

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THREE TRIMESTERS TO THREE YEARS: PROMOTING EARLY DEVELOPMENT

A PRINCETON-BROOKINGS FUTURE OF CHILDREN EVENT

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Introduction and Moderator:

ISABEL SAWHILL
Senior Fellow, Center on Children and Families,
The Brookings Institution

Reflections on “Future of Children”:

RON HASKINS
Senior Fellow Emeritus, Economic Studies, The Brookings Institution

JANET CURRIE
Senior Fellow Emeritus, Economic Studies
The Brookings Institution

ISABEL SAWHILL
Senior Fellow, Center on Children and Families,
The Brookings Institution

Overview of Volume:

ANNA AIZER
Professor and Chair of Economics, Brown University

JEANNE BROOKS-GUNN
Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development, Teachers College
Columbia University

Panel Discussion:

ROBERT DOAR
President and Morgridge Scholar
American Enterprise Institute

DARRICK HAMILTON
Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy
Founding Director, Institute for the Study of Race, Stratification and Political Economy
The New School

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

TIMOTHY SMEEDING

Lee Rainwater Distinguished Professor of Public Affairs and Economics
University of Wisconsin-Madison

DIANE SCHANZENBACH

Margaret Walker Alexander Professor of Human Development and Social Policy
Northwestern University

CHRISTOPHER WIMER

Co-Director, Center on Poverty and Social
Policy, Columbia University School of Social Work
Columbia University

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. SAWHILL: Hello, everyone. Welcome and thanks for joining us today. We are very pleased to be launching a new and very important issue of the "Future of Children." It's on how experiences during the prenatal period and the infant and toddler years affect children's development and includes research from some of the leading people in the field.

We have the editors of the journal with us today, Anna Aizer and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and also a terrific panel that's going to comment on this new research.

But before we get to all of that I want to let everyone know that the journal itself, the "Future of Children," is sunsetting in June of this year and this will be the last event we hold at Brookings related to the journal. There is one additional issue that relates research to practice, but all of the issues of the journal, including all of the past issues, will continue to be available on the "Future of Children" website. All you need to do is google "Future of Children" and they will all be at your fingertips.

But since this is our last event at Brookings I want to say just a few words about the journal and the terrific team that has produced it and then invite my colleagues, Ron Haskins and Janet Currie, to say just a couple of words as well.

The "Future of Children" was originally published by the Packard Foundation from 1991 to 2004. Since 2004 it has been a partnership between Brookings and Princeton University. Its mission has been to commission high quality research from academics and other experts and then to make sure that that research reaches a broad audience, including the policy making community.

Over the years we have tackled such diverse topics as child health, education at every level, criminal justice, social and emotional behavior, family structure, food insecurity, childhood disability, immigrant children, work-family balance, child maltreatment, racial gaps, and many other issues.

I especially want to salute our editor-in-chief, Sara McLanahan, who has contributed so much to the success of the journal, along with my fellow senior editors, who have included Ron Haskins, Janet Currie, Cecilia Rouse, and Melissa Kearney.

One of our senior editors, by the way, is about to become the chair of President-elect Biden's Council of Economic Advisors. So that's going to create even more opportunity to make sure that

our ideas get translated into policy.

By the way, I want to underscore that Ron Haskins has played a key role in making sure that every issue of the journal was accompanied by a policy brief. He has co-authored many of them himself. And he and I are both deeply indebted to Morgan Welch for the key role she has played in Brookings in making sure that those policy briefs and the associated events have reached a wide audience.

Ron has recently retired from Brookings, which is why I'm doing the honors today, but he has been dedicated to ensuring that all of the issues have gotten the attention they deserve. So, with huge thanks to Ron for his efforts to make this journal successful, let me now turn it over to him to say just a few words.

MR. HASKINS: I endorse everything you said about our indebtedness to the staff, to the other senior editors, and especially to Sara McLanahan, who has led us since the very beginning, from the time we developed the original proposal until now. So we've been blessed with a great staff and great senior editors.

We decided before we did the very first issue that we were going to do policy briefs. And we defined policy briefs as roughly 3,000 word essays related to the topic of each of the volumes. So you'll notice if you go through the page on the Princeton website, it lists the volumes and the topics of the volumes and the policy briefs; that the policy brief and the volumes are closely related, often they have many of the same words involved. In a few cases we departed a little bit from the volume in order to address an issue that we wanted to give special attention to.

We did 28 briefs and we had two other volumes that we didn't have brief because the volumes were so big. But we did 28 briefs and we formed almost all of our public events — when we released a volume we did a public event and the public event was usually built around the policy brief, and occasionally the volume as well, but primarily the policy brief. So the policy brief provided great direction for the journal. We selected issues that were not only contemporary and interesting, sometimes even controversial, but ones that we thought would really get public attention. So our 28 policy briefs we think have gotten a lot of attention and we've gotten a lot of requests for those briefs and they're read

more than you might think by a 3,000 policy brief.

Bel already mentioned some of the topics and the topics of the policy briefs show the same very wide range. One of my favorites, not so much because of substance, but because of how unusual it is, was we wrote both the volume and a policy brief on children and climate, which I would never have thought of. Other senior editors thought of it and it was quite a fascinating volume. We also had very interesting volumes on disabled children and on children of parents who were prisoners and, of course, not surprisingly, we had volumes on abused and neglected children.

So it was quite a wide range of policy briefs. It was a fascinating experience over the years to edit those and to write many of them myself. And I was extremely glad that I had this opportunity. And, of course, if I ever had any problems I just turned to Bel and I said, "Bel, what do I do now?" And she said, okay, one, two, three, here's what you do. So that's what I did. And you never get in trouble if you do what Bel says, but you can get in trouble if you don't do what she says. So I learned that over the years.

I also had the opportunity to write policy briefs with all the other senior editors, and for that I also am very, very grateful because they were so much smarter than I was and I got to put my name, sometimes even first, on something that they had played a major role in.

So the policy briefs are a crucial part of the journal and you could see that by looking at the policy brief for this current issue that we're going to debate.

