THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE
Sixteenth annual A. Alfred Taubman Forum on Public Policy

TUESDAY, MAY 6, 2025

This is an automated transcript that has been minimally reviewed. Please check against the recording for accuracy. If you find any significant errors of substance, please let us know at events@brookings.edu.

MODERATOR

DARRELL WEST
Douglas Dillon Chair in Governmental Studies and Senior Fellow
Governance Studies, Brookings

PANEL 1: ASSESSING BUDGET AND STAFF CUTS

ELAINE KAMARCK
Senior Fellow and Founding Director, Center for Effective Public Management
Brookings

DON MOYNIHAN
J. Ira and Nicki Harris Family Professor of Public Policy
Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan

PANEL 2: THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE

DAN CHENOK
Executive Director
IBM Center for the Business of Government

MAX STIER
President and CEO
Partnership for Public Service

* * * * *

WEST: Good afternoon, I'm Darrell West, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. And I'd like to welcome you to the 16th annual A. Alfred Taubman Forum. And this forum was set up to cover a different topic each year and we're really grateful to the late Mr. Taubman and the entire Taubman family for their support over the years. Mr. Taubman always was a visionary and we really appreciate his vision in helping us set up this educational forum. So this year, our topic is the future of public service. It obviously is an eventful time in national government with the recent budget and staff cuts in the federal administration. It is time to discuss why public service is important, how the current administration is affecting the civil service, and what we want government to look like in the future.

To help us understand these issues, we have two panels. Our first panel features two distinguished experts: Elaine Kamarck is a senior fellow and director of the Brookings Center for Effective Public Management, and she writes regularly about government operations and ways to improve management performance. Don Moynihan is the Ira and Nicki Harris family professor of public policy at the University of Michigan, and he writes about issues related to public service. And we will have a second panel right after this one. And if you have questions for either set of panelists, you can email them to us at events at Brookings.edu. That's events at brookings.edu. So Elaine, I want to start with you. You have a long history of working on improving government. Why is public service so important?

KAMARCK: The interesting thing about public service being so important is that the American public doesn't really like it until they don't have it. And so there's something in the American DNA that says, we don't like government. I mean, this has been going on for years and years and years and we were born after all in a revolution against, against King George. And yet the minute you take some government away, no matter what area it's in. The Americans say, where's the government? I saw this first up close and personal in 1996 when I was in the White House, and we had the first and longest government shutdown. And suddenly it was like a massive civics lesson was going on. Catholic Charities had to close down their operations. Turns out that Catholic Charities get 60% of its money from the federal government. And so the, when people respond to polls and say how much they hate government, etc, politicians echo that, it's all over our, you know, it's over the blogosphere. It's all over everywhere. They don't hate government when government is not there and they expect it to be. So it's a very weird situation and I believe that because of the sorts of things that this administration is doing, we are going to enter another period of massive civic education. It's already happening, where people are gonna say, oh, well, wait a minute, we didn't mean that when we meant at the government.

WEST: So, Don, a similar question for you, why do we need a civil service?

MOYNIHAN: So I think if we think about what is the purpose of government, Abraham Lincoln, as he has done with many things, said it better than pretty much anyone else. The purpose is to provide for a community what they couldn't do for themselves or couldn't as well individually. And using sort of fairly straightforward language, Lincoln evokes the idea of collective action, of public goods, the idea that you need to have specialists who take on certain sets of challenges that the free market or individuals cannot master themselves. And so over time, America has tried different systems to solve those problems.

Around about the 1880s, it settled on creating a civil service system. Much of it borrowed from the United Kingdom, but maintaining an element of responsiveness by

maintaining a very large number of political appointees, more than in most other countries, embedded within that system. And that, for a long time, for 150 or 140 odd years or so, seemed to work fairly well, notwithstanding some of the discontents that Elaine pointed to. In general, that system, although it gained reputation for being bureaucratic and procedural, helped America to become a fairly dominant actor on the world stage in the post-World War II era, establish public-private partnerships in areas like science and technology and innovation, many of which are now at risk because of some of the changes in the new administration.

