THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

PURSUING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AMIDST GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Washington, D.C.
Friday, November 13, 2020

PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

FRED DEWS
Managing Editor, Podcasts and Digital Projects
The Brookings Institution

Guests:

JOHN MCARTHUR
Director, Center for Sustainable Development
Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development
The Brookings Institution

MOLLY REYNOLDS
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. The concurrent global crises of pandemic disease, economic contraction, systemic inequality and environment degradation are evolving amid of rebirth of nationalism, rapid technological change, and breakdowns in international cooperation. Against this backdrop, the work of nations to chart a new course under the sustainable development goals towards economic, social and environmental progress by 2030 continues.

On today's episode, I speak with Senior Fellow John McArthur, Director of the new Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings whose mission is to pursue research and insights to advance global sustainable development and to implement the sustainable development goals across all countries. McArthur talks about the goals of the new center, why sustainable development remains so critical in these times and why he is passionate about the work. Also on today's show Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds with another edition of what's happening in Congress. You can follow the Brookings Podcast on twitter at policy podcasts to get information about and links to all our shows including Dollar and Sense: The Brookings Trade podcast, the Current and our events podcast.

First up, what's happening in Congress with Molly Reynolds.

REYNOLDS: I'm Molly Reynolds, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution. President Trump's potentially destabilizing claims notwithstanding, the presidential election has been decided in favor of President-Elect Joe Biden. The final landscape of the congress he will work with come January, however, remains less clear. As of now, eight House races remain uncalled and partisan control of the Senate won't be determined until January 5th when two run-off elections in Georgia will be decided.

Even with a handful of results outstanding, Democrats have won enough seats to maintain their House majority but it will be smaller than their current one. Indeed, it stands to be their smallest House majority in the post-war period. Not only will the majority be narrow, moreover, expectations going into the election were that the party would expand its ranks rather than lose seats. Conventional wisdom suggested that a bad night for democrats would have involved gaining only five seats but at present they have lost five on net.

What happened? We still need more data, especially about how the presidential race shook out at the congressional district level through five clear answers but we do know that most losses were in districts where democrats had picked up seats in 2018. Only one of the eight who lost, Colin Peterson of Minnesota, is not a current freshman. How Democrats had hoped to win more of the kinds of suburban seats that they won in 2018.

Indeed, the only seat House Democrats have picked up so far that was not the result of new congressional district lines is in suburban Atlanta but generally rather than making additional gains in these sorts of districts, democrats lost ground. In the senate, meanwhile, Democrats picked up just one seat on net with wins over incumbent Republicans in Arizona and Colorado and the loss of an incumbent Democrat in Alabama.

In addition to Georgia, Democrats have focused their hopes on four other Republican held seats in Iowa, North Carolina, Maine and Montana. Of these states, all but Maine gave their presidential votes to President Trump suggestion that a strong historical trend towards low levels of ticket splitting, at least in Senate races, may have continued. Indeed, in 2016 and 2020, exactly one senator was elected when his or her state voted for a presidential candidate of the other party, which is Collins of Maine who beat expectations to get re-elected last week.

What does this all mean for legislating in the 117th Congress? If Republicans win one or

both run-off races in Georgia in January, we will find ourselves with a presidency and the House controlled by one party and the Senate controlled by the other which is an unusual division of power in Washington. It has only happened once since World War II. In addition, the president's party, thanks in part to coattail dynamics has historically had control of both chambers of Congress during the first two years of his first time. This kind of divided party control certainly makes congressional action more difficult but it also can obscure somewhat who is to blame for good luck.

When a single party controls the House, the Senate and the presidency, it is easier for the other party to criticize them for not getting things done. When the two parties share power, even the most basic responsibilities of government require cooperation across the aisle, making it more difficult to assign blame to just the party holding congressional majorities in the White House. Given that the chamber that might be controlled by the opposite party is the Senate, a key first test of what the dynamics between the parties will look like if Republicans do maintain control of it will be nominations to executive branch positions.

