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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. KAMARCK: Well, good afternoon everyone. Welcome to this year's Taubman Forum on Public Policy. My name is Elaine Kamarck. I'm a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and I'm going to be the moderator for this session on COVID-19 and the federal government.

This forum is the twelfth one in a series and it was generously endowed by Alfred A. Taubman. He was a wonderful friend of Brookings as are his children, Bobby, Bill and Gail. We appreciate all that they have done to help us inform people about public policy issues. I'd like to remind our viewers that you can submit questions for panelists by emailing events@brookings.edu or via Twitter #@taubman forum or by tweeting @BrookingsGov.

Now, I thought I would introduce the rest of my panel here. I'll start, I don't know how you can see me but I'll start to at the top here with Lee Drutman. Lee is a PhD in political science from my alma mater Berkeley, UC Cal Berkeley. He's a senior fellow at New America in the Political Reform Program. He is a history -- his big book lately was called, "Breaking the Two Party Doom Hoop: The Case for Multiparty Democracies in America." Which sounds like a really intriguing book and I hope he'll talk a little bit about it.

The other book he wrote was, "The Business of America is Lobbying." And he is the winner of the very prestigious Robert A. Dahl award in 2016. He also is a co-host on the podcase, Politics in Question. So Lee, thank you for joining us today at the Brookings Taubman Forum.

MR. DRUTMAN: Pleasure to be with you.

MS. KAMARCK: We then go to Tom Wheeler. Tom Wheeler is a visiting fellow at Brookings. He was chairman of the Federal Communications Commission from 2013 to 2017. And there he had quite a record. He led the process that eventually adopted net neutrality. He was a champion for privacy concerns and for increasing cyber security. He's an entrepreneur as well as an intellectual. And his latest book is called, "From Gutenberg to Google" which I think is one of the great all time titles.

MR. WHEELER: Thank you, Elaine.

MS. KAMARCK: Last but not least is Nicol Turner Lee. Dr. Lee is a fellow at the Center

for Technology Innovation here at Brookings. She comes from the multimedia, multi-cultural, media, telecom and information council. A non-profit that dealt with the intersection of race and technology. She's written extensively about race and broadband access. And, in fact, her groundbreaking 2009 study has been the impetus for a great deal of major legislation and action in the United States Congress.

So, we have three people here, I think well equipped to lead off today's discussion about the United States government and the crisis that we're in. And I'm going to start by asking everyone, perhaps in the order that I introduced you so Lee first. What have we learned so far about U.S. government capacity functioning whatever in COVID-19?

DR. DRUTMAN: Well, I think we've learned two things. First, is that the government is really important and I think it's something that a lot of people maybe had taken for granted or tried to deny. And the central -- the federal government in Washington plays an incredibly important coordinating role and when it's not doing it it becomes quite apparent.

I think the other thing that we're maybe not learning but maybe just reaffirming is that the lack of trust in government. And the excessive partisan polarization is really making it difficult for us to effectively respond to this really dangerous and frightening crisis.

MS. KAMARCK: Tom, why don't you --

MR. WHEELER: So, I think Lee just hit the nail on the head. I mean, the reality is we have a government that is populated by very good people who are living in institutions that were created in another time. And that if we know anything about COVID it's that it spread everywhere at once and challenged everybody at once at an exact same time when our government was structured to deal with things. Well, it's always been this way, serially down the line, and so, we've been challenged in how to respond.

DR. TURNER LEE: And I think, and you know, I want to echo what my colleagues have said Elaine as well but I want to add something different as I sit next to a historian and two political scientists. What we've actually learned during COVID-19 is that inequality is quite entrenched in our society. And that the government has done very little to sort of address that.

I mean, the inequalities that we have seen manifested in education disparities and digital access disparities. When it comes to employment disparities of whose been on the front line and who has not. What we've actually seen is that this government, you know, and I don't want to put it on one administration. Just has been, you know, incapable of addressing some of the historical inequalities that have led to an unequal distribution to access power and to wealth. And what is surprising is that a pandemic, a pandemic would actually reveal such glaring inequalities in ways that I think going forward we got a big problem to address.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. Why don't we go to the next question? I mean, I think all of these are important aspects of this problem. I mean, we simply are hobbled by the current levels of polarization and we are hobbled by the longstanding disparities in wealth in this country. Not to mention race which coincides with that but also seems to have a separate and more and different impact on it as well.

So, why don't we start with you, Nicol. And I want to ask the second question which is, what would you do? If you were king tomorrow, queen tomorrow, what would you do?

DR. TURNER LEE: You know, I've entertained that question several times. If I were able to actually chase the scenario, I think what I would do is one, we have to recognize that we're coming out of an administration where the polarization that we've all discussed is real, right. And I think the extent to which racial polarization and the racial profiling of COVID-19 in particular is going to lead to much more fracturing that we had even before we started this pandemic. I mean, we were already in this, it's just actually worse.