At the heart of the civil service system is the idea that we're better off collectively having actors who are not purely political by nature. That expertise and knowledge matters. And I think that is part of the debate that's been playing out over the last couple of months. How much do we continue to believe? That someone who knows a lot about their job, specializes for 10 or 20 years in certain tasks, should be given autonomy to make decisions to provide public services. And I think the U.S. is, in many cases, learning as Elaine pointed out, a real time and what might be a very expensive lesson about the value of that knowledge and expertise.

WEST: Elaine, Don has mentioned the current changes, and clearly we've seen tremendous cuts in government staffing, even the elimination of almost entire agencies. How are these reductions affecting the ability of government agencies to deliver basic services?

KAMARCK: Oh, it's all over the place. And it's because of the chainsaw, what I call the chainsaw approach to cutting the government, which DOGE and Elon Musk have decided to use. Um, I will remind people that 30 some years ago, the Clinton administration did the same thing. I was in charge of the reinventing government initiative. And, uh, early on a report in the Trump administration, a reporter said to me, were you sued? And I started laughing. I said, no, we didn't have any lawsuits. Nobody sued us. The reason was that we went about the work carefully and we stayed within the law. We gave notice. We went to Congress when we needed laws changed, et cetera. We didn't in fact just go in there and take the names off buildings and fire people, which by the way is turning out to have been totally illegal. And so what you have going on now is this bizarre situation where a group of people with no government experience went, took over the government before, and this is critical, before there were any Senate confirmed Cabinet secretaries, undersecretaries, assistant secretaries in those agencies and proceeded to issue firing notices, which then, by the way, the courts one by one have been reversing. And so we have this bizarre situation here where somebody tried to cut the government and, oops, it didn't work.

But what it did do was create an enormous amount of chaos in the government. It interrupted all sorts of functions. And let me just tell you about one of them. At the Agriculture Department, let me remind you, they have a little unit over there on food, agricultural, animal, plant, and safety and they, DOGE went in and cut them and then. It dawned on people, uh-oh, some of those people were working on avian bird flu. Now, if you remember the campaign, how of the many famous things that Donald Trump did was he talked about the price of eggs, the price of eggs was a big, big deal in the 2024 campaign. Obviously, as soon as it reached the Oval Office that, oh, they just fired people working on bird flu, somebody had a fit. Might have been the president, might have been the chief of staff, I don't know. And very quickly, they tried to rehire the people who were working on avian bird flu. Some of them they couldn't find, okay? Some of then had actually taken the early buyouts that had been offered. And so just recently we read in

Government Executive, not a popularly read piece, but something that some of us read all the time, that guess what, they're panicked over the agriculture. They're trying to get people from different places. They're asking people who had taken the early outs to please come back, et cetera. They don't have enough people to work on this. Now, that's just a microcosm of what is going on in the rest of the government, whether it's nuclear safety, whether it is Food and Drug Administration and drug approvals. What they've done by going about cutting the way they did, is they are really cutting muscle, not fat. And we're gonna live with these consequences for a long time.

WEST: And just to one, just to add one example to what you were talking about, the example of aviation, like we seem to have a shortage of air traffic controllers now and just this morning I was seeing the story about all the problems at Newark Airport where they don't have enough air traffic controllers, a bunch of flights have been canceled. Newark is a big hub up and down the East Coast is really creating havoc. So that's just one more example of some of the things that are going wrong. So, Don, how do you see the current reductions affecting the civil service?

MOYNIHAN: So we could think about this from a number of dimensions. One is from the individual civil servant's perspective, which I think people working in the federal government have never faced a more hostile work environment where they are being told an official messaging from OPM to go work in the private sector where they can perform high value work relative to the low value work of the public sector. Where many of the choices made including some of the return to office policies seem designed to encourage people to leave government. And that might seem unfortunate for the individual employees. It is going to create difficulty in recruiting the next generation of public servants.