Ending debate on these nominations only requires a simple majority in the Senate, meaning President Biden would have to select appointees that could garner the support of only a few Republicans for approval. Getting those votes, however, is not likely to be the biggest challenge. Choosing nominees who Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is willing to bring to the floor is. While confirming nominees would be easier if democrats do win both Senate run-offs in Georgia and find themselves with an evenly split Senate a tie-breaking vote from Vice President Kamala Harris, that would not resolve all of the parties' legislative challenges. The filibuster would likely stymie many legislative priorities and some democratic senators, notably Joe Manchin of West Virginia have indicated that they are unwilling to eliminate the 60-vote

requirement to end debate on most legislation.

While senators positions could change depending on the actual piece of legislation at hand, when the debate over eliminating the filibuster comes to a head, it is far from clear that the democrats could eliminate the filibuster even if they win both senate seats in Georgia. Add in the narrow majority in the house and a republican house minority well-positioned to make additional gains in the House in the midterms and it suggests an uphill battle for Democrats is much of what will be happening in Congress.

DEWS: And now here's John McArthur, director of the new Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings. John, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria.

MCARTHUR: Thanks for having me, Fred. Happy to be here.

DEWS: I was reflecting on the history here and I last interviewed you on the podcast with Homi Kharas in October 2015, so five years ago.

MCARTHUR: Oh, my gosh.

DEWS: So the world has changed a lot so we might touch on that a bit as we talk about this topic which is the fact that you are the inaugural director of the new Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings. So congratulations on that.

MCARTHUR: Thank you.

DEWS: On standing up the new center and to all your colleagues there. Can you tell our listeners a bit about the new center's mission and goals?

MCARTHUR: Of course. Thank you. It's definitely a team effort so a lot of people have brought us to this day in the team at the center and also all around Brookings and around the world because the center aims to really generate research and insights to advance what we call global sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals. So we can get into all

of that that means but the global sustainable development really references the universal challenge of tackling the interwoven economic, social, and environmental problems that all societies are confronting in some form, including the United States domestically but also in its own form may of the poorest countries of the world are confronting in different ways too.

So we're trying to take this on as an analytical agenda but also there are a bunch of policy goals and the Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals that were set by all countries back in September 2015 to a 2030 time horizon. We want to help those get achieved too across those economic, social and environmental domains.

DEWS: And this isn't a new area of research for Brookings. I mean this has been going on for many years, for decades even. So why a center? What does it mean that this research is now under the umbrella of what we call at Brookings a center?

MCARTHUR: Well, it's a great question. I'll give you my best answer. I don't know if I can give a complete one but Brookings does a couple of things. One is it pulls together many important things that scholars are already doing. So we have an amazing starting roster. We have Homi Kharas who helped to write what many people consider the first draft of the sustainable development goals for the world. We have Marcela Escobari who is pioneering new ways of thinking about mobility and job mobility for low income works in the U.S. and used to run Latin America for USAID.

Or if you like Tony Pipa who helps to negotiate the goals of the United States and is really active in thinking about how to connect local leadership for the goals across the U.S. and even in the rural parts of America with local leaders in other parts of the world. It's got to be pushed down to where people live in order to really resonate. We have Amar Bhattacharya who is a long-standing leader in sustainable infrastructure, climate change, worked for decades with

developing country finance ministers and he is really helping to mobilize what we call the biggest picture of global issues on climate.

And then George Ingram who is in my view a godfather of bipartisan U.S. cooperation for global development, foreign aid, foreign assistance. So each of these people -- there are six of us -- I work on a lot of that. Sustainable development issues. I work a lot on the multilateral system, extreme poverty and also my home country of Canada.

Each of us are working on our core pieces and we thought it was important to try to pull it together so that the whole could be more than the sum of its parts. What we then do, hopefully, is consolidate our ability to do more and to contribute more to galvanize more partnerships. We really want to focus on being a node in a global network of policy leadership for this because there are so many people from business, from government from civil society, from academia who are working on different pieces of the puzzle.