I would say going forward, the other thing that we're going to have to deal with and I'll give some examples of what I think we really should do. Is that we're learning where there are vulnerabilities in systems. You know, 53 million school kids stayed home as a result of a pandemic and districts across the country because of equity challenges, struggled to get people online. That shouldn't have happened, right.

And we're seeing the magnification of health disparities, particularly in the number of

people in color as well as people who are low income or in abject poverty who are not able to get access to sufficient healthcare. If I had that pen, Elaine, you know what I would do, I would start with a commission. A commission to really understand what happened, what are the lessons learned.

And I wouldn't actually do what we've previously done in administrations and have some big commission with advisors that we think can answer any and all questions. I would actually take the root of the problems that actually manifested. We need a commission on whether or not we can actually move schools towards remote and distance learning in a way that is appropriate and timely and expeditious.

We need a commission on digital divide. Are we paying attention to digital access in this country? My colleagues have all written books. I've got a forthcoming book coming out on the U.S. digital divide next spring that will actually address this.

We also need to look at healthcare. Tom and I both know about the use and practice of telehealth. Let's come out of this with lessons learned that have been based on this three-week national pilot of telehealth services and see if we can continue that.

So, I would think, you know, we really have to stop putting band aids and looking just at symptoms. And let's do what we did with the COVID-19 virus and let's stop the spread of inequality. And the only way that you do that is you actually have to sit down and address it one by one, Elaine, or else we're going to be back in the same situation once we have another blind spot that takes us by storm.

MS. KAMARCK: Great, thank you. Hey Tom, do you want to tackle this? I mean, you're king, what would you do?

DR. TURNER LEE: Don't blow up his head.

MR. WHEELER: So, let me try it from a slightly different point. I think the points that Nicol raises are excellent. But, you know, as a recovering regulator and a network guy who spent my life in technology. I think that what we've learned from COVID is the importance of digital technology.

I mean, stay at home. If we didn't have Zoom, if we didn't have Netflix, we'd all be slashing our wrists. And we have learned that the network and services that deliver the internet to us

maybe used to be nice to have but now they're critical. And yet we have this critical capability that has absolutely no public oversight.

You know, Eric Schmidt wrote a book a few years ago in which he said that the internet is the world's largest ungoverned space. And here we have this incredibly critical capability that is totally un-governed and government is not equipped to deal with it. Because we have -- our government has always been organized around industrial concepts, you know.

I ran an agency that its statute was written in 1934 when radio was just developing. And it was last amended in 1996 when the internet was screeching modems and AOL. And we need a set of statutes and structures that will relate to the reality that we have as a result of living in the information era rather than in the industrial era.

And those solutions aren't bolt-ons to some existing structure built for another purpose. But they are new builds to say this is the new digital reality, what do we think are the standards that ought to govern that? So, I think the challenge to how do you reform American government is to say, okay how do we get out of an industrial mindset and into a digital age mindset?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, two little comments before we go to Lee. One is you said what would we be doing without the internet. I'll tell you what we'd be doing, we'd be going outside. We'd be out, we'd be -- I mean, I think the staying in place which is working a little bit but probably not as well as people, I think, nobody would have been doing that if we were not able to conduct as much business as we have been conducting on Zoom. So, we'd be even in a worse pickle. When you say, I mean, it's intriguing. The internet being the world's largest ungoverned space, government would have to be international, would it not?

MR. WHEELER: Well, so here's where we -- this is where we really fall out of bed as a result of our government's long term, this doesn't fall on any specific administration. But long term saying we won't get involved. Because what's happened is that the United States used to be the leader in how the world thought about network and technology policy. I mean, two weeks after we adopted the net neutrality rules at the FCC, I was in London sitting down with the 28 counterparts of the EU helping them

write their net neutrality rules so they would follow ours.

But in a world in which we've pulled back and said no, we don't want any kind of regulation, we have left a void. And we have left a void to the rest of the world to come up with their own rules that because, to your point, Elaine, because we're all interconnected, we have to end up dealing with.

And we're also left with, which I know is something that Nicol worries about, where when the federal government doesn't get involved, hey the states get involved and then we have 50 different policies. So, there is a real consequence of us not trying to step up and do something to establish basic rules about how this critical service is going to operate.

DR. TURNER LEE: Elaine, can I jump in on that real quick before we just switch modes.

MS. KAMARCK: Yes.

DR. TURNER LEE: And before we go to Lee. So, I think Tom is absolutely right that I think what we've actually seen in this ecosystem is that the critical nature of the internet is beyond, you know, a question now. We know that we need to actually build infrastructure, we know that these applications that we're actually using now need the level of infrastructure bandwidth support, you know, capacity. Flexibility innovations do all these things.