But it's also an issue from a collective perspective. So we could think about that collective perspective either in terms of government capacity or in terms of democratic accountability. So let's take a couple of examples from a government capacity point of view. A lot of what public servants do is to help create public value. The public sector doesn't have a bottom line, but it does create value for the public. And in some cases, it's easy to quantify that value. If you look at the National Park Service, for example, there was 331 million visitors there last year. That's as if the entire United States went to visit the National park. That generates about $55 billion in revenues for the surrounding communities. The budget is about $2.9 billion. That's an incredible return on investment. And yet, President Trump is proposing to cut the national park service budget by 40 percent. And that means, you know, effectively cutting a lot of people who can help keep those parks open without trash piling up. If someone gets hurt in the national parks, making sure someone is there to help them. So it's really I think a very visible way in which capacity to provide services that people value in our national parks, who are our most popular agency, is reflected.

Our least popular agency is the Internal Revenue Service, and you can see almost a parallel trend there, where the president wants enormous job cuts, and we've already seen double-digit cuts in that agency. Where, again, They do provide a lot of value, and many of the cuts have focused on enforcement positions. The Yale Budget Lab has estimated that if the full weight of the proposed cuts is implemented, we could see something like a $2.4 trillion, that's trillion with a T, revenue loss over course of a decade. So these are cases where the efficiency and performance value of these agencies is indisputable. There's no real business case for cutting them in the name of efficiency, and yet the cuts continue. And I think it goes to something Elaine pointed to, which is you have

folks coming into government with no real understanding, I think, of the statutory mission and goal of agencies, but very strong prior assumptions about the lack of value inherent in public work. And they're unable to overcome those assumptions when the rubber meets the road.

WEST: So Elaine, I want to ask you about the role of Congress in making staff in budget cuts. So Trump clearly is not the first president to want to cut the federal bureaucracy. There even have been Democratic presidents, including Bill Clinton, the administration of which you served, that made some cuts. What seems unusual about this one is how so many of the cuts, at least early in Trump's administration, bypassed Congress and kind of went on their own in doing this. So, one, could you talk a little bit about that process, and two, what typically is the role of Congress in approving the types of cuts that President Trump has sought to make?

KAMARCK: Yeah, well, what amazed most of us who'd been in this world for many years is that OPM suddenly had the authority to fire people in agencies. Huh? That was never the case, okay? And they proceeded to do it, and people proceeded to believe it. And finally, a judge in San Francisco wrote, and I quote, not in the United States nor in the entire universe does OPM have the authority to fire people in agencies, not in the entire universe, okay? So what they did is they, and I don't know how conscious this was, but they decided that they were gonna just go right for it, do what they wanted to do, disregard the law, and go right to the courts and skip Congress, okay. They skipped Congress on almost all of these actions. So for instance, back when we were cutting government in the Clinton administration, um, we had our discussions about USAID. The, the, the value of USAID, et cetera, has long been where it should be, how it should be governed, all that stuff. This has been contentious for a long time. It's not new. And yet if we had ever decided, which we did not, but if we have ever decided to get rid of USAID, we would have written a piece of legislation and sent it to Congress. That would have given Congress a chance to debate it and the public, to the extent that debate was covered, public chance to figure out, well, what are the pros and cons of this place? The wholesale dismantling of agencies, which by the way, will be reversed, okay, because it hasn't been done by law, the wholesale dismantle of agencies simply skipped Congress, pure and simple. And I think they wanted to do that because I don't think they -- they wanted to act really fast.

