politicians as messengers of some of these issues. But for me it comes back to this notion that

at the end of the day members of Congress are elected officials, they're motivated trying to get reelected, and that it can be hard to get people who are trying to get reelected to vote for imposing direct costs on people now in exchange for long-term benefits in the future. So the easiest choices that members of Congress can make are those that involve immediate gains and put off long-term costs, in part because they involve less uncertainty.

So there are things structurally about Congress that really mean that it's difficult for Congress to certainly act on issues that have very high long-term costs, for which solving them would impose substantial short-term costs.

I also point to the comment that Representative Kilmer made about how it's not clear that Congress itself cares a lot about the long-term as an issue at the moment. The degree to which particularly things like the 2017 tax bill have indicated that, you know, Congress is not particularly fiscally responsible at the moment. It affects the kind of credibility that Representative Kilmer was referencing around having members of Congress try to be credible messengers on this issue.

And then the last thing I'll say is that the issue of the deficit does have certain partisan dynamics that I think also make it difficult for members of Congress to act as credible messengers on the issues. So Alec mentioned before that addressing the national debt is a much higher priority for Republican survey respondents at the moment than it is for Democrats. However, the degree to which that's a high priority fluctuates with the partisan control of governing institutions in a way that's less true for climate change. Alec referred to these as regime effects. And so Alec also mentioned the degree to which for the younger generations, they're more likely to lean Democratic.

So sort of when you put all of these things together -- I was really interested in Representative Kilmer's comments about the need to find perhaps different messengers to if not replace members of Congress, certainly to work with members of Congress in figuring out how to more credibly convey to younger generations the extent of the problem.

MR. BUTLER: Well, that's very cheerful. (Laughter) So just bearing in mind that there's all this to focus on solutions rather than problems, I wonder if you could just elaborate for just a moment on how you would imagine Congress being more receptive to this. In other words, what would have to happen for -- pressure from somebody from the outside to have more impact on Congress in this way?

How would it have to operate differently? Is the budget process part of that? Is it something else?

MS. REYNOLDS: So I'm not sure that there are a lot of changes in the institution itself. I think -- and here I would go back to what Representative Kilmer had us do at the top of his remarks and think about how we imagine the effects of climate change versus how we imagine the effects of the debt, and the idea that for voters, I think frankly of all ages, but even more so of younger generations, there's just not this strong connection between the policy consequences of not addressing our long-term fiscal challenges and the nature of the problem.

And so I think for us to see action in Congress, that link needs to be a lot stronger in the minds of voters, that it needs to be much clearer to voters what will happen if we don't address some of the long-term fiscal challenges.

I will say, at the same time, that for younger voters it's also -- you know, Representative Kilmer talked about his sort of aha moment about whether or not Social Security will be around when he retires, and certainly when his children retire. And that when you look at data -- Pew has some data on this -- for people under 50, the share of those individuals who think Social Security will be around when they retire is pretty low. So on one level, voters are already convinced that these things aren't going to be around for them in the future. But sort of trying to untangle that knot a little bit about what is really the policy connection, what are the policy consequences for voters of not taking action in this area I think is probably, to my mind, the most important thing that we could do to try and get Congress to be more active.

MR. BUTLER: Eric, you have to deal with these issues on a daily basis in terms of the communications. Is Molly right? Should we just give up on you being able to do anything --

MS. REYNOLDS: I'm a Congressional optimist. I would never suggest giving up on Congress.

MR. HARRIS: No, I'm not giving up. We're good.

MR. BUTLER: All right. (Laughter) But how do you convey these very issues?

MR. HARRIS: You know, it's interesting. I've heard sentiments before expressed that Congress isn't the right messenger for this. And I think we're asking the wrong question. It's not that should Congress be the sole messenger, it's how should Congress work in parallel with other

stakeholders to make sure that we're underscoring the severity of the issue.

I want to remind people that elected officials aren't just politicians, we are on the front lines of constituent services. We are the ones who are fielding calls from constituents about their Social Security benefits, their VA benefits, their SNAP benefits, TANF and WIC and other social programs that we have to also remind ourselves are being used to balance the budget by certain people in Congress. So it's not whether or not they're the right communicators, it's are we on the right team of communicators.

And I think another part of that is really understanding -- I love that we're here at Brookings talking about how we communicate the severity of climate change and the budget and the deficit to millennials. What would be great is if we as a country figured out how to better just talk to millennials. We are story tellers, we are content consumers. So, you know, I worked for Congressman Gwen Moore who always said meet them where they're at. And what I'm not seeing from certain members of Congress is that ideology of being able to talk to us where we are, be able to talk to us the way that we communicate. So I love that we're talking about this, but also how are we communicating these issues.

I remember the foot stamp challenge, the SNAP challenge. This was a great way for people who didn't really understand supplemental nutrition assistance, but when they're asked to only spend \$4.15 a day on their food, like someone who has SNAP benefits, well, now you have skin in the game. Now we are creating a story for us to be able to be a character in and we get to feel what it's like to go into a grocery store and look around and know what our limitations are.

We should also be thinking past just that proximal idea though, we should also be thinking about what happens when we don't have \$4.15 a day to be able to go to a grocery store because other people have used SNAP or different social services as a way to balance the budget.