But I do think we need to be careful and this is where Tom and I do know each other on this realm about how much government oversight is necessary. If I look at the handling of this pandemic in particular, the government oversight of it was absolutely horrible. And where we have seen government come in and take over in terms of management, we've not always seen great results.

I think to compliment what Tom says, I think we should reserve the question to, the statement to, we need government to actually work in partnership with those players when we actually find these types of gaps exist. And I've been really intrigued by, for example, in some of the areas where kids do not have access to technology where we're actually seeing these types of partnerships step up. Particularly when districts have no solutions to do this by themselves.

So, I think to me that's really, and I appreciate what Tom is saying. I've sort of thought

about what this looks like going forward and clearly, for example, in places like rural, it may be a partnership or it may be areas where we have to support some government. Not necessarily incentives for private sector to build out but different models to actually look at how we actually develop solutions.

MR. WHEELER: So Elaine, we're filibustering and keeping Lee off the here. After Lee, let's come back to this.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, well I want to come back to that. Lee, the floor is yours, thank you.

DR. DRUTMAN: All right. Well, if I were king for a day, I'd immediately give up the throne because America shouldn't be ruled by a king. And for sure, I don't have all the answers. And, you know, I fundamentally believe in the pluralist democratic process for solving our problems. But I think as both Tom and Nicol have eloquently pointed out, we have a mounting number of problems that have gone unsolved for a long time.

I think as, you know, Nicol has pointed out and, you know, we see the incredible inequalities that have been hiding in plain sight for a long time in this country and, you know, are just it's impossible to ignore the ways in which this pandemic is having disparate impacts on people. Depending on their ability to work remotely, depending on their ability to, you know, live and get away to places where they, you know, can safely social distance. I think we're just -- we're seeing these incredibly disparate impacts that are just not okay and I think we all know that they're not okay and we've just been letting this go on for too long.

And to Tom's point, you know, about the economy and the industrial age of the past transforming into a new era and us just not having any sort of regulatory infrastructure in place to deal with that. I think that's exactly right. I think one of the things, I mean, we've basically had since the mid-'90s, we've had this kind of paralysis in Washington.

Where we've just been unable to solve problems as political polarization has gotten worse and worse. And everything has become campaigning and gamesmanship and fighting this game of inches to get this elusive unified control that never happens. And, you know, that's been the abiding

drive of our politics. And the process has, you know, not worked for almost everybody in this country and it's turning people off from politics.

The number of people who say they think government in Washington is broken is, you know, basically that's the one thing that everybody agrees on. The number of people who now call themselves independents is higher. It's a distrust of both of the parties. And, you know, we're having these same partisan blame-throwing contests, you know, even now when we should be trying to solve this problem.

And, you know, the societies that have managed to keep this virus, this pandemic at bay are high trust societies where people expect that everybody else is going to pitch in and we're all going to share the same information. We can trust what the government does. I just read a poll this morning, Democrats think that there is a higher number of deaths than has been reported, Republicans think there is a lower number of deaths that's been reported.

I mean, on every issue here, we don't trust one another and we think that somehow the other side is out to get us. And this is this hyper partisanship which is preventing government from addressing problems that, I think, there are a lot of issues, 70 to 80 percent of people know that there's a problem, know that there's a better way. And it's just all political gamesmanship.

And this is where I get to, you know, if I were king which believe me, you don't want me to be king. But, you know, I think there's a way in which we have this electoral system which creates these incredibly perverse incentives of just trying to get this narrow elusive majoritarian control. And it just doesn't work with our political system. It's driving us apart into this binary us versus them. It just doesn't work with our brains.

And so, what I would do is I would get rid of this antiquated first past the post system that have driven us into these two binary camps and open up our political system a little bit more to make it less us versus them. I've been a big supporter of right and choice voting as a way to kind of open up some space and some fluidity on like to move to a multiparty version of that. Which is, you know, borrowing from Ireland and Australia, New Zealand I think are all countries that have had successful, you

know, moderate multiparty democracies.

I think this binary is just creating this incredible gridlock that is stymieing innovation, stymieing problem solving, exacerbating inequality, exacerbating urban rural divides, exacerbating racial divides and we're stuck in it. And until we get out of it, we're going to be stuck.

So, I mean I really hope that this moment can expand our imagination. I mean, certainly I think it's expanded our imagination to think beyond this sense that we have that everything is kind of just, you know, we'll kind of muddle through. Because now we're deep in the mud and there's no more muddling, we're stuck in it.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, you know, that brings me, I don't want to go to questions from the audience just yet. But it does bring me to something I wanted to bring up and Michael in our audience also brought up. And let me let the three of you think about this for a moment. How do you see federalism involving through the pandemic and afterwards? That's Michael's question.

And my question would be how one of the things that's happened in the last six weeks really is that we have moved our attention from the president and Washington to the governors. And the governors, you know, I think everybody had a little civics lesson about the 10th amendment to the Constitution when the president asserted that he was in control and the governors said no, no, no, we're actually in control of the law.