We want to help to be not just a problem solver in our right through our research and convening but also a connector for others. I think this center and having, I have to say, extraordinary support from John Allen who is the president of Brookings and, of course, Brahima Coulibaly and Global. We have a tremendous ability to send a signal to the world as Brookings that these issues matter. They are front and center. They are not going away and I think it does matter that this isn't seen as what a friend of mine calls folk fest. This is seen as center stage and so that's really how we're thinking about this is how to define and articulate that center stageness of the issues.

And then also how to advance the problem solving, the partnership efforts, the network leadership efforts so that the problems actually do get solved.

DEWS: Right. Well, I'm going to go into what some of these specific problems are in a

moment. I do want to tell listeners that they can hear interviews that I've done, not only with you but with people like Homi and Amar and George but I haven't done interviews with some of your new collaborators.

MCARTHUR: We've got to hook that up.

DEWS: Tony and Marcela. And I look forward to interviewing them on the program in the coming months and years so again thanks for that. It's very exciting. You mentioned that you're from Canada, John. You also mentioned a few minutes ago that these kinds of questions on sustainable development also pertain to the United States.

When people think about sustainable development, I so want to ask you to define what that means but we think about the developing world, other places around the world, we don't think about countries like the United States and we don't think about Canada or Britain. Can you talk about maybe why we should be thinking about this country, Canada, other quote developed countries in the context of the sustainable development program?

MCARTHUR: It's a great question. I would say up front I've gone through my own journey on this over the past several years and I remember the first time someone told me in 2012 there was an intergovernmental agreement to set these things call the Sustainable Development Goals. And I remember in a very cheeky way -- I was talking to a senior official at the time -- and I said I love sustainable development, I just don't know what it means.

So I've spent a lot of time thinking through what it means and the international policy debates have really come a long way to define what it means. Let me give you what's like the big picture conceptual answer and then a little more of what would be the jargon and, third, how I would boil it down. So the big picture conceptual answer it actually goes back to someone named Gro Harlem Brundtland who led something called the Brundtland Commission back in

the '80s.

She was a Norwegian prime minister. Very famous leader. Head of WHO. Going into the first Earth Summit really a long long time ago, they came up with this definition of advancing the current generation's wellbeing without sacrificing any of the future generation's wellbeing. That's kind of the essence of it. So we do well but we don't inhibit our future generations' ability to do well and to support the planet. Over time, it's been refined, especially as this notion of goals came to be.

What does this really mean? And there are three pillars to it. It's the economic, the prosperity; the social, the people; and the environmental, the planet. So it really comes down to people, prosperity and planet and they need to work together. Now, in the jargon, it's things like combating inequality within and between the countries, preserving the planet, creating an inclusive and sustainable economic growth, fostering social inclusion, all these things I would say in a sense buzz words but also kind of core concepts. The key thing is no country has yet solved all of them together.

So even the United States or Canada, very wealthy counties on average, have a lot of people getting left behind. And when these goals were set in 2015 after a few years of the world's most inclusive negotiations or public input that the world has ever seen, the one sentence that all the negotiators from 193 countries kept coming back and saying over and over again was we will leave no one behind. If anything, we will support the furthest behind first.

And so this notion of people getting left behind has been central to this and in the global sense, the first among equals of the challenges of sustainable development is eradicating extreme poverty because those are the people who have been most left behind, most exclusive from life opportunities in the most basic sense but it also goes to these questions of relative poverty within

countries and within communities and who is getting left behind and then it gets into deeper question of well, great, if you have high average incomes.

What if your carbon emissions are going up? Or great if you have high average incomes but it's only the top 1 percent that is getting the gains. And then if we look at countries like the U.S. we say well, gosh, average life expectancy has been coming down in several of the past most recent years. On average for the country even while income has been going up. That can't be right. And so I boiled it down in the simplest sense to every country in the world is trying to solve three basic problems.