MS. SAWHILL: Janet, over to you.

MS. CURRIE: Thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here today. I've been asked to say a few words about the sunsetting of the "Future of Children" in my role as one of the senior editors from Princeton. I have to say though that I'm the most junior senior editor and I've only been doing this for 10 years, in contrast to Sara McLanahan, Cecilia Rouse, and Chris Paxson, who were the founding Princeton editors, along with Ron and Bel, when Princeton and Brookings took over from the Packard Foundation.

Like Bel I want to pay tribute to Sara, our editor-in-chief, and Ron, whose retirement really sparked serious thinking about the future of the "Future of Children." The series has been a labor

of love for them and that's been apparent in the quality of the end product. They each brought so much more to the table than sheer intellectual firepower. I'm thinking specifically of Sara's tremendous grace dealing with authors — not that authors are ever wonky or difficult — as well as her boundless optimism that if we built it someone would fund it. We relied on Ron's wit and humor to get through long conference days in good spirits and, as Bel and Ron both talked about, Ron has taken the lead for years on writing a policy brief related to the theme of each volume. And I've greatly admired his ability to home in on the most topical aspects of the volume to highlight.

I also want to thank our wonderful staff at Princeton who have worked tirelessly to make this whole operation seamless, Jonathan Wallace, our editor, Kris McDonald, and Tracy Merone and Regina Leidy, who ran all aspects behind the scenes of this operation.

It's been my privilege to serve with these wonderful people and I've learned so much from them in terms of how to run a truly multi-disciplinary enterprise that highlights the best that all the contributors have to offer. I often turn to the "Future of Children" when I want an authoritative overview of what social science has to say on a question related to children. And I refer many others as well. I believe that the Future of Children will continue to play this critical role for some time to come.

The conference today on promoting "Three Trimesters to Three Years: Promoting Early Development" is in this spirits. And it returns to one of the ongoing themes of the "Future of Children." In fact, the very first volume published by the Brookings-Princeton partnership was entitled "School Readiness: Closing the Racial and Ethnic Gaps" in the spring of 2005. So in some ways we've come full circle and this will be a fitting capstone for this series of volumes.

So, without further ado, we'll turn things over to one of the editors of this volume, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn.

MS. BROOKS-GUNN: Thank you. Can you hear me?

I'm Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and I think we have some sort of symmetry here, a little bit different than what Janet said in terms of the last issue of the "Future of Children" is focusing on the first years of life. So I think that's very nice.

In its entire history, the "Future of Children" has not done an issue on the earliest years of

life taking a developmental perspective, which is kind of interesting, even though the future has looked at some topics relevant to early childhood. Earlier issues have also not focused on pregnancy or what is really the first nine months of a child's life.

Anna and I wanted to emphasize in this particular volume the continuity between in utero experiences and the first year of life. Some consider the newborn period, the first three months to four months of life as the fourth trimester, trying to emphasize this continuity. We're also excited when we think back, as Janet said, to the first issue that Princeton and Brookings did, which was on racial and ethnic gaps in early childhood — at least I did since I was an editor of that volume as well as this — is how much the developmental research has exploded since 2004. And I think it might be fun for some of you who are interested in history to go back to the earlier issue and look at what we said in that issue, or what the author said about research and interventions and what our authors this time around are saying. That makes me very happy.

The other way I think about this issue is as a companion piece to a “Future of Children” issue that was done several years ago looking at children from age three to third grade, because if you put the two together, you really are looking from pregnancy all the way through early childhood.

I'd like to thank the Nicholson Foundation who generously funded our issue and also to the Princeton team who worked with Anna and me to do this last issue of “Future of Children.” Personally, I've been honored to be an editor of several of the issues, in this case the first and the last issue of “Future.” And I am very excited to hear our panelists and the questions that our wonderful audience has already raised — thank you guys for sending us stuff already — in terms of the policies that Anna and I are recommending from all of the good policies mentioned in this issue for serious consideration today.

And, now, to Anna, my wonderful co-editor.

MS. AIZER: Perfect. Great. Thanks so much, Jeanne.

So I just want to spend a little bit of time discussing the contents and the findings of the issue. So our introductory chapter highlights the ways that environmental experiences influence the biological and psychological state of both the pregnant woman and her unborn child with an emphasis on

a long run impact of prenatal influences on child development that researchers have identified.

Our second chapter takes up the issue of maternity and family leave. Over half of U.S. mothers with infants are employed. Yet we lack a national paid maternity leave policy. We are an outlier in that respect. The budding research in this area, based on European countries and the eight states in the United States that have developed maternity leave policies, suggest that paid maternity leave results in fewer premature births, increased on time vaccination, and even reduced diagnoses of ADHD among school age children.

We then move onto an exploration of a young child's first relationships post birth and the importance of sensitive and nurturing interactions with caregivers to promote health child development. Research links these kinds of interactions to infant physiology and consequently a child's ability to regulate their emotion states, which are the foundation for later social and emotional development.

This of course is related to a child's first language experiences, which are strong predictors of future success in school. Research has shown that a nurturing and stimulating home environment promote brain, language, and cognitive development, setting the state for later learning.

The chapter on the role of stability in promoting child healthy development underscores the importance of stability in a child's home, in their childcare setting, in their neighborhoods, in promoting social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. While instability can and does affect all children, poverty is the main determinant of instability in a young child's life.

One source of instability relates to food. The chapter by Diane and Betsy Thorn on nutrition documents the high levels of food instability in low-income families, which has only increased as a result of the pandemic. They review the evidence on the positive short and long run impact of access to food support for children through SNAP. And they propose a young child multiplier that would provide more SNAP benefits to families with children under three who do not yet qualify for school meals.

Infants and toddlers of course have significant healthcare needs and the chapter on health analyzes how well the current healthcare system serves young children. The authors conclude that the traditional medical model does not serve children well as it hampers efforts to identify and treat developmental delays for which evidence suggests early diagnosis is key to good outcomes. The right

model would provide consistent and coordinated care and address issues of disparities in care by race and class.