And so, we're kind of having a federalist moment here too. And is there anything that we should be thinking about in terms of the future, in terms of the relationship between the federal government and the states. Why don't I start with Lee and go around, Tom and Nicol.

DR. DRUTMAN: Yeah. Well, this is a great question and, you know, I mean certainly, you know, the question of where should authority come from. And this goes back throughout our history and there have been constant struggles over, you know, whether cities, states, the federal government has authority and lots of battles.

And, you know, generally the trend for the last, you know, really 60, 70 years has been towards more authority in Washington and less authority at the state level. So, we've been moving

towards a more nationalized system.

Now, this moment of basically, you know, the dereliction of duty in Washington, I don't know what else to call it. Has created an opening for a lot of states to take different approaches. Now one of the challenges about federalism in this particular moment is that it's not like the virus stops at the state border. And so, you know, what happens in one state depends on what happens in the neighboring states and lots of people travel between state lines for work.

So, I think it's a particularly big challenge for federalism. Certainly, I think there are areas in which states and cities are better equipped to solve problems. But, you know, I think we're in an era in which it's very hard for states individually to solve what are national and increasingly global problems.

So, if you think about the regulation of the internet, if you think about climate, if you think about, you know, inequality, these are fundamental challenges that, you know, I certainly support different states doing experiments. But, you know, I think the flow of people is, you know, very much between states. And so, I think I don't see federalism as a solution to a lot of this. Sometimes it's been a release valve but even to the extent that what we see as federalism now is not the brand I see in laboratories of democracy federalism, it's red states versus blue states.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah. Tom, take on the federalism question and then I will remember before we go to other questions to come back to this governance of the internet.

MR. WHEELER: Okay. Well, this should be real quick. The laboratories of democracy, that was going to be my opening line, Lee.

DR. DRUTMAN: All right, well you can go first next time.

MR. WHEELER: This also relates to Elaine's previous question which was about this interconnected world that we live in. And, you know, one of the stories I tell in *From Gutenberg to Google* is about how railroads used to have to go to the state line and stop, particularly in the south. And the -- in the middle of the Civil War, Robert E. Lee, of all people, petitioned the Confederate Congress to allow the railroads to interconnect. Because he was being bested on the battlefield by the interconnection of railroads in the north and their ability to move troops from one theater to another. And the Confederate

Congress told him no.

MS. KAMARCK: Wow.

MR. WHEELER: And you can go back and look at major Chickamauga and other major battles and see that was probably a reason why those battles were lost. We live in an interconnected world. We need to have a common set of rules for that interconnected society, at least inside our own economy and our own society.

DR. TURNER LEE: Yeah Elaine, I just will bring up, my colleagues have sort of brought up the reason why we have to be very careful. About going back to this or keeping, maintaining this relationship between the federal government and state governments that appears to be quite contentious particularly in the handling of COVID-19. Because I think people at the state level just felt as in other issues, when it came to immigration, I mean, this is not new, right. That states have felt that Washington has been too slow to respond and has not necessarily been in the best position to do that.

But what worries me and I think Lee can actually echo my sentiment here is what do we do about those types of regulations or statutes as Tom has also suggested that require federal leadership. You know, I'm worried if we say, okay post COVID-19, let's give more authorities back to the states. What about the Voting Rights Act and what's happened when it comes to the degradation of the, you know, the exercise the right to vote when states are in control?

Look at what's happening when reopening right now and states that are rushing to open up because in many respects it will feel like they have a majority population that's going to be infected because that's not what the media is telling them. Right, or that's not what the federal government has painted in terms of who is mostly affected by the virus. So, that worries me.

I mean, I think again, COVID-19 has sort of surfaced these lessons that require further conversation. They require further healing and they require a long range discussion of how we bring back to the point of this conversation a balance in American government, right.

So, we're not being ruled in some way even though none of us up here want to assume the role of king or queen, I know person who is pretty happy with that title and who will remain nameless, right. But

at the end of the day, that's not what we want to do post COVID-19. We have done a great job in the U.S. improvising through this. But that improvisation should not become the norm.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. So, let me remind our viewers here that if you want to send in questions, you can email events@brookings.edu. You can Twitter using #taubman forum or by tweeting @brookingsgov, okay. So, let me remind that but I want to go back to an earlier question first which is the question of governing the internet.

I think, I agree with Tom, I think that's going to loom large as we come out of this. And how do you see that happening? I mean, yes, granted we do not have the American leadership right now. But let's assume that this era ends one way or the other and that we come back to a more normal American government which does seek to be leader in the world. What does this look like? What would they do? Are you thinking, do you have European Union model in your mind? What are you thinking about?

MR. WHEELER: No. So, I think we've got to start, Elaine, I think we've got to start with the recognition that the digital environment, both society and the economy, are very different from the industrial environment. And that government has been built on an industrial model.