And I call it recoupling decoupling and recoupling and what do I mean by that? Recoupling is you need to recouple economic progress with average wellbeing of families. So when I was going to graduate school more years ago then I care to count it was kind of article of faith if the economy was doing better. People are doing better. People don't really believe that so much anymore. So GDP is going up. Great. What does that mean for my family. This is where we do see this challenge of many parts of the world with things like the opioid epidemic, mental health crises, others even before COVID, life expectancy started to go down.

My home province of British Columbia in Canada has seen life expectancy drop in recent years. This is a huge issue but then also we see so much of a gain being taken in society's economic growth by the top segments of society so it's kind of who is running away with the farm is kind a debate that many places are having but we need to see people doing well on average and that their lives are getting better, not just that their incomes are getting better.

The second big challenge is the de-coupling. That's the de-couple the economic progress that we need to see and all those hundreds of millions of people in extreme poverty and billions of people still in general poverty, they need to get out of poverty but we're still facing this

problem that every new unit if economic progress is still cranking out a corresponding unit of environmental problem.

We need to break that link and climate change is the most profoundly obvious. Greenhouse gas emissions are now at their highest sustained level in the carbon atmospheric concentration of probably several million yes and that's because we 've got this great economic success of billions of people getting lifted out of poverty globally but we have to decarbonize every unit of progress and that's why this process of eliminating carbon emissions by 2050 becomes so important for example because you've got to at least reduce it by 90 percent per unit if GDP but there are other things that come up too. Oceans, food systems, plastics.

We've got so many environmental problems but the biggest issue is to de-couple. Then third is the re-coupling. By that, I mean we're all in it together. It used to be, I would argue, that economies were tested by whether they worked on average and now I think they're tested by whether they work for everyone. In every country in the world and every society in the world, especially in North America we see as much as anywhere else, people are tired of being left behind based on their race, their gender, their ethnicity, their geography, their sexual orientation, their indigenous status, any number of issues and so the notion of no one left behind or leave no one behind I think has a very profound resonance or religious orientation in some countries of course.

We need to see equal access to opportunities for all and so those three issues, the recoupling, the decoupling, the recoupling, to me that's what this sustainable development agenda is all about and every society is confronting some version of those three things.

DEWS: Recoupling, decoupling and recoupling. Okay. I'm going to put that phrase in the show notes so people can lock that in their minds. So you've mentioned a couple of the goals and

there are 17 Sustainable Development Goals and eradicating global poverty is one of them, combating climate change is one of them and from my perspective as a layperson, not a practitioner of work in international organizations in sustainable development, these seem to be really high up on the list and maybe a couple of more.

I know zero hunger and high quality education, I talked with our colleagues in the Center for Universal Education a lot about education issues but what are some of the goals that you think deserve more attention? Not that they are any more or less important because I don't think there is any hierarchy in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. What are some of the other issues that you think don't get as much attention? All of them should but what are some of the other ones that you would want to just chat about right now?

MCARTHUR: I would make two points on this, Fred. The first is for each of these goals, whether it us poverty or hunger or healthcare or gender equality or education or jobs or cities or the environment or water or da, da, da, there is someone who is absolutely convinced that that issue is the most important issue. There are tens of millions of people who hold firm that their issue is the most important issue because that's the one they see.

They might be confronting and dealing with in their own life everyday whether it's a job or the gender discrimination they're facing or the institutions that are breaking down into conflict or, you know, the schools that are closed or if they are open, they are not getting fixed quickly enough. Each of these issues has a major constituency.

The big point is each of them is right and that's the point of these goals. I did the math once early on where I started canvassing people. I would go into different rooms and I would ask what is the single most important issue the world needs to solve. I still ask this question pretty much everywhere I go. It doesn't take a very big room to get all 17 issues out on the table that

someone thinks that's the most important thing. That's the point of these goals is that they are a way to get everyone on the same page, literally and figuratively whatever side of the proverbial element they're seeing in their day to day.