Let me step back for a minute. For those of you who are not familiar with Silicon Valley, and I frankly wasn't until some months ago, they have a saying there, a Mark Zuckerberg saying, move fast and break things. And that's what you do in these high-tech companies, right? Musk, when he took over Twitter, he fired 80% of the staff. He caused mammoth chaos. Things were going fast and furious. He then, because there was such disruption, Twitter went black for four days. Now, did anybody die because Twitter went black? Nope. Okay, did everybody even care if Twitter went, Twitter went black? No. How about if Medicare doesn't pay for your life-saving drugs for four days? That's a big deal. Okay, that's a very big deal, how about if the grain rots on the docks and it doesn't get to people who are starving in Yemen? That's a big deal, people die. The assumption that somehow the US government was somehow like Twitter, or now X, was so wrong and so strange, frankly. And I think, frankly, it even probably surprised Musk himself and some of the people who worked for him.

WEST: So Don, I'd like to get your thoughts on the role of Congress as well. And just, I want to add one dimension to this, which is there is some early evidence that Trump may actually be learning this lesson because now the administration is preparing a rescission package for Congress to basically ask them to take some money back to

authorize the staff cuts in various agencies. So I'm just curious how you see the role of Congress and what if Trump does go back to Congress, If Congress then approves these cuts, how will things look at that point?

MOYNIHAN: Yeah, and it's a measure of how quickly things have changed that we're even talking about these sorts of questions. So if you would have asked me or any political scientist or administrative law scholar, can the president get rid of the Department of Education? Last summer, we would have said, no, that's a congressional function. Presidents cannot eliminate agencies. Republicans have been saying they're going to do this the day after the Department of Education was created. It's never happened and it's never going to happen. We would have said with a high degree of confidence that the president cannot engage in mass firing of civil servants. We would've said that the president cannot impound funds for both legal and constitutional reasons. And Trump has put all of those questions in play.

And I think there is learning from his first term when he felt like I could not do all of the things that I wanted. One of the crucial differences between Trump's first term and his second term is the way in which he's relied on different legal advice and targeted general councils to give him the advice that enables him to enact, I think, fairly dramatic changes, and then as Elaine pointed out, challenge the courts to stop him. From a congressional point of view, if you believe in the institutional prerogatives of the legislative branch, this is a disaster. They've sort of given up on really pushing back against the president, we'll see how aggressively they do so. There's some crucial moments that are going to come up, budget reconciliation, rescission, what the new framework for spending will look like, where if the president does actually do things like cut the National Science Foundation budget by 50%, at some point Congress has to to that. Or cut the National Institutes of Health spending by 40%, Congress has to take a vote on those things. And those are not popular votes. And so it is, this summer is really gonna tell us a lot both about how far the courts will push back against some of these actions and how far Congress will reclaim its institutional prerogatives. Thus far on the congressional side, it's been something of a disappointment.

WEST: So, Elaine, I'd like to move from the present to the future. What do we want government to look like in the future? Like government does seem to be getting bigger and bigger. And there are many people who, even if they don't like what Trump has done and the particular way in which he has done it, would say that either they want to slow the rate of growth or there might be some people who actually do want to scale back government. Are there ways that we can achieve greater efficiency in government? Are there, uh, ways, uh we can have a smaller government that actually can still deliver the services that the American people want?

KAMARCK: Sort of yes and no, okay. I mean, one of the things that struck again, those of us who've worked in this field for many decades, struck one of things that stuck us back in October of 2024 was when Elon Musk appeared at a Trump rally in Madison Square Garden and was asked, how much money are you going to cut from that bloated Biden-Harris budget? And he said, $2 trillion. And we all just went, what? $2 trillion, that was more than the entire discretionary budget for one year of the United States. I mean, it was an impossibility unless you were going to cut people's Social Security checks and cut their Medicare reimbursements. It just was impossible. Interestingly enough, over the period of time, they went from $2 trillions, then went down to a half a trillion. Then up to a trillion and now Musk is saying 160 billion. Which is why the issue with government is really not what the size is, because as our colleague John DiIulio at University of

Pennsylvania has written so eloquently, the size of the federal workforce has been more or less constant since the 1960s. 1960s, okay, so we're talking now, six decades.