Families face multiple barriers to finding consistent, affordable, quality childcare. These barriers are greatest for low-income families and those with young children when the cost of care is greatest. Compared to care and education for children over three, the quality of childcare for children under three is not high and most early childcare remains unregulated, making it difficult to measure and ensure quality of care for such an important period in a child's emotion behavioral and cognitive development.

Finally, Chris and Sharon Wolf conclude the issue with a review of the evidence on the importance of family income and the healthy development of young children. Income matters for two reasons. First, it allows families to purchase goods and services that promote child development. We refer to this as a family investment pathway. The second mechanism is what is referred to as a family stress pathway. Poverty and income instability creates stress and prevent families from providing the stable and nurturing environment needed for child development. These two mechanisms are not independent. And Chris will speak more on this topic later.

There were a couple of common themes that emerge across the chapters that I think are worth mentioning. The first is that child well-being is very much dependent on parents' health and well-being. This is perhaps most immediately apparent in the chapter on pregnancy and fetal development, but it's a theme throughout all of the chapters. Second, family income is enormously important for all domains of child health and well-being. And many of the income support programs either aren't sufficiently targeting children in need or aren't adequately funded. I'll return to this in a minute.

And, finally, there are strong inter relationships across multiple domains of child development, especially for the youngest children. Language acquisition, health, and development delays should not be considered separately in this population. They're affected by many of the same inputs. And development in one domain affects development in the other.

So, finally, let me just conclude with a couple of policy recommendations that we have developed based on the findings of this issue. But they were also inspired by the pandemic and the

impact it has had on families with young children. The pandemic lay bare the precarious situation of many working families in the United States who without sufficient income support, paid leave, and affordable childcare, have been unable to provide the healthy environment young children need to thrive. Even in more moderate circumstances before the pandemic, many working families faced unexpected shocks to employment and health that they could not weather without additional support, negatively affecting the health and development of their young children. When the pandemic recedes the inability of working families to weather shocks will remain unless policy makers take this opportunity to address them in a lasting way.

So we will propose expanding existing programs for families with children under three. We call these expansions infant toddler policies. And there's very good reason to believe that these programs will pay for themselves in the long run. Economists have viewed over 100 historical policy changes from the past half century, targeting social insurance, education, job training, taxes, cash transfers, income transfers, and they conclude that direct investments in children's health and education have historically had the highest benefit cost ratio, exceeding 5-1 on average. These investments that we make in early life are later recouped, often many times over, via additional taxes collected and reduced transfer later in life.

So the policies we're going to highlight are, first, paid family leave. This lack of access to paid leave to care for family members in an emergency this past year has harmed both family outcomes and economic recovery efforts. In recognition of this, the COVID Response Act actually required many employers to provide paid family leave to their workers during the pandemic. After the pandemic, a policy of universal paid leave would benefit working families with newborns in two ways, by making more household resources available for investment in the child and by allowing caregivers to spend more time with their children at this critical stage of child development when nurturing relationships are formed, setting the stage for future learning and development. Such a program or a policy could be modeled on those already in place in eight states.

The evidence thus far suggests that these impacts on children will be quite large, but impacts on firms and workers likely to be small.

The second policy relates to income support. Even before the pandemic 17% of young children were living in poverty. For families with little savings and no income source other than employment, the loss of a job or a reduction in hours can be extremely destabilizing, triggering the loss of childcare, housing, health insurance, and other benefits. These effects can be highly persistent. The EITC and child tax credit can be increased and made fully refundable.

To better target families with young children, policy makers should consider increasing the size of the benefit for families with children under three. Indeed, recent news from President-elect Biden indicate that he is going to propose such a measure, and that would be most welcome.

Finally, our last policy recommendation relates to childcare. The pandemic has really exposed the nation's inadequate investment in high quality affordable childcare for working parents. Childcare centers are already operating at razor thin margins, were unable to remain open with even the slightest additional strain on resources brought about by the pandemic. This short sighted lack of investment has contributed to the unprecedented retreat of working mothers from the workforce. Additional funding through the Childcare and Development Block Grant should be increased, particularly with families with young children and should continue to include efforts to monitor and reward quality of care in centers and family daycare centers.

And that concludes the summary of our issue and the policy recommendations that came from it.

And so now I turn it back to Bel for the panel discussion.

MS. SAWHILL: Thank you very, very much, Anna. That was a terrific summary of what is such a rich volume that it's very hard to do it justice. I hope everyone will actually read it and read your policy brief as well.

So now we're going to be turning to a wonderful panel that we've brought together to have a discussion about all of this today. I'm going to very briefly introduce them in order that they will initially speak. They're each going to get just three minutes, which isn't very much, but then we'll have time for some discussion amongst ourselves. And, finally and importantly, time for some Q&A with you, the audience. So I encourage everybody to stay within their time limit so we can get to the Q&A.

Chris Wimer is going to be the first up at bat. And Chris is a co-director of the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at the Columbia School of Social Work. We'll then turn to Tim Smeeding. He's the Lee Rainwater distinguished professor of public affairs and economics at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Then we'll hear from Robert Doar, who is not only president of the American Enterprise Institute, but also their Morgridge scholar and who's done so much work on poverty before he took on these tremendous administrative responsibilities. Then we'll hear from Diane Schanzenbach, who is the director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. And, finally, but not least, from Darrick Hamilton, who is the professor of economics and urban policy at the New School.

Great to have all of you with us and let's start with Chris.

MR. WIMER: Great. And thank you, Bel, and thank you to you at Brookings and Princeton and Jeanne and Anna for including me in this event and also in the issue.

So myself and Sharon Wolf from the University of Pennsylvania, we took on the chapter on income and child development in the 0-3 period. And I guess we start from the premise that Jeanne and Anna outlined that early childhood, especially those 0-3 years — and even before 0-3 during pregnancy — is a particularly important time for interventions and contextual factors to influence children's child development and potential long-term adult outcomes. And, importantly, from an income perspective, early childhood and these ages 0-3 years are a time of considerable income instability and levels of low income.