Now, that said, when I do ask that question the second point is some things often don't come up. The one that I would argue comes up least often is oceans. I make a joke about oceans. I guess that doesn't matter. It's only 70 percent of the planet. Guess we don't need to deal with that over the coming generation. People laugh, ha-ha. And then I make the point that that's an intentionally obnoxious comment I'm making because the world has to understand these goals properly.

These aren't what the UN told the world to care about. They're what the world told the UN not to forget about. So I think of Goal 14 for oceans is really important because people often forget about it, especially if they don't see the oceans all the time but it's 70 percent of the planet and it kind of matters for all of us even though we might not interface with it or see it every day. If I go to a school of public health, they're going to focus more on the health issues maybe naturally.

If I go to a political science department, they focus more on the public institution issues and inequality issues so everyone sees a piece of the puzzle and everyone's got their natural blind spots. So I think of these goals as almost a checklist of what are all the things everyone is worrying about and it's not a complete checklist for the world but it's a pretty good one and it's definitely a strong starting point to make sure that we're all thinking about all the things that we're all worrying about and that then let's us think about okay. What do we do about it?

DEWS: Well, speaking of then when you're doing the collaborative work, John, on these issues, talking to all different kinds of people who are also seeing a different part of the elephant,

how do you collaboratively, maybe in the same space -- not the same space anymore but via Zoom -- how do you get a large group of people who care about these issues to collaboratively consider all 17 of them holistically? I mean is there a formula for that?

MCARTHUR: Oh, my gosh. Now you're going to get me excited. This is exactly one of the problems we're working on and we have those whole 17 Rooms Initiative that we've been doing over the last couple of years with the Rockefeller Foundation to say how do we convene people around each of these different problem areas, each of which is really its own constituency. Often, it goes back to the departments that people went to school in. Did they go to school in like the oceanography department or did they go to school in the economics department or did they go to school in the public health department?

All these things they last for decades of people's lives in terms of what they see and what they care about. So we said, well, actually, why don't we honor that instead of criticize it and why don't we get people together ultimately not thinking about the abstract far off goals that might feel too big or be too hairy for people to get their head around and instead think about getting people together in rooms which is where people meet or actually this year we call it 17 Zooms where people meet virtually and we said why don't you actually get them together to think about if they were to cooperate each within their own room what could they do next as a next step that might bend a curve towards success and then why don't we have them report out on what they each see and then see what bubbles up on where they could cooperate.

So we've actually been trying to codify this as a methodology. We were even working with some universities and hopefully some communities soon to see how this could be what we call 17 Rooms X or 17 Rooms U that local communities can start to say here's a way to get all of the different constituencies to care about all of the different things to agree on things that they

think could be done next but also then to learn from what each other constituency seems could be done next and then to think through what could bubble up to cooperate.

So we're going to put out a report in a couple of weeks on some of the big themes that we're seeing about how people are talking about transitions coming out of this crisis and where there are ripe areas to cooperate.

DEWS: Well, I'm going to talk about the crisis now and think about it as a dividing line before and now and moving ahead to ask you about how do you discuss or how do you talk about whatever progress the nations of the world were making on the sustainable development goals, let's say through 2019 before the coronavirus really hit and then what impact is the coronavirus having and will it have on continuing attention to and progress towards meeting the goals?

MCARTHUR: So how is the world doing compared to pre-COVID on the SDGs? This is a really hard question to answer. In many ways because the data sucks, you know, in a technical terms. There are some things that we know a lot about. We know a lot about how many people are unemployed in the U.S. every month or getting a job -- making jobless claims or asking for income support in a lot of the advanced economies.

I would argue that's a major part of the SDGs in terms of how advanced economies are doing in terms of insuring livelihoods and successful livelihoods but we don't yet know how the household level offshoots are taking shape within all the people who have been laid off or may be working from home or maybe have some job insecurity in a new way. So that stuff is more evident in the front line and less evident in the back line. We have some issues like extreme poverty just to go back to that one where our colleague Homi Kharas with some of his peers recently put out an assessment.