So, when the agencies of the federal government were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they stole the management model of the companies they were supposed to regulate and what was that? Well, you had a guy on the shop floor and he was a guy, right, who followed rules, who was supervised by a supervisor who followed rules. Who was supervised by a manager to make sure everybody else was following rules. And we're surprised that we have a rules based bureaucracy?

That's not the way the digital world works. Things move so quickly and we have introduced what's called agile management rather than this rules based bureaucracy into the management of companies. But that has not reached out to the management of government. And so, what would that look like, for instance?

One, I think you would take the agencies of government that deal with stable industries and relatively stable technology and leave them alone. But you'd say, we've got a whole new segment of the economy that is built on rapid change based on digital technology. And how do we establish

standards for that and here Nicol will be stunned to hear me say that I agree with her that that is not the kind of traditional industrial era micromanagement that we have seen before.

Which is also to your point, Elaine, do you copy the EU? No, we need to say okay, you know, the national electrical code covers how our houses, why our houses don't burn down. It's established by industry and enforced by government. FinRa overseas, the operation of financial markets similar kind of way.

How do we create a structure, a digital agency whose job it is to bring these forces together both the companies and the public? To come up with standards that can then be used as the guidepost for how you run the economy and that are enforceable. And that is an entirely different concept from anything that government has done heretofore.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay.

DR. TUNRER LEE: And Elaine, I'll just jump in really quickly just if I can because Tom and I have been on this pathway for a very long time. I think I agree with him in terms of not looking at the judicial standards of how we govern the internet and I want to push it just a little further when he talks about agency.

Because in my book, I'm suggesting that, you know, really at this time we need to have a chief digital innovation entity that actually deals with, I think, the embracing of new technologies. The thing about government intervention that worries me to Tom's point that we actually don't always look at standards, we look at ceilings. And ceilings on innovation is not going to, I think, cultivate the type of environment that we did see that was somewhat agile under a COVID-19 situation.

But we can remove the regulatory boundaries and barriers on telehealth and have people be able to Skype and Facetime their doctors in real time. So, I think this is probably a topic of another conversation but I do agree with Tom. I think international governance models will not plug and play into the United States simply because they have different values around the role of technology generally.

But I think we as a country have seen other areas and Elaine, I'll just leave it with this. When we talk about internet governance, my hope is that we don't walk away and say who controls the

internet but rather we look at things like federal privacy. We look at things like the digital divide.

I was so happy after 25 years of doing this to hear a plan on digital access come before Congress just a couple of days ago and to treat it not on the margins of our society. We just need to reformulate how we're looking at the internet and technology in general and, I think, come to some kind of balance between what Tom is mentioning and where we are today.

MS. KAMARCK: All right. Obviously, this alone could be another entire Brookings forum.

DR. TURNER LEE: Yeah, me and him.

MS. KAMARCK: With the two of you, yeah. Because I know I'm fascinated by it. I think Lee, you probably join me in that. But let's go to some of our audience questions because I think we've got some really good ones. Why don't we start with you, Lee, and this is a question from Carlos. And he says, without the will to do institutional reform, is there any way to diminish polarization?

DR. DRUTMAN: Well, I mean, my belief is that we actually need institutional reform because we need to shift the underlying incentives. I mean I think there are some ways to diminish polarization without institutional reform. I think are trying to build up factions within the existing parties that are not quite aligned with their core party.

Or perhaps the other way, I mean, some ways the way to diminish polarization is to change what we're arguing about and to add a new dimension of conflict. And, you know, one area that I think gives me a little bit of potential hope is the way in which there are some voices in the Republican party and I'm thinking about Josh Hawley here and Mitt Romney, to some extent. That are kind of rethinking the role of government a little bit. And, you know, I think creating some potential for some new cross cutting issues.

I mean, this is my nerdy political science perspective is that the way to -- we've got a party alignment that's basically stuck in this zero sum fight. But it's also an urban rural fight and it's also a culture war fight and it's also a race and identify fight. So, it's all these things that are layering on top of each other. And you have these political coalitions which there are wedge issues that would split Republicans and Democrats internally and potentially create some new alignments that wouldn't make

everything seem so zero sum.

So, if we were having different political fights and maybe if we were having more political fights in the sense that where actually there's a lot of issues that we're just not debating. Frankly, because the leaders in both parties basically only want to let the issues that they think they can win on come to the surface. So, there are a lot of issues potentially within both the Republican and the Democratic party. And if Mitch McConnell were just to let Senators have the floor and bring up a bunch of issues, you might see a lot of interesting cross partisan coalitions come up.

And if Nancy Pelosi were to see the floor and let a lot of rank and file members bring forward bills, you might see a lot of interesting cross partisan coalitions forming. But the problem is that rank and file in both parties have seeded so much to the leadership because they're so concerned about maintaining power. And they don't want to open up that process because it might make their side look bad on some issues. And this is kind of a chicken or egg problem.