Now, the population has grown up, the number of dollars spent has grown, grown up but the people administering it have stayed the same. What explains that? What explains it are two things. First of all is technology. And I, and I fault DiIulio who I love dearly for not including that. Cause technology, I mean, think about it this way, when the Clinton administration came into the government there was no government website. For, say, the patent office, right? There wasn't a website. Now, of course, there's government websites. You can do transactions online, et cetera. Think of all the people that that saves, right, and think of all of the efficiencies that that has. So there's definitely technology. But the other thing is contracting, okay? The government has contracted out more and more of its work over the years. Some of that contracting is actually for things. Whether it's an F-35 or whether it socks for soldiers, right? Nobody really thinks the government should be in the business of manufacturing. The government is not a manufacturing entity. But the rest of that contracting, somewhere about half of it, these are very hard numbers to pin down. The rest of the contracting is in fact for goods and services. And looking closely at that budget is very important. And again, the the DOGE people knew that, but they went at it with this sort of bizarre notion where they were just looking for transgender things. At one point, cutting scientific research on transgenic mice, thinking that somehow this was a "woke" process. Transgenic has nothing to do with transgender, which most of us then learned. In other words, they really went after this in really with a blunderbuss, really in a sort of difficult, difficult way. And they were not, they have not been able to cut into that budget either. Again, that budget, like that money, like the money to pay civil servants is going to be wrapped up in lawsuits for years to come. So we don't know where that will come out.

But we do know one thing. We do know that the government can and doesn't use technology as efficiently as it should. And that there are every generation, there are big changes in technology. For us, it was the internet. I mean, when I walked in the White House in 1993, I didn't have the internet, I barely knew what the internet was, okay? So it wasn't until '96 that we really started to use the internet. So technology can obviously take us a long way and some of us thought that, gee, maybe Elon Musk can come in with a team of really smart people and they can help the government move into the next generation of excellent technology. That could save people, it could save money, it could improve efficiency. They have frankly done exactly the opposite and that is, I think, a real problem. But technology is the future.

The other future, of course, is doing something about entitlement reform. But that is really, really, really hard, okay? And the last time this country did it was back in 1983. And in 1983, they actually fixed, very quietly, they actually fixed Social Security so that, for instance, back then, the full retirement age was 65. Today, for people, it's 67. So, but they did it, and they did far into the future, nobody really noticed. There are changes like that that could happen. But it takes a lot of courage and it takes a lot comity, something which we simply do not have in politics in this day and age.

WEST: So, Don, I'm curious your view on this. What would you like government to look like in the future and are there ways to achieve greater efficiency in government?

MOYNIHAN: Yeah, and I think the point I take from Elaine's comments here, which I agree with completely, is that the idea of big versus small government sort of misses the point here, partly because what we define as big versus small depends on how you're

describing government. Government spends a ton of money on entitlements and defense, right? And someone described government as an insurance company with an army. That's basically where a lot of government spending goes. And one way of illustrating that is that if you just look at the civil service, civilian employees, 70% of them work in basically the national security functions, and I'm talking about non-uniform civilian employees working DOD, VA. Or Department of Homeland Security supporting what is basically aspects of the government security function. And those are all very popular functions. Another way of thinking about this is that if you cut 25% of federal employees, you would cut a grand total of 1% of federal spending each year. So the size of government is not really tied to the number of employees. It's tied to a lot of spending choices we make on entitlements, on military spending, on health spending, on procurement of services.