If the world was doing in historical terms pretty well in addressing extreme poverty over the past generation and in 2015 best estimates showed we were down to around 700 million people living on $1.90 a day or less and this was getting down to around 620 million so about a drop of 80 million people in just five years. By Homi's best estimate, that number this year has jumped up about 140 million.

So that's a big jump in probably the first time in well over 20 years if not many more that we've seen an increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty and we've probably reversed quite a few years' gains at least in the short short term. Now, there is news today that there might be a vaccine coming out.

We're all going to see what might be really sticky in terms of solutions and how soon that all happens so we don't know if that's going to be a blip of reversal and then go back to a downward trajectory but I think the odds are it has certainly slowed down a lot and this year is going to be tumultuous and traumatic for many many people around the world and that itself might be sticky. So we have maybe 130 million people extra that are pushed into pretty severe hunger. By some estimates, one in a million extra children will die this year before their fifth birthday because of gaps in access to healthcare.

Then we have really long term questions like there are more than a billion kids out of school at one point. Within a matter of weeks, it was closed to a billion and a half out of school. As of September, we were still around 800 million out of school. This won't just matter in the short term. This could matter in lots of long term ways. Some of them will go back to school and have big learning gaps that might persist for a lifetime.

Some of them might not go back to school at all, especially girls in a lot of places. Then we'll have drop out effects for a lifetime and there are these big big so-called cohort questions of

if you were a kid of age X when the crises came and you spent a year or two out of school in 2020 and 2021, we might be watching those costs in 2050, 2060 in terms of how those kids' lives are affected.

So these are some of the bigger uncertainties that we all need to track and I would say on the environment side, we have three big buckets always. You know? Some things were getting better and then had a big blip. Some things would have a steady state and then had a big question mark of uncertainty of how bad is it going to be and then some things were going in the wrong direction, especially the environment like climate, ocean protection, biodiversity.

The crisis hasn't turned it around. The one bright light I will put in this may be category of the environment is there is meant to be a climate summit and a biodiversity summit and actually an anti-desertification summit all in 2020. These are like the major summits that no one has heard about. Maybe some people have heard about the climate summit but these other ones were really to chart the world's ambitions for the next generation. Each of those got pushed back a year because of COVID.

With the what now seems to be changing administration in the U.S., the President-Elect Biden talking about rejoining the Paris Agreement right away and also rejoining the World Health Organization right away, we do have a possibility that the year delay and the re-initiation of global cooperation because of it allows a breakthrough to happen on these big summit moments in 2021. So there could be an accident of history that COVID delayed these things long enough for the politics to line up to get a much breakthrough.

DEWS: Wow. That's really interesting. I hadn't thought about and I'm sure most people hadn't but thanks for sharing that because I did want to ask what opportunities and challenges do you use In the field of sustainable development under a Biden presidency in the coming years.

You mentioned rejoining the Paris Climate Accord, rejoining the World Health Organization, being able to participate in these postponed summits. What are some other areas that you think the outlook looks perhaps different or brighter for sustainable development?

MCARTHUR: I think there are a couple of things that might happen at once. To start, there is a lot to play out in this transition era. We see that the politics are messy even this week so a lot to be figured out but I think the biggest backdrop point is the crisis as a colleague of mine said recently, the crisis has brought about a change in thinking about how the world works and how the issues interconnected.

The sustainable development goals we were already trying to point out five years ago. So if we think about it, it's a microscopic imbalance between nature and humans in one part of the world that almost immediately upended all of the global economy and global society in a matter of weeks and then all of the sudden we have in addition to hundreds of millions of people being turned out of work to more than a billion kids out of school to millions of people extra dying. There couldn't be a starker illustration of how interconnected these issues are and we need to think very differently about what resilience looks like for humanity.

Now, if we take that lens, most of us want to go back to normal. I know my gamily family does but I don't really want to go back to 2019 as my normal because one of the things we've learned is that 2019 was not such a hot place in terms of resilience for these issues in preparing ourselves for how they interconnect. So in that sense I think when we add to that the issues of racial discord in many parts of the world, systemic racism in the U.S. front and center is a huge issue that needs to be tackled, when we think about issues of how climate would really be confronted over the long long term if you're sitting in the middle of wildfires in any part of the U.S. and you can't go outside for a couple of weeks because the air is unbreathable.