So we used a lot in my work the supplemental poverty measure, which takes a more comprehensive portrait of resources than official poverty statistics. And second only to young adults, families with infants have some of the lowest incomes and highest poverty rates, and we short of show that initially in the journal — or in the article. And the reasons why we think income matters and might be consequential in that time window are typically thought of in this family investment and family stress framework which Anna previewed. And the way I tend to think of that is, you know, what money can buy for a family and for a family's child or children. And from the family stress perspective, you know, what the absence of money can lead to in terms of potentially compromising important child developmental processes and outcomes. So it can compromise the parent's mental health, increase stress, you know,

increase harsh parenting, decrease more sensitive nurturing parenting, etc. Family investment would structure what many could buy in terms of goods, services, you know, even neighborhoods and schools for children — early childhood settings.

But we turn in the chapter to really focus on an issue of causality, which is a central question from a policy perspective. So we of course observe in a lot of observational studies that the children of higher income parents tend to do better in school, tend to do better in the labor market, and to go to higher education at greater levels, etc. But would actually increasing the income of families — low-income families lead to measurable impacts on the kinds of outcomes that we hope all kids can achieve?

And from there we need to really go to questions that get specifically at causal mechanism. And it turns out that nowadays there are, you know, a solid set of studies that really do provide convincing and consistent evidence that improvements to family income can lead to actual causal improvements and impacts in important outcomes that we care about.

And I know I have a short time, but I'll just mention one which is one of my favorites, which is by Anna Aizer, who is one of the editors of the issue — it's not my favorite just because she's an editor of the issue, but it's a study of mother's pensions — which was a precursor to TANF and precursor to AFDC before that, ADC before that — mother's pensions. And Anna and her team did an admirable job of pulling together data sources from administrative data sets, historical data sets, all in one to understand the causal impacts of the mother's pension program, which provided income to mothers with young children. And the key important part was she compared mothers who got the income from the program to mother's who didn't get income from the program, but also had applied to the program and were then later deemed ineligible for the program. And critically those families were deemed ineligible primarily because they're more affluent and more advantaged. So you would expect, if anything, to see long-term those families who were denied do better and not worse. And in fact what you see is the opposite. That across a host of outcomes, including education, earnings, even living longer, families receiving the income from that program did better.

And then there's a host of other studies — not a host, but a small but decent size and growing set of studies that estimate the impacts of income using other causal experimental studies. We'll

know more from a randomized control trial that Greg Duncan, Kim Noble, and others are running where we're actually giving people money in a randomized fashion. And so there's still more to learn, but there's convincing evidence that income matters.

And, lastly, I'll just say we do focus not just on the level of income but we talk a little bit about the emerging literature on the instability of income, which can matter above and beyond the level. Here, the evidence is not as causal, it's more associational, but it does seem that income instability evidence supports the idea that instability itself, above and beyond the level is consequential for lots of development outcomes that we care about.

We turn to a consideration of policy, but I'm going to stop there and hand it over to Tim, who I think is going to talk more about that.

MR. SMEEDING: Hi, everybody. Thanks, Chris, Bel, and Anna.

I have contributed to and rely on the "Future of Children" in the past and use it regularly. And it's been a great resource. I'm sorry to see it go, but I am glad it's going out with a great issue.

I want to pick up where Chris started on two big issues, income stability month to month, which has long been a problem for low-income families and poor families, and which has been severely exacerbated for even middle-income families by the COVID-19 recession. This volume and policy brief, Chris' own work, my work, and that of the National Academy of Sciences panel on having child poverty, which Ron Haskins and I were both members of, suggest that poverty matters to poor children and poverty negatively affects their development (inaudible). so these are two issues we have to deal with.

So what can be done? There's a remedy to improve stability and support young children through the crisis and beyond, which is mentioned in the report and in the policy brief Anna just went over. And that's to make the child tax credit fully refundable and paid monthly to all families of kids under 18, with an extra amount for younger children, such as the 0-3s, focused on here and reflecting their greater needs.

The financial (inaudible) report and the "Future of Children" policy brief both push for higher EITC, more subsidized childcare, and especially for extending the child tax credit downward to all families with children and paying it monthly. This package, according to the National Academy, would

both reduce child poverty and increase work, where and when it's available, among low-income families.

So for a year now the American Family Act, proposed by Representatives DeLauro and Delbene and pioneered by Senators Bennet and Brown, has advocated for higher child tax credit, \$250 per month for a child under 18, plus an extra \$50 per month per child for younger children. That would be \$300 a month total to be fully refundable to all middle class and lower-income families and paid monthly. Such a policy targeting benefits within a universal bill, a tax bill, will help almost every family with children, except for those with the highest incomes. It would immediately make incomes in these families more stable, even without work or jobless benefits, and it would reduce child poverty for young kids by almost half, according to Chris and Zack Parolin's estimates, with especially strong effects on young children from families of color.

It would very visibly show everyone the government can make a difference and help support low-income and working class parents and children at risk of failing and do so every month, regardless of their unstable incomes and job loss.

And, finally, and Anna mentioned this already, according to today's Washington Post, Joe Biden is proposing exactly this policy in the new anti-COVID stimulus bill that he will unveil today. So this isn't a dream anymore, it's going to be proposed, congress is going to be talking about it, and I think it might happen.

Thank you.

MS. SAWHILL: So I —

SPEAKER: Robert, you're on mute.

MS. SAWHILL: Can you hear me? Robert, you're on mute.

MR. DOAR: Here we go. Sorry.

So I'm really deeply appreciative of being included in this. I made a decision a long time ago to always do whatever Bel, Sara, and Ron asked me to do. And I've kept that policy for a long time and it's worked out very well for me. I have great admiration for all three of them and for this journal that I've relied on during all the time I worked in New York City and New York State in the social services program and since I've come to AEI.

I have a few observations to make about the policy brief, although I do want to say generally that the focus on the early period in children's lives and the relationships that children develop with their parents is something that I'm greatly appreciative about the volume. And I think it deserves greater attention and it seems to be getting it in this volume.