And I work for Congressman Jimmy Gomez who represents Los Angeles and downtown Los Angeles. We have some of the poorest people in this country and some of the most wealthy in this country. The way that the Congressman communicates is by storytelling, it's being able to talk about his interactions with our constituents and what's at stake in these very stark times that we live in.

I'd like to say one more thing to that. I was really impressed with both presentations on the data that was presented here today. And then I'm seeing two different things. I'm seeing that

millennials like myself and generation Z want government to help out, they want government to be an active participant in their daily lives. I think that does underscore the need for us to be a part of this conversation to communicate intentionally.

And I think the other presentation about data framing is also really important. It's how are we talking about these things to ensure, like Congressman Kilmer said, that we're connecting the dots for everyone so that everyone understands that they're a stakeholder and they have skin in the game. I think Congress is the right place to start that. And we take panels like this and organizations like Brookings and Pew to take all of that data together and work in parallel to be able to achieve that objective.

MR. BUTLER: I should remind everybody that the actual title of this panel is "How to Speak Millennial". So I think we should really have some simultaneous translation going on on this panel. (Laughter) And I kind of meant that almost seriously because certainly those of us -- and I emphasize I'm from the baby boom generation and I'm here at a think tank and so on -- we certainly within Brookings, like most (inaudible), really struggle with how do people who are focused on data, on analysis, on really seeing these long-term pictures, how do we convey these. So it's a very real issue about how people in the research community and the think tank community I think should really -- need to really sort of focus on different ways of doing that, which are consistent with what we do as organizations.

Layla, you spent a lot of time dealing very directly with young generations and mobilizing them around issues. Kind of from what you've heard this morning, what's your reaction to what you heard, particularly from Nat and Alec on this?

MS. ZAIDANE: Yes. So thank you again for even just hosting this event. I think it is so important because it underscores such an important problem where we're starting to chip away at. And, Nat, you said it in the answer to the first question of your presentation, which is that understanding is frame dependent. And I think that is the entire premise upon which my organization, Millennial Action Project, was founded. And for those of us in the room who aren't familiar with it, back in 2013 we launched Congress' first ever bipartisan caucus for young elected officials with the idea of precisely being that the framework of tackling problems in a left-right frame was not working. And so instead, what if we framed it in a future frame and that totally removes the baggage of all of these other arguments that you start to assign to individual issues. The how becomes less important and the what starts to take on a lot

more value and you're able to focus on it in a much more targeted way. And I think millennials are especially well suited to engage in this way.

Alec, in your presentation you mentioned that -- and you just said the same thing -- that young people are open to government solutions to some of these big meaty problems. At the same time, we're so skeptical of big institutions and we have a lot of reason to be quite cynical. And so I think because we are able to hold to truths, at the same time we need to pivot and think about different ways of kind of framing these issues -- bit issues like climate, big issues like the debt.

You know, one analogy -- I don't know who here has a cable package -- not a ton of people --

SPEAKER: (Inaudible). (Laughter)

MS. ZAIDANE: Case in point.

SPEAKER: I knew you were going to say that.

MS. ZAIDANE: You know, there's maybe a few channels that we want to watch or a few things that we're interested in, but there's more likely a lot more channels that we don't necessarily care about or maybe channels that we very specifically avoid. I don't spend a ton of time watching like the MLB Classic channel, for example, and instead --

SPEAKER: (Inaudible)

MS. ZAIDANE: Go Nats. But instead we're subscribing to things like Netflix or selecting our options more a la carte, and I think that's a good analogy for how we should be thinking about issues and tackling these big problems moving forward. We're trying to sell a cable package to a streaming generation, and we need to kind of pivot to recognize that we need to move the frame.

MR. BUTLER: That's a very good analogy. Yes, I mean my daughters, who are both millennials, I have to text them because they don't respond to anything other than to text, even if they're in the same room. (Laughter) I have to text them about exactly, you know, how do I change this channel. I don't know, they just do it for me and that's -- I find much more simple.

I'd just like to pick up on something which actually I've heard in the research, so I want to see if you all agree that this is the case, which is one of these things about younger people, and particularly in the issue of climate change, is the feeling -- and probably because of the disdain, the

suspicion of larger institutions and so on -- the desire to actually do something yourself to help deal with the issue. So, you know, getting a fuel efficient car, worrying about your carbon footprint, and so on and so forth. And how might that be translated -- if it's true, and maybe, Nat, you want to jump in on this -- how might this be translated into something like the debt and deficit? Is there something that younger people do or could do to make a difference in their own mind for the future?

I think it kind of weaves into this whole issue of solutions. You know, what is it you're trying to achieve and what can I personally do to help get there? Is it possible to offer some ideas for younger people, that actions they could do, given that Molly has told us to give up on Congress, you know, others have told us that you can't look at a package deal and so on, you've got to look at individual steps? What could those steps be and are they meaningful?

Anybody want to jump in on that? It's open to everybody.

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Yeah, register to vote. So I think that's the first thing.

MR. BUTLER: Okay.