I think there is one sort of really great illustration of this choice about what the future looks like. And as Elaine pointed out, when DOGE came along, there was a lot of goodwill waiting for Elon Musk to pick up the challenge of modernizing government. And it was bipartisan. There were a lot people who thought we need a tech reinvention within government. Let's get a really smart guy to provide the momentum that will enable good technologists to modernize the government. Because since the Obama administration, with the creation of the US Digital Service and 18F, there has been a growth in the number of smart civic technologists working in government, but they've never really had the clout to do sort of root and branch improvements. They're usually called in to solve a particular fire that's going off or to deal with a specific project, but not to really rethink government. Some of those technologists were working in IRS, building the Direct File tool. Direct File, if you're not familiar with it, is something that most countries in the world have, which is a way of reporting and paying your taxes online for free to the internal revenue service. The U.S. has never had a good version of that product for a variety of reasons. But finally, we were building something that was working incredibly well for the last two years. DOGE has basically killed the Direct File tool and has broken up the team that was working on that. And so it illustrated in a nutshell that you had these smart technologists that were building a system that was really working well, was built more cheaply in-house than would have cost if they were procuring with a traditional vendor, and people loved, and was creating public value. And DOGE killed that. Instead, I think a lot of what DOGE is doing is actually introducing red tape and services. They're asking for secondary reviews on all sorts of hiring and spending decisions. They're blocking grants from going out the door. Some of it is the very caricature of red tape, like excessive compliance demands that are being placed upon bureaucrats and members of the public. And so I think we need to get away from that version of DOGE and move towards the version that we hoped Elon Musk would bring, which is a muscular reinvention of the digital capacities of government, including investing more in the ability to manage procurement, technology, and medical spending.

KAMARCK: And can I just add one little thing to that? Because Don, something you said ties to something you said earlier. You were talking about the park service. And just today in the papers, there's a story about toilets in the park service and how, because of DOGE, there now takes them months and months to hire janitorial services. And what's happening, of course, is that there's a toxic waste dump developing in our national parks. And, you know, that's a perfect example of how they've introduced red tape and they're screwing up a system that used to be pretty easy and pretty simple to get in effect.

WEST: I think both of you have made important points here. And I remember early in Trump's administration, Musk used to wear a t-shirt that said "tech support" on it. And from listening to each of you, it sounds like if that had been the version of Elon Musk that we got, someone who could modernize the federal government, bring much needed

technology into it, we'd be having a different conversation now. There actually might have been public support for that. But as each of your pointed out, He seemed to confuse cutting the size of government with cutting the size of the staff and the staff is actually a very small part of it, as you each of you point out. It's really the defense spending and the entitlement programs that have led to the growth in the size of government not the growth of a personnel. So he didn't seem to understand that relationship.

I have one more question for each of them. We're going to move to some questions from the audience. And the question is, let's assume Trump has his four-year presidency, there's a Democratic president who comes in in 2029. How much of what has happened with the civil service is reversible in four years, and how much of it has happened so far is going to persist regardless of there being a Democratic president the next time around? Elaine, we'll start with you first on that.

KAMARCK: All of it is reversible, all of it. Until they put things into statute, it's all reversible. It's all executive orders. It's this myth that modern presidents, and I'll tell you Obama shared it too, modern presidents have that somehow executive orders are important. No, executive orders only last until the next president undoes them. And so I see two things happening. I see, first of all, it is already happening that some Cabinet secretaries are taking control of their own department away from DOGE. The best example is Secretary Rubio, who just laid out what we would in the old days had called a reinvention plan for the Department of State. I don't necessarily agree with it, but it makes sense. It gets rid of a lot of the bureaus that have grown up at the State Department that are sort of ancillary to actual diplomacy. It makes sense he has taken control of his department and of how he's going to reform it. Those sorts of things might in fact last because in doing so, by the way, he consulted with the House and the Senate committees that have jurisdiction over the State Department. So that's the sort of thing that will last.

I think the other thing that's going to happen is that slowly but surely a lot of these, this first 100 days stuff is going to unravel. It'll unravel in budgets. It'll ravel in riders and appropriations bills. And people are gonna find out that, uh-oh, it's pancreatic cancer research. There's a pancreatic cancer research group, and they're gonna be mad that somebody stopped the grant, the medical grant for exploring cures to pancreatic research. Guess what? That's gonna go back into the budget. So I think very slowly, a lot of this is gonna creep back into budget even before. Trump leaves because it was not thought out. It was just sort of random. And then I think a Democratic president, I think Democratic presidents should, like as Clinton was, should be attuned to keeping the government efficient and running well. Hopefully a Democratic president would do that, but also hopefully they would, in fact, get rid of some of the overreach that we've seen in the last hundred days.