Now, I have a couple of observations about where we are now. I understand that we are in the midst of an awful pandemic and it is an emergency and we need to do emergency things. But I do have some concern of taking this situation and using it to develop big significant long-term changes that we will live with after we're past the pandemic that might not be as helpful in the long-term as we may think. And what I'm talking about is I do believe that everyone on this discussion may agree that we have made some progress in reducing child poverty through a combination of work and work supports. And if you really look at what's happened with regard to child poverty over the long-term, that combination of earnings and assistance provided to working families has made progress. We're not finished, we've got more to go, but we've made progress.

And I'm worried about the policy brief's emphasis on more benefits that are not attached to work in the way I think they should be, might take us back to a world where we did rely on assistance and not work in helping families escape poverty. So I'm concerned about that.

The second thing that I want to emphasize is that in order to encourage work you really have two potential ways in which you can effect it. One is what happens with the family or the individual and the other is what happens to the employer. And I think it's important that as we think about these policies that we consider well, employers are hurting also during this pandemic and getting them back to employing people at the rates they were, including people with limited skills and education, were barriers to employment, is going to be very difficult. And I think we have to be very careful about policies that could negatively impact their desire or their incentive to increase the number of people they hire, to hire people that are harder sometimes to hire, to stretch into the labor force and bring people into work who sometimes have difficulties getting into work. And so that raises some concerns about other aspects of the policy brief.

And I should point out that that's at a time when we also have built in across the country

in various states higher minimum wages, we're going to have more regulations on business. And I think that we ought to be very careful about what we do that discourages employers from hiring people we really need to be working. And they and their families need them to be working.

So, finally, as I turn to the three policy proposals — this may not come as any surprise to some of you — I'm not comfortable with the big increase in the child tax credit that isn't explicitly attached to work. I think there are some diminishing returns to additional benefits into families that aren't related to work and that people will stay longer out of the labor force. I'm also concerned about family leave policies. For businesses that have been especially hit, small businesses, by the pandemic — restaurants, retail, small community based businesses that do hire people with limited skills, an additional burden, an additional thing they have to worry about and do, form to fill out, requirement to comply with, makes it just a harder for them to make the decision to reopen businesses that have been destroyed by the pandemic.

And then, finally, with regard to childcare, increasing childcare benefits, I think it's — I've always supported increased funding for the Childcare Development Block Grant. There was a significant increase only four years ago. I've sort of wondered what happened to that, what was the effect of that. But I have — you know, I'm not — I can't really say — there's a little bit of tone in the document that indicates that nothing has happened there for a long time when in fact there has been significant increases and I'm not sure we really evaluated how well that's been absorbed by states, although I'm open on that.

So my view is that we're going to have — coming from working in the social services departments in New York State and New York City where every year we looked at Christopher's statistics and other statistics on how we were doing in affecting child poverty in our communities, I want to be in a place where we're going down in affecting child poverty. And I think that requires a combination of employment and assistance. And I'm very worried we're going back too far away from employment and relying only on assistance.

MS. SCHANZENBACH: Thanks.

So the chapter that I wrote for this was largely about nutrition in early years, both from

prenatal period through age three. And as part of that I spent a lot of time thinking about the SNAP program and the WIC program, which is the special supplemental nutrition for women, infants, and children. And like others on the panel, I would point out that I think the evidence is quite clear that resources available to families from conception through age three are extremely important and they're an important investment in future health and well-being of these children.

So my chapter covered two aspects, income stabilization through these programs, and then also nutritional. I'll spend a little bit of time on each.

The first, to explain that quite a large share, nearly one out of five SNAP households has a child age 0-3 in it. So a lot of these SNAP resources go to families with very young children. And half of the money that goes to SNAP families with young children goes to very poor families with incomes less than half of the federal poverty threshold. So this program is doing a lot of really important work propping up incomes and making sure that kids have enough resources to be able to eat the food that they need to grow and thrive. Of course there's good research on the impact of having access to SNAP. My colleague, Chloe East at the University of Colorado Denver, has some really nice papers that looks at later childhood if you had access to SNAP in early childhood. Adolescents are healthier, they're less likely to miss school, things like that. And of course my work with Hilary Hoynes and Doug Almond that looks at access to the SNAP program during early life and their impacts on adult outcomes. You know, we find that access in early life leads to higher levels of graduation and then better health in adulthood. And for women in particular we find that it leads to better economic outcomes, more work, the types of things that Robert was just talking about.

On the other hand, you know, I think that it's worth thinking a little bit about the WIC program and some challenges it faces, especially I would argue that it's underperforming for children ages two, three, four. The participation rate in WIC drops off by 50% from age 0, the infant period, through age 4. And we should look at that and try to understand, you know, what's driving that and can we reverse that given what we know about the importance of adequate nutrition and adequate resources during this time period.

One more piece on income is that prior to this pandemic I think the literature was quite

clear in saying given what we know about the impact of resources on children, we really need to protect children against negative economic shocks. We have done a phenomenally poor job protecting children during COVID. And it's going to take a lot to dig out of this mess.

So let me transition and talk just a minute about nutrition. I commend the whole journal team, but especially this chapter. There's some interesting background on the impact of fortification. A lot of this is historic. It's, you know, the addition of iodine, vitamin D, B vitamins. that have been largely done voluntarily by manufacturers that really caused great gains in health across our population. Most recently, in 1998, we added folic acid to enriched grains and that's really important to happen. Before a woman gets pregnant she has to have adequate folic acid in her diet. There's been great studies that show that this reduces neural tube defects because of this addition of folic acid. But there's still a gap that needs to be served. We need more widespread fortification of folic acid into corn masa flour to help close the gaps, especially for Hispanic and Latina women.