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: I mean to become an active member of this democracy and to make sure that your voice matters and that it's heard and that you also work with other groups and other stakeholders who can now amplify that voice. I think that's a major thing. It's great to be able to compost and it's great to be able to get a fuel efficient car and to mitigate your own carbon footprint, and that's great, but we also need to understand that there's not a one size fits all approach to these issues. We have to be very intentional about what type of strategies we're offering to younger generations and generations like mine because, you know, our -- figuring out whether I was going to say this or not, but I think I am --

MR. BUTLER: Do it. (Laughter)

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Our bullshit radars are incredibly honed and we've been watching television for most of our lives and we see a lot of elected officials tell us one thing and others tell us another. We have a president who says things that we laugh off now and that we've normalized in a certain way by saying, you know, it's just the President being the President. But for younger people, it's the President of the United States saying things and they're taking that to heart and they're saying that potentially is true. So we need to be truthful, we need to stark, we can't be hyperbolic, and unfortunately

the current administration doesn't really make that easy for us on any given day.

But if we need a plan, a strategy on how young people can address growing deficits, it's to become a member of this democracy and register.

MS. REYNOLDS: I think that's right. And, again, I would never suggest giving up on Congress, but I do think that when we talk about, again, what motivates members, they do have to in the House stand for reelection every two years, they have a lot of incentives to pay attention to and respond to the issues that their constituents are telling them to care about. And so for younger Americans, making sure that you are one of those people who your elected official is hearing from is I think incredibly important.

Pew has documented the degree to which the share of the electorate that is in younger generations is growing. So think we're sort of in that -- we're going down that path already, but I would completely agree that that's one of the most important individual level behaviors that folks can engage in if they care about these issues.

MS. ZAIDANE: I also think just, you know, Mr. Kilmer's point about the solution being localized is so important. And that's perhaps why we've seen so much success at the state level in moving energy or climate related bills. And I think the more that we can put our messengers in people's neighborhoods, in their communities, talking about things that they can see with real impact, whether it's potholes on their street or other issues that are being neglected because of this kind of larger existential issue. The more we can localize it, the more we can start to drive the urgency and draw a bright line between registering to vote and fixing this big problem. And I think what's missing is kind of that direct connection to your everyday life. And the more we can paint that picture and draw that bright line, the more we can start to create a coalition around it.

MR. HARRIS: That's a really good point. I remember when Senator Warner was governor of Virginia and they were battling some pretty terrible budget issues. They had to close the DMV one day a week. And that got everyone's attention. That touched everyone across sectors, across political spheres, across ideologies. I think right now one of the obstacles that we have in front of us is that we look at debt as a very abstract concept, very far down the road. And so we have to balance, we have to make sure that we're underscoring the severity of the issue without being too hyperbolic, without

violating the trust of millennials. And that is a fine balance that we have to do every single day.

MR. BUTLER: I think this trust issue seems to me very central to this. You know, since we announced this event today and wrote the piece related to it a couple of weeks ago, we've had a fairly lively input of reflections on both this event in advance and on the piece I wrote. And I'd say the gist of certainly most of the email that was sent to me, all the Twitter that was sent to me -- I think they cut out a lot of the language of some of them, but some of them came to me -- but basically said you people -- and I think this person meant economists and people at think tanks and people roughly my age -- have been telling us every decade from the '60s, '70s, onward, that within 10 years there's going to be economic disaster, and it just doesn't happen. And now you want us to believe it again. Why should we pay extra taxes, reduce benefits, and so on, cut things when you've never been true in the past. And I think that's a big challenge for us. So I think trust is an issue.

And then I think also translating to the local, as you said, is really interesting. I mean on the face of it I would feel in general that climate change should be harder to do that because climate change involves the whole world, the countries, and so on. So to kind of personalize that would be very difficult. But I think, as Layla said, it has been successful, there are steps, people see this in a very direct way.

And I just wonder, again, what is it one could imagine in the debt and deficit area that could be made much more personal. Is it that we should be encouraging people to save more, should we be encouraging people to have a better lifestyle and improve their nutrition so they will need less medical care from Medicaid, Medicare in the future and so on? What's the individual action that could be the equivalent here?

MR. HARRIS: It's not political paternalism. I can tell you that.

MR. BUTLER: Right.

MR. HARRIS: I think people on both sides of the aisle have had enough of that, telling us what certain people can use with their SNAP benefits, telling people that we have to pee in cups in order to get social services. We're done with political paternalism I think as a strategy to employ. I'm happy to say I represent a party that doesn't do it that much, but it's something that we do have to move away from.

But I think we need to start calling people out. I think -- again, we're back to this trust idea. We cannot afford to help the most vulnerable among us, but we can afford to go war in places that we shouldn't have any type of conflict with. We can't revamp the healthcare system, it's way too expensive, but we can do billion dollar cuts for the top 1 percent of this country. It's a duality of inconsistencies. And I think a big strategy is making sure that we are calling out those who are giving us talking points as opposed to truth and heighten this conversation to the degree where it should be about something as important as climate change, which is an existential threat to this world, and the debt, which could be a major threat to the most vulnerable among us right now. And let's humanize that, let's put a human face on that so that we again are starting to not just tell someone something, but tell a story that people can identify with, connect with, like Congressman Kilmer had underscored earlier.