To me, the institutional solution is more likely but, you know, I could see a revolt, a bottom down revolt in both parties say look, I actually came to Washington to solve problems. I think there are a lot of Democrats who are frankly frustrated that Nancy Pelosi is running the show because they feel like she's not addressing a lot of issues that they care about. And there are a lot of Republicans who are frustrated that Mitch McConnell is running the show because he's keeping them from debating a lot of issues.

So, I think that would be a sort of revolt of the bottom. But it would be chaotic until a new equilibrium emerges. But, you know, the world is chaotic so maybe our politics should be a little more chaotic.

MS. KAMARCK: When I was in graduate school at Berkley as opposed to when you were in graduate school at Berkley, we used to talk about the shifting coalitions in Congress. We would read whole books on the shifting coalitions in Congress. There really was a day when, you know, liberal Republicans might move with the Democrats on a certain issue. And, of course, in those days, you had a lot of southern conservative Democratic congressmen who often voted with the Republicans. But the

concept, this voting that they have now where everybody votes absolutely lock step, that is something pretty new.

MR. WHEELER: But Elaine, doesn't that start with the people being limited in their ability as to who they can choose by gerrymandering and other kinds of things. That you go to Lee's point about let's get a broader choice of the people we send rather than somebody who is targeted. Okay I've got this very specific district, this is what I'm going to take care of.

MS. KAMARCK: I mean, I think that's right but I think Lee would probably agree with me that political scientists can show you that gerrymandering, while important, is really not the whole story. And we have self-sorted in the United States in a rather dramatic way in the last several decades in a way that we didn't years ago.

And this goes to Nicol's point is too. The self-sorting has also put us into, you know, areas of great prosperity and all the left behind areas. So, this is something that I think, I mean, I think gerrymandering reform could do a little bit here but I don't think it's the whole story.

DR. DRUTMAN: Yeah, that's exactly my reading of the political science evidence too. That there are a lot of trends that have caused this, you know, and gerrymandering, you know, on the margins yes. But I think definitely the broader story is the urban rural polarization of our parties and the loss of liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats.

I mean, we had something much more like a four party system with those shifting coalitions. And now, you know, I mean, in many ways, I would argue that although we've sort of in name had a two party system for, you know, most of American history, we've really only had a true two party system for the last decade or so in which the parties have no overlap. And that's the new thing that's happened. And that's created this just intense game of interest dysfunction that is really preventing the government from dealing with any issue whether it's innovation or inequality or, you know, anything that we care about.

MS. KAMARCK: Let's take a question now from Brady. And I think we'll let you start with this, Nicol. How do we reform government to make sure marginalized communities aren't left out this

time?

DR. TURNER LEE: Yeah, that is the hard thing, Brady. Because we'd actually have to go back in the history books and redo how we actually started our society because it's based on inequality. You know, I would suggest one of the things I've written about at Brookings that I think could be very timely and again, going into a new election cycle it could be an opportunity for whoever is elected. Which is to recharter the Carter Commission.

I mean, clearly what what Lee is talking about in terms of racial polarization is real. The health inequalities that we've seen, the educational disparities, the employment disparities are all part of what was discussed during the Carter Commission report. Which suggested that our society had basically developed these fractures that led to some people, you know, being at the top as Elaine put it, some people being at the bottom.

And now, what's even worse is that we've got more people at the bottom than we do at the top. And those people at the bottom, is particularly evidenced in this disease are those that are most exposed to more inequality. You know, I tell people, when we come out of this, imagine all the folks that have been told to not pay. You know, we're assuming that the jobs that were lost are actually going to be recreated and we know for the most part who is going to be most effected in terms of rehire.

So, I would suggest that the federal government take a long, hard look at this. Let's not keep putting up policies that say, okay we're going to create, you know, more opportunities and wealth assets. We're going to create more programs for education opportunities. Let's have a serious conversation in the United States, go back to what we tried to do with the Carter Commission which I think to this day may not have had the impact because it was somewhat myopic at the time based on the tension that we had then.

But I think we have enough smart people to start coming up with what I believe will be an inclusive plan for recovery. You know, where is that discussion happening now as we come out of this. And so, I would just suggest that's the response that we can't solve all the problems that have been affecting people like me. But we can at least have a conversation to make sure they don't affect future

generations.

MS. KAMARCK: So, here's one that takes us in a slightly different direction but I think pretty central to the time we're in. And it's from Solveig and she writes, how do you believe that the pandemic will affect our healthcare policies going forward. You want to lead off, Tom?

MR. WHEELER: Well, you know, it's a fabulous question that I have a little personal experience with. I just got -- first of all, I had my annual physical online two weeks ago. And, you know, I had blood and obviously you can't do that online but I had my annual physical.