A few other aspects of nutrition that are worth sort of noting in this aspect, even after supplementation, still fully 63% of toddlers are not getting enough vitamin D. And this is something that we should be talking about and addressing. Just over Christmas, a little bit after Christmas, the Department of Agriculture introduced its new dietary guidelines. It sort of it didn't get maybe the attention that it normally would get to due to everything else that's going on, but there are two things that are worth noting here. The first is, you know, well, for the first time ever they included dietary recommendations for young children, and that included two big sort of aspects. The first was that they recommend that children be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their lives. And the second, which is going to take some real work, is that they said no added sugar in diets of toddlers. Currently, 98% of toddlers get some added sugar in their diets, whether that comes — some big sources of that include yogurt, fruit drinks that aren't 100% fruit juice, cakes, cookies, things like that. So we're going to really have a lot of challenge, but I think, you know, given what we've seen in terms of increases in obesity, both at early ages and in later childhood, this is a goal that is worth us really working on.

Thanks.

MR. HAMILTON: So like my colleagues, I got a lot to say with a little bit of time, so I'm

going to try to go quick.

I'm going to begin by presenting a caution for us to go beyond class reductionism and think about race as a pillar in our political economy, and then try to conclude with an anti-racist economic rights frame as a mechanism to address these inequalities.

So when considering "Three Trimesters to Three Years" in early development, it's important to understand the confluence of race, policy, and economic circumstance happens well before the womb or conception. It's overwhelmingly evident that certain identity groups face greater vulnerability and that greater vulnerability is the result of unjust historical as well as contemporary stratification. The immoral devaluation of Black lives has been ingrained in America's political economy and it is long overdue for reckoning. We need only look at contemporary current events to make that case.

We need a deeper understanding of how devaluing individuals based on social identities, like race, gender, sexual orientation, relate to political notions of who's deserving and who's not deserving. And that will be essential to expand beyond conceptions of individual transactions in order to work toward larger political structures that will better affect us all.

So let me level set with some inconvenient truths. For the most part, the health and economic literature is focused implicitly and explicitly on the lower socioeconomic status of Blacks and the perceived confluence that comes along with this socioeconomic stratification on detrimental behaviors and attitudes as the explanations for racial economic and health disparities. There's the emerging consensus of social determinants, that the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, and age are the primary determinants of health, economics, and likewise health and economic disparities. The presumption is that if a greater share of Black and Latinx individuals invest in a good education, this in turn would lead to better jobs higher incomes, and economic and health disparities would dramatically be reduced or eliminated altogether.

We know education matters within groups and is positively associated with better outcomes for all Americans. However, these disparities in health, labor markets, and financial markets not only persist at higher levels of education, they worsen. Black expectant mothers with a college degree have a greater likelihood of an infant death than white expectant mothers that drop out of high

school. This is not unique to women. Black men with a college degree are nearly three times more likely to die from a stroke than white men who dropped out of high school. And this pattern of persistent and worsening disparity with education is evident for virtually every other major disease type, including cancer, heart diseases, HIV-related causes, and undoubtedly will emerge when we're fully able to analyze the mortality rates, from the COVID pandemic as well.

Policy itself is endogenous. The historical disenfranchisement of Black Americans from full economic participation is well documented. From policies like redlining, highway constructions, desegregated schools and the metropolitan level, exclusionary zoning, they all work in tandem with regulatory controls intentionally to marginalize Black Americans and constrain economic participation and political power.

More recently, stigmatization based on race and an anti-Black frame, they are strategically used as political fodder in order to implement harsh, impunitive control on the underclass. In other words, Blacks have become symbiotic of undeserving welfare queens, deadbeat dads, and super predators, by which we define a surplus population to manage rather than elevate.

Let's think about the evolution of policies as it relates to race and then I'll conclude. We can think about the late '80s, early '90s with targeted universalism that was put forth by such scholars as William Julius Wilson and his seminal book, "The Declining Significance of Race," which talked about racial disparity largely as it related to the confluence of poverty where Blacks were situated, and also made the case from a political standpoint that if we address poverty that would be expedient in order to address race in terms of something that would be passable. It evolved to John Powell, more recently at the turn of the century, where he described targeted universalism where if we targeted dimension of any quality that's so stark, like for example, reading on level for eighth grade students, then de facto that could lead to racial equity and it could also be a political strategy to build consensus.

But more recently, Bel, who's here on this panel, as well as her colleague, Richard Reeves, has introduced the concept of race conscious policies. I like that evolution because it recognizes that there is no pulling the wool over Americans as it relates to hiding race when we talk about policy. Indeed, it is implicit in everything we do. So talking about in a race conscious way, doesn't shy away from

race, you know. And they talked about it both in terms of universal or targeted. There was a — reparations is an example a race conscious policy. But as they describe, and as I agree, baby bonds, which is also on the political docket, which is aimed at endowing every child with an account at birth that they can use toward asset enhancing when they become a young adult. And those accounts are seeded based on the economic position, which is largely race based.

I know my time is running out. I say that an evolution to race conscious is Ibram Kendi's notion of anti-racist policies, which recognizes that there's nothing in American society that's race neutral. In fact, if we think about race neutral policy, it doesn't account how by design and implementation we are where we are today, it is de facto racist. So Ibram Kendi has put for the point that if we're not actively working to address that racist past, we are de facto racist.

I'm going to argue that we need to even add another element, and the I'm going to conclude. And that is an anti-racist notion of economic rights. It is a recognition that there's a set of enabling goods and services that are so critical for individual life, liberty, and self-determination, that the quantity, quality, and access to them should not be vulnerable to the pricing and rationing that comes about from firms trying to meet their profit maximizing fiduciary responsibility. There's a need for public options to compete with and crowd out inferior private options in these areas that are so important that people don't have authentic agency. And they would include universal quality healthcare, jobs, income, housing, schooling, financial services, capital, and the free mobility without the psychological threat of bodily harm or detention because someone's identity is linked to a vulnerable or stigmatized group. Examples would be baby bonds, Medicare for All, and we've talked a lot about expanding EITC. Well, EITC is a negative income tax policy where, if we want to, we could politically — we could reduce the work requirement and literally eliminate poverty and expand the EITC phase out all the way up to middle income so as to lift more families up to the middle class.

I'll stop there.

MS. SAWHILL: Oh, thank you, all of you. You were great. We went a little over time, but that's not surprising. You all had important stuff to talk about.