MR. BUTLER: And Nat, maybe I can put you on the spot on this in terms of what you laid out and from this conversation you've heard so far. What have you heard that really strikes a chord with what the research is you mentioned. Is it what Eric has just said, is it what Layla said?

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: So I've got about five pages of notes that I've taken in the last 10 minutes. So that's a --

MR. BUTLER: Okay. Well, one page is sufficient for --

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Yeah, one page is sufficient. So I think the last five minutes are really kind of not talking around, as in avoiding it, but kind of circling around this common conundrum with both of these issues, which is fundamentally the solution is not individual action. The solution to climate change is not turn out your lights, it's not compost. So I think that when you kind of look at that, together with this people's need for efficacy, you have kind of a second layer of conundrum. So if the solution is not individual action, but if people need efficacy in order to engage, then you kind of have this tension.

And my thinking is largely where -- Eric, is that right?

MR. HARRIS: Yes.

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Eric and Layla talked about kind of the importance of civic engagement as the individual action that I think is most important and appropriate on these issues.

So I've been thinking a lot and kind of waiting, yearning to do work on how you frame

kind of basics of civic participation to the American public in a way that encourages a better understanding of what a democracy is and how it works, which I kind of think we have forgotten in some ways. A lot of the funders who fund our work are interested in funding ideas of civic participation and democracy in far flung places like Kenya or Bangladesh, but I think a lot of that work needs to be redirected towards the context in which we live and talking about civic participation in this country.

So one other quick thought is that a really key difference between two concepts, one is personalization and the other is individualization. So personalization, yes. So we need to frame things in a way that resonates with people and that moves them in a direction, but the direction that we move them in cannot be individualistic, it cannot encourage people to think that problems are caused and solved by the will and character of individuals. To me in the work that I've done over the last 12 years, that is one of the most obstinate challenges to the change work that I'm trying to be part of, the way in that people conceptualize these really complicated issues as being kind of narrowly about the will, grit, gumption, drive choice of individuals and how that occludes the -- and this sounds a little geeky -- but the systemic perspective that is necessary to engage in if we are actually going to address these big issues.

So personalization, yes, by all means, but individualization I think is a danger of -- we're in danger of conflating those two things in this discussion. So I'd encourage us to think about that.

MR. BUTLER: Everybody agree with that?

MR. HARRIS: I don't know if I agree with that. I don't know how I can agree with that when I know that individuals are the reason right now that the House of Representatives is blue. I think a lot of people individually looked at the trajectory of our country and thought I may be just one person, but I'm going to do what I can to turn my district from red to blue, or to vote out someone who doesn't represent my values and doesn't help enrich or help improve the quality of my life. I think when you get individuals together in a group I think that is when you actually start seeing those movements start to take shape and come to fruition.

But I agree, I think we can't conflate the personalization component to it either. I think we need to be able to play in both pools. But, you know, I am the son of baby boomer parents who remind me every other day that they ended the Viet Nam War and that they were in the streets and that they saw their friends go and individually they felt powerless, but they individually worked with their local groups.

SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, these are young students who just did it on their own and they say they ended a war. And I've got to tell you, I believe that and I like being able to underscore the idea that even on your own, that you have the capacity to do something amazing, not just for yourself, but for your community and quite possibly your country.

MS. ZAIDANE: Can I just jump in?

MR. BUTLER: Yes, absolutely.

MS. ZAIDANE: I think both are actually kind of right. And just going back to the chart that you had up on the screen, Nat, of the like low efficacy, high urgency, and thinking about where we want to be in those quadrants, we're not living in a vacuum. And at any given moment, there's so many different of those quadrants being filled by so many different issues.

And I think back to your point, Stuart, about trust, I think we're talking about this and we're framing this conversation in how can we get the public to trust the policy makers in terms of how to create a solution, but I think we also have a challenge in getting policy makers to trust each other too. And we're not going to be able to separate the urgent and the important if we think that everybody else who is working on other urgent matters is not to be trusted and so we have to double check their work. And while we're all double checking each other's urgent work, all the big important stuff is getting left for the next generation to solve.

And so I think there's a crisis of trust internally as well before we can even think about how do we personalize this for the public. How can we create this culture of trust internally among policy makers as well? And I think kind of just speaking to your points about the challenges and frustrations of how to move issues forward. It comes back to that initial point of all understanding is based on framing and we need to shift our framing within our legislative bodies, even before we can start to have that trickle out to the public.

MS. REYNOLDS: And we're living as -- you know, I think one of the things that Alec opened his remarks with is we're living in this period of extremely high polarization. And so the degree to which that and the incentives for short-term thinking just towards the next election among members of Congress make it difficult to build that kind of trust that is necessary to tackle longer-term problems as opposed to just sort of shorter-term problem focused conversations more than solutions focused

conversations is another way that structurally I think Congress faces challenges in this area.

MR. BUTLER: Let me open it up now to the audience and to Twitter. You can send in questions.

We have one here which I'll take in a moment. Maybe if we could just start in the center here.

MS. IRVING: My name is Susan Irving.

I'm struck by the tension of your point about we're selling to a cable -- you know, we're trying to sell a cable package to a streaming generation. And yet if you look at the list of all the things people won't cut, and you add to that the list of people opposed to raising taxes, the only way to address the substance of the long-term fiscal challenge is to do both. How do you do that by letting people pick and choose, because you generally what you get is a package that won't work.