And then I got a note from my doctor saying that COVID had shut the office down, had changed all the economics and she needed now to start assessing every patient \$315 as an annual fee that you would pay to be able to have services. Not a concierge doctor like some wealthy people have but this was what it took to keep the place open because the economics have changed because nobody is coming through the door, therefore they can't do any billing. So, I think that there are an awful lot of, well we've always done it this way, that will end up getting revisited.

MS. KAMARCK: The insurance companies won't pay for telemedicine?

MR. WHEELER: They will pay for certain parts of telemedicine but not all of the telemedicine.

DR. TURNER LEE: And Elaine, tomorrow we have an event, it's the shameless plug, on telehealth for the people who are watching who are particularly interested in healthcare. We have a paper coming out on the telehealth possibilities post COVID as well as people from the American Medical Association and Doctors on Demand to help us talk through this.

MS. KAMARCK: Good. So, Solveig, I hope that you can tune into that one too. Lee, any comments on healthcare policies?

DR. DRUTMAN: Well, it does seem to me that there are tremendous externalities of a healthcare system that doesn't cover anyone and requires people to have employer based health insurance at a time when a lot of people are losing their jobs. And to the extent that, you know, if you have an environment in which people are suddenly without health insurance at a time in which they need

to be able to get care and coverage if they are sick and they might go without it because, you know, which can have, you know, tremendous externalities to other people in spreading that disease.

And, you know, I mean, I think, you know, the case for employer based healthcare system has always been weak. I think the fact that 30 million people have lost their jobs in the last few weeks makes that even weaker.

MS. KAMARCK: I think that's right. I also think that maybe not with this president but certainly with a subsequent president we're going to see a public option added in. Based on, you know, the model of Medicare and that we may evolve to a point where healthcare is more similar to Great Britain where people have the fundamentals but then they buy extra policies if they want to above and beyond.

Or like it is for Medicare patients who can afford it by wrap around policies. So, we may be, I think, this is probably going to be a big push in that direction. I want to ask one more question that's sort of narrow and then Thomas has sent in a really big think question.

But, you know, what should we change, this comes from Surge. Do you expect or should we want to change the role of the federal government after the pandemic? I mean, we discussed earlier how we have, we've kind of fallen into this mixed system. Federalism seems to have come back a little bit because the national government Washington, the president seems to have failed in a key leadership role and so, the governors have gone into the breach.

But moving beyond Trump because I think it's hard to do because he's so, you know, he's such a powerful force in our imaginations not to mention our lives. Movement beyond Trump, how would you want to see a different role for the federal government? Why don't we go Tom, Nicol and Lee.

MR. WHEELER: Well, you know, the federal government has evolved over time, okay. You know, early on it was, you know, basic national defense, some taxation for imports and things like this and then the industrial revolution came along. And it made us totally rethink the role of the federal government. And now the digital revolution comes along and again, I think we have to rethink.

And the lesson of history, I believe, is that ultimately, we do but it takes a while. And that one of the dangerous things is to think that day after tomorrow, everything changes. When you look at -- and we

should not set up that false expectation because we will fail on that.

But we need to start down the path saying just because we've always done it this way is it only an excuse for not thinking. And how do we change the way in which we approach things and constantly be improving. I mean, again I go back to the fact that the last time we considered telecommunications policy in this country was 1996.

MS. KAMARCK: So, it's time to do it again.

MR. WHEELER: It's ridiculous.

MS. KAMARCK: The floor is yours, Nicol.

DR. TURNER LEE: You know, I would say that's a really hard question, how should the federal government change. I think the federal government has pretty much been static but to your point, I think people have changed, right, in the handling a variety of issues that are placed before the federal government.

I think clearly one area I would like to put out which has been somewhat interesting to me is that the federal government can actually go back to being much more thoughtful about future consequences, right. The whole issue with the stockpile really disturbed me, right, because of the fact that it suggested that our global supply chain needs to be reevaluated and relooked at going forward.

You know, the fact that the federal government has deemed unnecessary offices like the office that dealt with pandemics is disturbing. And I think a lot of that goes back to what Lee has really articulated which is we are living in the now in our federal government versus living into the future. And going back to ways of building a much more resilient structure.

And so, if anything could be taken from that question, I don't think we need to change, I think we need to think beyond just the current situation going forward and we need to see that this is possible. So, I would really put that out there that, you know, we should never be in a situation where we're a day late and a dollar short simply because we thought that these were unnecessary functions or functions that would not or activities which would not affect us.

MS. KAMARCK: Lee, what's your thoughts?

DR. DRUTMAN: Yeah, so I would do a definite plus one to what Nicol just said about thinking forward and expanding our imagination. I mean, I think that's crucial.