I want to, to the extent we have time before we bring the audience in — and, audience,

we will bring you in — I want to focus on four themes that have come up. One is priorities for a new Biden administration. I want your thoughts on that and I don't want to start with Tim, because Tim is pretty clear on and has already spoken about that. But I would like to hear from one or two of the rest of you.

Second theme is investment. I think a theme of the whole volume, and, Diane, you especially focused on this, but you all did, is that if we invest in young children it will pay for itself over the long-term. It's not just the right thing to do, it's the economically smart thing to do. I want to hear a little bit more about that and whether we can say to OMB or CBO or someone else, anybody else advocating for these programs, yes, they are going to pay for themselves. Or is that just something we are kidding ourselves about and we don't have hard enough evidence to say that.

Third theme is work, which Robert talked about a lot. And I want to know what some of the rest of you think about what he said. We know that work based programs are going to be more publicly popular than programs that simply deliver assistance to families. So what should our balance be there?

And then finally, if we have time, and we may not, I think the theme of targeting has come up. Darrick in particular brought it up very clearly in the context of race, but there are also issues about, for example, with the child tax credit. Should everybody get it or should just the low income groups get it. And of course we're having that debate now with respect to any kind of relief checks to families as part of the pandemic. And so I want to know what your thoughts are about how we do race conscious targeting or income based targeting, or what kind of targeting. Or for political reasons, is it better just to with universal programs.

So I know that's too much for us to take on, but let's start with priorities. Who other than Tim wants to say — I want your top priority. I want you to tell me if you only had five minutes or less, three minutes with president-elect Biden or his staff, what would you tell him is the one thing that should be at the top of their list to try to get into legislation or to change?

Chris, you have an answer?

MR. WIMER: I do, and it's not too different from Tim's actually. But the universal child

allowance basically is I think one of the biggest things we could do to reduce child poverty and improve incomes of families with young children. The American Family Act, which Tim talked about, is one version of this. It looks like it probably will be in the Biden plan.

But one thing to elaborate on that for a bit is that the child tax credit used to be a maximum of \$1,000 per child. It's now under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act up to \$2,000 per child, but only for families who are more affluent, who have income to deduct away from. So for lower-income families who get the refundable part, the maximum is \$1,400.

MS. SAWHILL: All right. But while we're on that topic, the child tax credit, even if you make it refundable, it still goes up to, what, \$400,000 a year for married couples? I mean it goes very high up the income scale. So I want to know if you have thoughts about that.

How many of you want to raise your hands on making a child allowance the top priority for a Biden administration. Okay, at least two of you.

Other high priorities?

MR. DOAR: I mean I think the highest priority should be recovering from the virus. I mean I think we have to get very focused in a much better way than the current administration has on recovering from this virus. And I think that's what he has to focus on more than anything else.

And I worry a little bit, as I've already said, that the child tax allowance going to lower-income families, that it doesn't go all the way down to, needs to be reminded that that's on top of the earned income tax credit that those families — to the extent that they work some or a little or a little more, already. So I don't begrudge them getting more, I just want to make sure that it's still tied to work and employment.

And I think that we could be fooling around with increasing transfer payments and greater benefits, and we'll do all that. And if the economy remains stuck for four years, poverty will not go down.

MS. SAWHILL: Well, I think virtually everyone would be in favor of getting the virus under control. I don't think anybody is going to argue against that.

But with respect to what we do after that for children, Diane, you have a thought?

MS. SCHANZENBACH: Yes. So something we haven't talked a lot about on this panel

yet is the role of caregiving for young children. My colleague, Katharine Stevens at AEI, often pushed back when I say oh, you know, we need financial stability. She says and don't forget the other piece that goes into child development is really the quality of those interactions.

I spent a little time recently looking at president Biden's proposals around caregiving. And so a lot of that has to do with, you know, making sure that kids when their parents are working have access to high quality childcare. I agree with Robert, I'm very concerned about the devastation that the pandemic will have done to the childcare infrastructure. And we need to see how much damage has been done, what do we need to rebuild, but really sort of keeping front and center the role of caregiving along with economic resources for young children, I think is key.

MS. SAWHILL: Okay. Got it.

Darrick, briefly, your top priority.

MR. HAMILTON: You know, difficult question to answer because —

MS. SAWHILL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. HAMILTON: — I don't think disparity (inaudible), right. And I promise to answer.

So if we have to focus on one thing, and that would be jobs, but public jobs, WPA. But Robert is concerned about jobs and working, well, why don't we think — I'm in favor of a federal job guarantee. I know the Biden administration is not quite there. But we need public jobs. If we're going to do job training, there should be the assurance of a job at the end. And, as Diane mentioned, through this program we could have a care economy. We could have public jobs that ensure cradle to grave care, we could build our public physical and human infrastructure, and then — I could say more, but I'm constraining myself.

MS. SAWHILL: Yeah. No, that's good.

SPEAKER: Just for the record, I have always liked public sector job creation efforts and have administered those program.

MS. SAWHILL: Yeah, we had an emergency jobs program under TANF, right, during the '80s.

SPEAKER: We had it in New York. Yeah, we had it —

MS. SAWHILL: Yeah, okay.

MR. HAMILTON: And to be fair, I'm not talking about work fair, I'm talking —

SPEAKER: No, I'm not either. I'm not talking about work fair either.

MR. HAMILTON: Yeah, and —

MS. SAWHILL: All right. Well, that's really interesting that the two of you agree with that.

That's fabulous.

SPEAKER: But if you decline to take the job there has to be a consequence.

MS. SAWHILL: All right. One more issue we'll take up before we bring the public audience here in, speaking of public, because we've got a lot of great people who I noticed, from looking over the list, who were listening and participating in this event.

Investment. Tell me how strongly you think we can show that these programs of the sort that were in the policy brief, whether it was paid leave of expanding income support, or expanding childcare assistance, will pay for themselves over the longer run.

Go ahead, Diane.

MS. SCHANZENBACH: So I want to push back and argue that should not be our standard. We should be feeding and developing children because it is inherently the right thing to do.

MS. SAWHILL: Okay. All right.