So, basically, how do we frame that issue so people -- so that it's a deal?

MS. ZAIDANE: Yeah. So I think that -- and anyone else jump in -- I think the spirit of my comment is more about the messaging itself, about how to disentangle the idea of action on this long-term issue without assigning other completely unrelated issues just because of who the messenger might be or because of other things that you might know to be true about that individual or that kind of institution.

And so I think you're totally right, there is a big compromise that's going to need to be made to be able to take issue, but as we think about how do we separate facts from identity almost. And that to me seems to be one of the biggest challenges that we're facing, and even taking the first step on this issue.

MR. BUTLER: Okay. Maybe over here.

MR. CONNORS: My name is Jim Connors.

Interestingly, Congressman Kilmer framed the day when he spoke with pride about his grandmother living for 38 years on Social Security. Isn't that a terrific framing for how wonderful Social Security and entitlements is? From what I've heard today, and I came with this notion, the biggest problem facing millennials is their enemy is their grandmother. How would Nat frame that successfully?

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Oh, that's not fair. Come on. (Laughter)

MR. HARRIS: Please, tell us how you hate grandparents.

MR. BUTLER: I've got your grandmother on the line here.

MR. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Yeah, I'm not going to claim that I have the answer to that one.

I do think that frames that create a prime zero some ways of thinking are incredibly toxic as they seep and spill past the issues in which we intend them to hold. And so kind of othering and zero sum thinking is one of my biggest concerns in doing the work that I do and how easy it is for people to, with very little priming, to fall into that, to think about everything as being a competition. And once you're in that kind of zero sum mode, anything that's able to be seen as for you and yours is by definition -- I'm not pointing to anyone back there -- is by definition less for me and mine.

And so it's not a direct answer to your question, but I think that framing around the ideas of competition between groups is a really toxic frame, although in reality what you're saying is correct. So there's a difference between the social analysis and the communications analysis. So I'm in the communications analysis lane here.

MR. TYSON: Well, maybe one thing to add on this, kind of grounded in our research, is we try and ask people to what extent to you perceive conflicts between older and younger people, better and less educated people, people of different races or different ages. And at least in a self-reported survey, people really don't see this generational divide. It's not really salient for them right now. It's not to say that it couldn't become more salient, but as we stand here today, it's not among the top conflicts that public sees. And there are other questions, there's other research we do. Does the government do too much, too little, the right amount for older people or younger people? The divides you get in response patterns by age are perhaps more modest than you might have predicted. So at least in the survey data, we don't see this generational conflict as primed as you might see other forms of conflict in the country, at least at the current moment.

MR. BUTLER: If I can just pick up that, that reflection on your question. Some years ago in the early 2000s, 2000 to the mid-2000s, when I was at the Heritage Foundation, Heritage and the Brookings Institution, with a general accountability office -- they had a general accountability office -- and the concord coalition undertook a project called the fiscal wakeup tour. And we actually went around the country talking at primarily colleges about these issues of long-term deficit and debt and the problems

associated with that. And the audience -- it was at colleges, but typically the audience was roughly half people who were student age, and the other half were basically people who could be their grandparents. So we actually precipitated a conversation along the lines you just said, in terms of who's the problem and that the older generations are, the baby boom generation, is in fact depleting the opportunities for the future.

And so we had this kind of pretty robust conversation. And a potential reframing did develop during those conversations. Not enough to get the public policy, but -- and let me just kind of run this by Nat to see what he thinks about it. We had a lot of older people coming to the microphone and they would say something like this, I hear what you just said about how we and Medicare and Social Security and so on, are really draining the bank and that this young person who's next to me who's already got \$50,000 of college debt, he or she is not going to have what I'm able -- I'm willing to forego some of my benefits -- I've got a 401K, I've got some money in the bank, and so on -- providing that Social Security and Medicare I know is going to be there if I need it and be sufficient if I'm running out of money in some way. I'm willing to give up -- and I'm also willing to do that to reduce benefits in something like Medicare, providing I don't get Alzheimer's. In other words, provided I don't get something, which is going to mean I'm going to -- be an enormous expense.

So what was going on, it seemed to me, was a reframing to say if we think of these retirement programs not as something I expect as a stream of income and a stream of benefits, but something that's there as an insurance policy against things going badly. And we had a lot of traction with that. Not enough to get legislation passed, I have to confess, but it was a reframing. Is that the kind of reframing any of you think might get some traction in a broader audience today, or are we too far beyond that?

MR. HARRIS: I would say it's never too late to reframe the conversation.

And going back to your comment -- Jim, was it? Grandma is not the enemy, but the enemy is the environment and attitudes that cultivated grandma's ideology right now. That this is not my particular problem, I will have this. I think it becomes redefining the metrics as well.

So I'm from California, Southern California, I'm from a suburb of LA called Calabasas. Last year we had a major fire, the Camp Fire, that destroyed lots of homes. Northern California Fire

claimed the lives of dozens of people. I will tell you that my friends who are Republicans who did not believe in climate change before that fire do now. And it's because they had the head of CalFire explain wherever your political ideology is, that's fine, but climate change are making these fires stronger, they're increasing the volume, and they're making it more dangerous for everyone.