You know, I want to pick up on something that Tom was saying before about the sort of organizational management of the federal government and the sort of bureaucratic hierarchy of some agencies. You know, I think there's a sense in which we know that there are a lot of things that don't work.

But problem is that we can't think about a consensus on alternatives. That once you open things up and if you take the '96 Telecom Act, I mean, we know it doesn't work but once you open things up then, you know, there's a tremendous challenge of finding what is an alternative consensus. I mean, even, you know, you talk about the constitution itself and I hear more and more calls for a constitutional convention.

You open that up and what possible agreement could we possibly have or the Electoral College, you know. So, we have a lot of these old compromises and if you open them up in a hyper polarized zero sum politics, you're not going to have any space to achieve any level of consensus.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay, good. All right, I'm going to give you the last question because I think it was a very thoughtful question. It's a big question so I ask you, we're five minutes away from closing so be brief.

But Thomas writes in, the great reforms of the early 20th century because society was able to break through the "steel chain of ideas" gave us a series of reinforcing values and policy that effectively blocked meaningful reform. Is there a parallel today and if so, how will we break the contemporary steel chain of ideas? And maybe I would add with Thomas' permission, I hope he doesn't mind. I would add what is the worst steel chain of ideas here that we have to break? Tom?

MR. WHEELER: Wow. Well, you know, so I immediately went back to, you know, his comment about the early 20th century. And I, for some reason, Teddy Roosevelt's comment about the barrens of the new economy becoming states without a sovereign leapt into my mind.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, that's very interesting.

MR. WHEELER: And I think that's probably where we are today. And it takes that kind of leadership to step up and say no, there's going to be somebody to answer to.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Nicol.

DR. TURNER LEE: So, I had to go off for just a minute because I almost lost power and then I wouldn't have been able to debate Tom. So, I had to plug my computer in so Tom, that's the part of the digital economy that does not work.

You know, I actually want to agree with Tom. I'm not a historian but I think, you know, what he's actually suggesting in terms of, you know, looking forward into, you know, how do we answer these challenges, you know, are going to be important. I think history can serve as a lesson to that.

And again, based on who comes into our next role as president, you know, being able to sit back and just think on these things in terms of what we do next is going to be really, really important.

MS. KAMARCK: Good. Lee.

DR. DRUTMAN: Yeah, so I've been thinking a lot about the progressive era and the reforms that happened and how they happened. And I do think there are tremendous, tremendous similarities between that period and now. I think, you know, one of the most important similarities is that that was the last time when there was this level of concentration of wealth and inequality. And also, that level of dissatisfaction throughout the country.

And, you know, you had an era in which there was tremendous social movement organization from the bottom up. I mean, you think about that's the era in which the women's suffrage movement which lost battle after battle until finally getting and we are, you know, the 100th anniversary this year of that, final constitutional amendment there.

Senators who had been directly elected became or who had been appointed by state legislatures became directly elected. We got the primary which I think was a mistake but it was a major reform. So, I mean, we fundamentally changed the way we did democracy and the reason that happened was because there was a collapse of the old orthodoxy.

And there was an expansion of the imagination of what was possible and tremendous

social movement building. And it happened both from the bottom up, I think about the populous as well as from the top down, I think about the Mugwump's who were sort of professional class, you know, good government business types who said this system is corrupt, it's not working. And the populous said, we, you know, the railroads are taking for a ride, literally. So, I think there are tremendous similarities.

In fact, I wrote a *New York Times* Op Ed piece back last year called, Trump may have been the shock that we needed, that detailed some of the parallels between this era and today. And, you know, I do think that we are seeing there's a transformation. There was a transformation in media then, a lot more people were able to publish in the mass circulation media. Old power hierarchies were upended and I think we're seeing a lot of those similar patterns. I mean, it's not quite the same history. It doesn't repeat itself but I think it does rhyme.

I think we are seeing a lot of similarities. So, I do think we -- and it's not -- importantly, it's not a top down thing. I see Teddy Roosevelt's role as Tom was saying but I think most importantly is that that energy comes from the bottom up. It comes from people who have gone through this crisis and say enough is enough. I want change and a younger generation that's incredibly dissatisfied is starting to flex its political muscles.

MS. KAMARCK: We are out of time. But I am going to end this because there is a question from Monica who says, how do we develop a better system for identifying and nominating people with the requisite skills to lead the U.S.? And my own answer to breaking the chain here is that somehow, I think as American's we have to get rid of this idea that popularity or celebrity is what we want in our leaders. Maybe we should go back to a more old fashioned idea that we just want competence and experience. And maybe we wouldn't be having the kind of conversation we're having today.

So, anyway, I want to thank Lee Drutman, Tom Wheeler, Nicol Turner Lee for joining us today. I want to thank all of you who wrote in some very, very good questions not all of which I could get to. Thank you so much and I hope you'll join into the Brookings forums as they come online. And thank you again to the A. Alfred Taubman family. Bye bye now.

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