MS. SCHANZENBACH: With that said, I do think the returns to these policies are very large. But I don't want — I am an economist through and through, but that cannot be the reason — or the only reason we are doing this.

MS. SAWHILL: I'm so glad —

MS. SCHANZENBACH: It is morally right to feed children.

MS. SAWHILL: I'm so glad I asked this question. Anybody else want to add onto that?

MR. HAMILTON: Yeah, me. I —

MS. SAWHILL: Tim? Tim hasn't had a chance yet.

MR. SMEEDING: I just wanted to say that I am in favor of market work too, — so is the National Academy — of strong EITC. The minimum wages that we've got out there in many places now,

Bob — and I would go for a \$10 or \$12 minimum wage — and better high quality childcare, both improves child development and gives parents an opportunity to work. And the both together is what we emphasize in our report. And the two together do expand work. That's what we've said.

So I'm — and I believe that Nate Hendren and others have done some really careful work to show that early investments — this isn't just Jim Heckman anymore — early investments in children tend to pay off. And I agree with Diane, they are the right thing to do too.

SPEAKER: And may I just say on investment —if you do a universal — because I think a good example is in universal pre-K — the argument on return on investment is very weak. If we do it as targeted to the families most in need and most vulnerable, the argument for our return on investment gets strong. And that's — so if you're going to talk about investment, you need to know that there is that tradeoff.

MS. SAWHILL: Yeah. Darrick?

MR. HAMILTON: Yeah, I want to be careful with language. You know, Tim mentioned market work. To be clear, I'm talking about public jobs aimed at public physical and human infrastructure. And, you know, I want to amplify Diane because I think she's spot on that at the end of the day we need to promote a moral economy simply because it's the right thing to do.

And in our conception of thinking about deficits and returns on investment, right, it is never a deficit to invest in our most treasured assets, which is its people, American people, and ensuring that Americans have a right to housing, a right to healthcare. That to me is an immeasurable outcome that is just grounded in what we should be doing, because we certainly have plenty and the resources to do so.

MS. SAWHILL: Okay, I want to shift now to some of the questions that have been coming in from our audience. And, unfortunately, we can't possibly get to all of them. I really want to thank people though for sending them in. I have read all of them and we will share them more widely.

One question that has come up that I'm particularly interested is, but it's also come up from two or three people in the chat, and that is what about not just prenatal, but preconception?

Shouldn't we be worrying about not just the months before the child is born, but the months before adults

decide to get pregnant, if they do indeed decide to get pregnant. And based on my own research, I know that in the U.S. it's not typical at all for people to have planned to have had children, it kind of just happens. And that's not a reason not to support them once they're born of course, but it is a reason to worry about what young adults are thinking when they have a child before they're really ready, before they're in any kind of a stable relationship, etc.

And so I want one or two of you to address that.

The second thing that has come up a lot is about health and about Medicaid. People asking about what needs to happen in Medicaid to ensure that children have access to healthcare. They didn't mention WIC and CHIP as much, but obviously that's part of the picture. But one specific question, for example, was right now Medicaid guarantees healthcare for the mother for I think, what, three months after birth, but why not 12 months after birth.

So any thoughts about healthcare, about pregnancy planning, about — and everybody by the way — not everybody, but a lot of people in the audience ask about this priority question, and I've already put that out for you, so we covered that — other thoughts about those things?

MS. SCHANZENBACH: If I could, briefly, on the need to sort of start worrying even before conception, I agree with that. Our historic work on the roll out of the SNAP program I think showed that as well, that when women had access to additional resources even before they got pregnant, we saw these improvements. And, of course, that's a reason why these supplementations that have reduced neural tube defects needed to go broadly, right. Basically by the time you know you're pregnant it's too late to start taking the prenatal vitamins. You need this —

MS. SAWHILL: The folic acid and so forth. Yeah.

MS. SCHANZENBACH: Exactly.

MS. SAWHILL: That is (inaudible) what you said about that.

MS. SCHANZENBACH: Absolutely.

SPEAKER: Absolutely. I would —

MR. WIMER: I'm just going to —

SPEAKER: Go ahead, Chris.

MR. WIMER: — add the — you know, I started my comments about how second only to young adults, the infants have some of the highest poverty rates. And it's actually the 18-24 year olds that have some of the highest poverty rates. And we tend to think of that young adult group as, you know, childless. And for the large part of them, they are currently childless, but they are the future parents of the next youngest children. And also sometimes may appear childless to us in the data sets that we use all the time, but could be the nonresidential parents of children in another household.

So in that case, the fact that these young adults have some of the highest poverty rates and the safety net and other government policies and programs really don't play a large part in supporting their employment or their income, is really troublesome.

And relating back to Darrick and Robert's comments about subsidized jobs and public employment, and also COVID, where people are graduating from high school or graduating from college in this environment which has an incredibly long-term scarring effect probably without any intervention, that that's a group that should be pretty central to public policy concerns. Not only knowing and understanding they're the future parents I think of the next generation.

MR. SMEEDING: I think I would argue too that the Medicaid question, it's very important. "The Future of Children" had a couple of great papers by Sherry Glied and others on what they called two generation healthcare. And I'm on the American Pediatric Association Task Force on Child Poverty and we've heard them talk and talk about how the mother's state, whether they're stressed out, whether they happen to be abusing substances, whether they're having problems in their own lives, is critically important in the health of the child. We should treat the two of them as the same, particularly early on. First Family Partnerships, which we haven't talked about either, has found the same thing.

So I think it's critically important that both mother and child, and particularly the mother because of the maternal relationship early on, but even the fathers, should have basic healthcare and access to Medicaid, particularly if they're low-income.

MS. SAWHILL: Okay. Well, we are getting very close to the end of our time here. I really want to thank all of you for a great discussion, and, of course, the editors and authors of the volume as well.

For those of you who are interested in learning more, you can go to futureofchildren.org and find all of the papers from this volume, the policy brief, and everything else we've talked about today.

So thank you, Tim, Robert, Chris, Diane, Darrick. And thanks to all of you who joined us for this event today. Stay tuned and be well. Thanks. Bye, everyone.

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190