So when we think of climate refugees, I think a lot of people who think of people whose homes were buried under water. We now need to reframe that and start thinking of people who no longer have homes because they are now burned up. And I think figuring out different ways to stay -- as a communications professional I'm going to throw this out there -- to stay message disciplined without saying the same thing over and over again, but finding new ways to underscore the stakes and to be able to redefine the metrics there.

I think that will help us. And I don't think it's ever too late to try that, because something as important as climate change or debt needs -- we can't give up on the third try. We've got to keep trying. I think that's the whole point.

MR. BUTLER: I certainly think we need to reframe the issue.

Anybody else want to jump in on that? If not I'll go to another question. This gentleman here.

MR. RABINOWITZ: Thank you. I'm Dave Rabinowitz.

In 2000, the U.S. government ran a surplus in the budget and people were talking about finally starting to pay down the debt. And polls typically said about 50 percent of the people said you should use the surplus to pay down the debt.

There was this one poll where only 6 percent said pay down the debt. And I looked into it and discovered that there was no option that said pay down the debt. The option was don't spend it, which is equivalent to pay down the debt, but it didn't sound that way.

And it turns out in polls in general the results depend more on the wording of the questions, the order of the questions, and the script in general than on the actual opinions of the respondents, which is why polls generally support whatever position the funders want to support.

I'm wondering, are there more polls of millennials by organizations that have different positions, and do their results look similar to the ones that Pew found?

MR. TAYLOR: I think I can take that. (Laughter)

MR. BUTLER: You were going to get it anyway.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, right. (Laughter)

No, I mean it's certainly true that the wording you use in a question, the order or what themes you might prime can influence opinion. The effect of that is greater or larger, depending on how deeply held those opinions are today. For example, you could prime a lot of things in front of Trump approval and my expectation would be it wouldn't change a whole lot because those attitudes are deeply held by the public and they have strong reasons for believing the way that they do. So it's more often the case that on lower salience issues you could see potentially more of an effect in the results based on how the question is framed or written.

You know, we're a nonpartisan, non policy organization. Part of what we spend our days really grappling with is how to write this in the fairest, most neutral way possible. So we're very confident in our estimates, and I certainly would stand behind them.

But, to your question, could you get different results based on how it's framed -- absolutely. And I guess what I would say though, some of the enduring dynamics are very robust across different wording. For example, the large partisan divide in concern over climate change. Word the question however you like and you're going to get that large partisan divide

So I think my overall answer, of course it matters, it matters more for low salience issues, but some dynamics are so strong and so deeply held and so enduring that they'll express themselves across any type of wording you could come up with. And I think there are a lot of the same things that we hit on today that are robust across all methodologies.

MR. BUTLER: I have a question through Twitter, which I think nicely juxtaposes both of these issues. And the question is, would borrowing today -- in other words, increasing debt today -- to address climate change be a wise investment for the future? In other words, should we go deeper into debt to solve this other question?

MR. HARRIS: Without a planet, I don't think the bet is going to be a major deal for us.

MR. BUTLER: Okay.

MR. HARRIS: So I think we should definitely be figuring out all of the options before us in

terms of addressing climate change. And this can be from an individual standpoint, it can be from a group dynamic, it could be as a country, and particularly that has to start with leadership at the top. So we need to be able to have a government that will join its constituency in addressing those issues with the severity it demands.

But I think when it comes to saving the planet, we should be open to a plethora of different options, and we should also be listening to a diverse standpoint of opinions as well. Congressman Gomez, who I work for, likes to underscore the idea of environmental equity when talking about climate change, that those who are most impacted by the effects of climate should be prioritized in any type of legislative prescription that we're going to devise. When we talk about these issues, communities of color have a lot to say about them because they are, in most cases, more impacted by those negative effects than other communities.

So making sure that we have a diversity of opinions and a diversity of viewpoints as to how to solve these issues and how to address them, that is I think the only way that we're going to be able to move the needle in any direction.

MR. BUTLER: Layla, is that what you hear when you're out there listening to millennials?

MS. ZAIDANE: Yeah, I mean I think you make a pretty compelling point. Without a planet to live on, there's not a whole lot of other issues that we can work on unless I guess we just colonize the moon or Mars or something.

I'm struck by your comment about just engaging different constituencies too in this. We're actually about to do an event in a couple of weeks around the issue of climate and energy out in Wisconsin. And we'll hear from MAPS founder, Steven, in a little bit. I'm sure he'll slip in a Wisconsin reference at some point. But we're engaging the faith community around this issue with the idea of being good stewards of God's earth. And so thinking about how can you frame these messages in ways that make it urgent for people now, and I think -- you know, at some point you have to prioritize.

Back to the original question of what can we do on an individual basis, on the national debt I think, you know, sometimes it's a tough answer, but sometimes it's nothing, let's work on other issues first so that we are in a better position to more effectively solve the next problem and do the triage in the order of urgency.

MR. BUTLER: Any other comments? Good.

I want to thank the panel for walking us through this very complicated issue and for the two presentations, particularly, at the very beginning. So thank you.