If we think about the interconnections of all these issues, we start to think differently about where do we want to invest. I would also say there is a real funniness in our public debates on what dollar values count.

So one of the funny things about this speaking as kind of a macro-oriented economist, a gift of everyone talking about trillions of dollars at a time in the immediate response is that it's shown that billions aren't necessarily the big numbers. We're in a $100 trillion global economy so we're talking about a $1 trillion for a global investment need? That's 1 percent of the world economy. That's actually a small number when you think of the global scale.

And so we have to think again quite differently about what kind of investments we need and if this year we dropped 5 percent of world GDP -- we don't yet what the final numbers are going to be but call it 5 percent -- that's about $5 trillion of lost income around the world. So then the question is how many billions or trillions would we have invested up front to stop that? To protect those dollars, would we have spent 10 billion? Probably.

Would we have spent 100 billion? Probably. Would we have spent one trillion? Hopefully. But maybe not. And so I think the crisis and the change of the administration but also the new mindset around the world has an opportunity to trigger a different way of thinking about what is an upfront investment worth and what is the cost.

In that way, when we think about what does it look like to have safe cities, what does it look like to tackle the resilience of our environment, even our oceanfront, what does it mean to put up investments in low carbon energy systems, what does it look like to transition to electric vehicles, I hope that we're going to start thinking very differently about risk return but also return on investments for much bigger investments that are needed to tackle these big issues in the world.

DEWS: Well, John, I wanted to close our conversation by going back to something you said a little bit earlier in the conversation and this was kind of a personal question for you. Your passion and of course expertise on this topic are just evidence and I know listeners will hear that right away but you said earlier I love sustainable development. I quoted you. I love sustainable development. John, why do you love sustainable development?

MCARTHUR: I love the notion of society is working for everyone. I love the notion of society managing nature in a way that allows nature and the societies both to succeed and I love the notion of solving problems so that we can all move forward together.

I think the core of this amidst all the acronyms and all the jargon, the core of this does come back to really two things which maybe are important in the moment we're in in history right now. One is the need for cooperation. If I were to argue one word should be our headline every day right now, it's cooperate, cooperate, cooperate. All this stuff needs cooperation and that's really a basic first principle that I care about a lot.

The other one I think is respect for difference of perspectives and not a word but as a concept because different people see different things as important and the goals -- for me the sustainable development goals as a tool, they are really just a tool -- they're a bunch of words -- are a way for me to engage with so many people who see different things than I see and that's just exciting actually because you get to learn a lot and to see the world constantly through new eyes, that's fun.

So I think it's this notion of cooperation and respect for difference of viewpoint that to me are like the most personally motivating pieces of all this and then ultimately that helps solve problems which is why we all get out of bed everyday hopefully.

DEWS: Well, John McArthur, senior fellow and director of the new Center for

Sustainable Development at Brookings. Congratulations on the new center and thank you for sharing with us your passion and your expertise today.

MCARTHUR: Thank you for -- thanks for everything.

DEWS: The Brookings Cafeteria podcast is possible only with the help of a team of amazing colleagues.

My thanks go out to audio engineer Gaston Reboredo and our intern, Brian Jacobs; to Bill Finan, director of the Brookings Institution Press who does the book interviews; to Marie Wilkin, Adrianna Pita, and Chris McKenna for their collaboration; and, finally, to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their guidance and support.

The Brookings Cafeteria is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network which also produces Dollar and Sense, the Current, and our events podcast. Email your questions or comments to me at bcp@brookings.edu. If you have a question for a scholar, include an audio file and I'll play it and the answer on the air.

Follow us on twitter @policypodcasts. You can listen to the Brookings Cafeteria in all the usual places. Visit us online at Brookings.edu. Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2024