WEST: So Don, how much do you think is reversible and how much will persist regardless?

MOYNIHAN: Well, I've been agreeing with Elaine on everything so far, and it's all been pretty boring, so I'm going to take a chance to offer a more negative, skeptical view and say things could be pretty bad and irreversible. I'm reminded of Sam Rayburn, the former speaker of the House, who said, any jackass can kick down the barn, but it takes a good carpenter to build one. And I think the metaphor applies to governing as well. It's easy to break stuff. It's hard to rebuild stuff. In particular, if you think about that from a capacity point of view, if have a lot of employees who spent five, 10 years becoming experts in a certain area and they walk out the door, the person that you hire four years

from now is not going to have that institutional knowledge, memory or expertise. And so you may have to spend a lot of time rebuilding that muscle. I very much hope that Elaine is right, that Congress will basically reverse in a much shorter order within a period of months, many of the cuts that have taken place and bring those employees, some of those employees back. But I worry that also many employees will no longer want to come back and work for the federal government. The traditional sort of value proposition for public employees was if you were really excited about helping people and solve government as a way to express your public service motivation and if you value job security and stability, maybe a little bit more than pay, then the government was a good place for you. And I think that stability and security aspect has is looking less and less solid. And I, think for many public employees, they might think, am I able, I've heard this from folks working in government, am I still able to make a difference in people's lives? So that worries me when I look at my own students who are thinking about government, whether they see this as being a long-term proposition.

Let me mention two more things. One is the Supreme Court is going to have a big role to play here in deciding how reversible these changes are. The Trump administration has been embedding unitary executive messaging. And the shorthand for unitary executive theory, it's the legal theory that the president is effectively a king. And they've been embedding Article 2 references in many of the executive orders and actions, and they are hoping the court will take a maximalist position on this, which at its most extreme level would say the president is not beholden to civil service laws. And if that is the case, and that would be really extreme, then Congress cannot rebuild the civil service system because the court will effectively have handed that power over to the executive branch and every four to eight years a new president will have to rebuild their own civil service system, which I think would be a version of instability that would be really bad.

And then finally, imagine you have let's say a Democratic president coming in, there's going to be very strong pressures to do exactly what the opposite of DOGE has done. And I think that is completely understandable and well-intentioned, but it could also undermine the capacity of government to modernize. So, for example, the Privacy Act, which was passed in 1974, DOGE is ignoring the Privcy Act right now, clearly breaking the law, as best as I can tell. That act badly needs to be updated to allow data sharing that will enable government to work, but the idea of data sharing right now is incredibly toxic because of some of the actions DOGE is taking. So there will be strong pressures to move towards more stringent privacy protections, less data sharing, less use of technology and government because of the

WEST: So I want to move to some questions from our audience. And I want remind people, if you have questions, you can email them to us at events at brickings.edu. That's events at brookings.edu So we have a question from Kate. And she's worried that early career professionals are being stuck professionally in cycles of internships, that mid-career people are being pushed into entry-level jobs, and the young people who earlier might have wanted to go into the federal government now are being nudged out completely, like some of the people In a probationary status of people who were just hired were among the first who got terminated So she wants to know what bold shifts are needed to ensure that public service remains a viable path across the various generations

MOYNIHAN: I don't have a great answer to that, but I will note that In many agencies, funded internships have been taken off the table. So, those entry points for younger people to get into government in a way that was accessible to everyone, even if they didn't come from a well-heeled background. Those have been removed. Obviously,

probationary employees have been hurt. There was a new executive order this last week that would even make it more difficult for probationary employers to stay on. They have to bear the burden of demonstrating that they have value at the end of their one year in government. And so that increases the insecurity of the probationary status. All of this is to say it's going in exactly the wrong direction because the federal workforce is already older than the private sector workforce, struggles with firing people, but I think struggles more with hiring people and getting people into government. And so I think one really useful thing Congress or the next administration could do would be to refocus attention away from firing and focus it on how do we get smart people back into government?