MR. HARRIS: Thank you. (Applause)

MR. BUTLER: And now, I'm going to welcome up just for some closing comments, Steven Olikara. Steven Olikara is the founder and President of Millennial Action Project, our co-host today, which is the largest non-partisan organization of young lawmakers in the United States working with over 800 policy makers (audio drop).

MR. OLIKARA: (in progress) unemployment benefits and other assistance for middle class families. And I remember reading the New York Times article at the time I was sitting in my apartment in Madison, Wisconsin. I did get the Wisconsin reference in there. Seeing this one line after the compromise was laid out and it says, these 900 billion dollars over the next two years will be financed entirely with debt spending. So, that's another way of saying these 900 billion dollars will be financed entirely by young people and future generations.

I remember sitting there thinking, who is actually in Congress looking and thinking about the future. This is a generationally, inequitable and I think unmoral kind of compromise that these leaders are doing and it was seen generally as a good thing. And that to me was a sign that we have the wrong frame and the wrong type of leaders in Congress.

Second experience on climate change and prior to starting NAPA, I was pretty active in the climate change space. This was at the World Bank and working there on sustainable energy and climate change issues. We had just produced a wonderful report on sustainable energy and working on different power plants, how they can reduce their carbon emissions.

I remember sitting down one day with the chief economist that summer, it's the summer of 2012 asking her, what are main inhibitors to implementing our green growth strategy. Spent a lot of time on this report, now what are the roadblocks implementing it. And she said there are three issues. One, is financing, two is infrastructure and three is political dysfunction. She said, I feel confident about solving the first two and I'm absolutely hopeless about the third.

And when we're talking about political dysfunction, the main feature in my view and the

view of the founders of map was, one of those main features is political polarization and intense partisanship and it was in that time that we started to realize as millennials that these generational issues will not change unless we addressed that primary linkage of polarization dysfunction with short-term policy-making and that was referenced on the last panel.

When you're governing in a crisis mode, from crisis to crisis, it's always easiest to either put a bandage on, or just to kick the can down the road and let someone else solve it in the future. But if you can reframe these issues in terms of future progress, then maybe you could build some unlikely coalitions and by the way there's (inaudible) your slide that had future progress versus vulnerability of standing in the back thinking, God, I hope the bar is much higher on the left side, and it was. So, thank you so much and that for that slide, very helpful and reinforces in many ways the premise of our organization. So, thank you for that and we realized that if you can frame into that future way and to your point about legacy thinking, it wouldn't just be about young people who are saying we need long-term solutions, it would also be more senior members of society.

I'll never forget when we were wanting the congressional future caucus on the hill, we had of course all of the few millennials at the time join the caucus but on our way to the committee room, there were a number of more senior members including then the oldest member of Congress who came out of elevators, out of hallways and they said, can we join your caucus and we saw that happen at the state level too. Usually, the answer's been yes and the reason is because we're seeing some of the most senior members of these legislatures, saying that they want to, in your legacy framework, we want to leave a positive legacy, we want to leave the world better off for our children and grandchildren and when you see it in that kind of non-partisan frame, then you can start to throw a lot of different types of solutions from across the spectrum at the problem and looking at it in a much more pragmatic way.

The one thing I've realized over the last -- one of the things, I've realized over the last seven years or so, working on this sort of project, with Millennial Action Project, is that there are a lot of amazing ideas out there and Brookings Institution is usually an author of those good ideas. And the Bi-partisan Policy Center is another great author of good ideas.

I've been in meetings where we look at the issue of the debt and look at the different policy levers that you can utilize to bring the debt. Some are more right leanings, some are more left

leanings, some are just down the center and, of course, the assumption in those conversations as this is a great idea on paper but there is a long way to go between idea to execution and that's true.

I believe one of the greatest challenges we have right now is being able to create a new type of leadership, a new way of governing to actually motivate action on these challenges and we talked about the polls. I think we need to develop young leaders who don't just read the polls but know how to change the polls and that's a big piece of what we're doing out with Millennial Action Project.

I think great leaders can move people. They can move people to transcend their own self-interest, their own tribal interests, their own party's interest and to get people to see themselves as part of a larger whole.

There was a young President Kennedy who challenged people to give what they could, contribute what they could and utilize their skillsets to put a person on the moon.

There is a young leader in South Africa who reframed the conversation there on Apartheid and said we need to end Apartheid, not just for our community but for the entire country.

And if you look at the history of democracies, it's been often young leaders who have led the way in reframing issues and the good news is that we're seeing those young leaders emerge today and many of them are in our Millennial Action Project Network.

We have a group of these leaders on the hill in the future caucus where I've seen them take courageous stands where they didn't just read the polls. They also saw where our country had to go.

On the issue of the debt, I was so impressed when our vice chair in the last session, Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy, introduced the Balanced Budget Amendment. She said, we do need to take fiscal responsibility seriously and she said we should have balanced budgets most of the time except in moments of recession or times of war. I was -- and she's a Democrat. I was also impressed when our co-chair, a Republican in the last session decided to make climate change one of his primary issues. And not just that, he wasn't afraid to introduce one of the most politically difficult things to do on the Republican side and that's introducing a carbon tax. And he said, we should utilize these revenues and give it back to the American people but just to even have in all of those articles, the tax in there, the Republican leader who is willing to stand up for that really shows you some of the leaders are coming out of this generation and now both of the Republican co-chairs in our current session,

Congressman Anthony Gonzalez and Congressman Lance Gooden are both on the record saying that we need to take climate action. And when you look at these generational transactionally, I become fairly optimistic. When you look at Republican -- Republicans under the age of 50, the majority of them believe that we need to take action on climate. And we've been talking today about how this issue of climate change has a more personal feel. Let's just take stock of the fact that that's a huge accomplishment, because I remember 10 years ago working in the climate space where that was the big problem. The affects of climate change of are too diffuse and it requires too much investment up front and people don't really want to act and it's not personal enough.

Now, we're seeing this assumption where that is true. And we are seeing these amazing activists like Greta Thunberg for making it personal. So, it just shows that, you know, if that happened in 10 years, politics is a very human endeavor and ideas in politics can reach the tipping point unexpectedly and exponentially and I think we should take account of that. It is possible for that to happen in climate change. It is possible for that to happen with the national debt.

Another example that really has struck me recently and a lot of examples we should be paying more attention to is at the state level.

Recently, we saw our future caucus in Iowa lead a renewable energy tour across the state and we had Democrats and Republicans were part of the legislature doing it and I think we saw in real time how these young co-chairs of the Iowa caucus were leading the way in reframing the issue and then more senior members of the legislature got on board with it and they framed it in terms of why we need to make these investments in clean energy now so we can have stronger job opportunities for our citizens. They highlighted the fact that these jobs coming out are well-paying jobs to many (inaudible) to install a solar panel and it was our Republican leaders who were making those points.

Again, it just highlights the steam that when you can reframe issues in terms of the future versus the past, you can build these unlikely coalitions get new ideas to the table. The final thing I'll say about this is, I think our ability to act on generational issues like the debt and climate change are actually bigger than those individual issues.

Our ability to act on these long-term threats are also about democracy itself and sometimes our (inaudible) about where you just feel hopeless because you have no agency and the

urgency is really high, you can feel hopeless when you look at how democracy has performed in recent years. And you think about how if you look at the debt for example, the leaders who were primary authors of expanding the debt are no longer there and the accountability isn't there either.

So, you wonder sometimes because of this political cycle with democracy because you have this transfer of power, the accountability is so diffuse people can move on. They're not held accountable for making these poor decisions. Does that mean Democracy is not a compatible with making long-term decisions? You could either frame it that way or you could frame it a different way. Maybe it's because of democracy, the fact that we live in a diverse republic because we believe in the principles of pluralism, maybe the fact that we believe in those things, that's why we actually solve these problems. And I've seen it in so many other contexts. I'm a musician. I see how in jazz, for example, when you have different ideas colliding together in a pluralistic setting you create better music.

My family has an engineering background. As an engineer, you want a diverse team because you have more ideas on the table and you can create better solutions.

In business there's study after study, showing that executive leadership teams and boards of directors that are more diverse have better profits and better returns. Maybe it's because we live in a diverse democracy that we have a competition of ideas as Madison talked about in the Federalist papers. Maybe that's why we can solve these long-term problems. And if we can do that, I think we'll send a powerful statement about democracy and about the whole notion that people can govern themselves much better than one person can.

So, with that, I just want to thank you for taking time to be here this morning. Thank you for being part of this conversation. If you want to get involved in Millennial Action Project, please reach out and again, a big thank you to Brookings, let's give them a round of applause.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much Steven. I want to thank you. I want to thank Representative Kilmer at the beginning, I want to thank the panelist who gave us such a robust and interesting conversation about these issues. This event is not -- this is not the end of the event in a sense. We saw this event as beginning what I hope would be a continuing conversation. The Millennial Action Project is, I think, a crucially important organization people associated with it, we're really glad to be involved with a map on this -- on this issue but we see this as a beginning of a conversation over time

about how we look at these long-term issues. And particularly how those of us with some gray hair have to think differently about both communicating these issues, particularly the debt issue, which we're very heavily involved in, and how to get change in our political process.

Certainly, I've learned a lot today and it's really important, I think, for those of us here at Brookings and elsewhere that are focused on the budget and the budget process to think about how to reframe these issues. The reframing issue is so important about thinking much more about what solutions will mean for the future. We're always whining about or complaining and getting frustrated about the dangers ahead but the importance of how we can convey to people the benefit of a solution to these, I think is really -- came through very strongly. I think the whole issue of how our democracy functions which essentially, we felt that this whole issue of the debt and deficit is really a litmus test for whether our American democracy can handle these issues -- these long-term issues and how we can make it do so. And finally, the importance of young leaders, I mean Derek Kilmer, others, Steven (inaudible) out of Congress, is so important to this and how -- what the energy and the ideas that they bring to it.

So, speaking for the baby boom generation which is an awesome responsibility for me, I think we've learned a lot today about how we work together with younger Americans about how to think about these issues, how to frame them. How to enable our democracy to solve them. So, thank you for being with us here today, you can keep on connecting with this project through our website and our work here at Brookings and to be continued. Thank you.

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