KAMARCK: And the only thing I'll add to that, because that's exactly right, is the thing that the Trump administration has done is heap abuse on the civil servants. I mean, it's just insulting, the requirement that you list five things you did this week, okay, as a condition of keeping your job. You know, that's sort of kindergarten stuff. People who are asked to do a photo of themselves in their office to prove that they're in the office. I mean, this is just childish, insulting stuff. And I think it's been demeaning and demoralizing. And if you're a young person and you've got some job opportunities out there, why on earth would you go to the government to be treated like that? I mean that is maybe the worst, that is may be the most long-term damage that they've done, because Don's right. I mean, I taught at the Kennedy School and we had a half a heck of a time getting young people to go into government, right? It wasn't easy as it was. And now it's gonna be much, much more difficult.

WEST: I know when I was teaching at Brown University, I would often talk to students about their future careers. All of our students seem to want to do community service, meaning they wanted to work for a nonprofit organization or an advocacy group, but even back then, and this was going back more than 15 years, they didn't wanna do public service, like they didn't wanna work for government. And I can only imagine how they feel now, just given what has happened over the time. We have another question from Zachary that kind of builds on this point and again relates to young people. What advice would you give to a young person who actually is interested in pursuing a career in public service who feels that their future is being destroyed before their very eyes?

KAMARCK: Oh boy, I don't have much advice other than say, wait a couple of years, see how this plays out, okay? I'm obviously, as you saw in the last set of back and forth, I'm more optimistic than Don is about this. We could both be wrong or I could be wrong, he could be right. But I'd say wait a few years if you can, because we don't really know, this is, this, this blunderbuss that has hit the federal government is unlike anything we've ever seen before. And so we don't know how it's gonna play out. We don't how it could play out in the courts. We don't know what the Supreme Court's gonna do. We don't know if Congress is gonna get backbone. We don't know if the Democrats, if there's a blue wave in 2026 and the Democrats take back Congress and all of this stuff starts to get unraveled. I would, unfortunately, I'd say just wait and see whether this is a passing storm. Or something we will have to deal with for some time.

MOYNIHAN: That's good advice, and to strike maybe a slightly more optimistic tone, America has gone through all sorts of periods of dissent and problems with its government and major challenges. I think if you roll the clock back to the era of the Vietnam War or the period between the Great Depression, World War II or the First World War and the flu and that time period, you can pick any 20 or 30 year period in American history where there have been these really traumatic challenges. And usually out of those time periods, you see periods of renovation and renewal and innovation when it comes to

government. And so we are going to need dedicated and smart people. If that period of renewal returns, and I remain hopeful that it will, in the meantime, think about education to sharpen your skills. Think about state and local government, especially local government is always looking for, I think, smart people who can learn about democracy at the ground level when it comes to delivering services. So look for other opportunities and think about the- long term perspective here, where I think within a few years, we're going to be looking at a very different situation.

WEST: I think that is an important point and I actually have seen several state government leaders reach out to the federal employees who have been terminated saying, hey I'm sorry you got terminated, come work for us. Like, we need talent you have amazing skills, so that may be an intermediate option as well. Charles has a question at the other end of the spectrum, like not the entry level positions, not how do we get young people to remain interested in public service. His concern is what is the future for federal recruitment at the more advanced levels? Like there are a lot of scientists who work in NIH, work in the FDA, the National Science Foundation, has scientists who have very high credentials. Trump has kind of dismantled the digital services division, which was pursuing digital innovation. But in the future, we're gonna need tech specialists to come back into government and help rebuild the technical capabilities. And then Charles also mentions law enforcement. Like, you know, there are a bunch of FBI agents who have been terminated. So his question is not kind of at the entry level, but how do we encourage federal recruitment in these areas that we're going to need? Science, research, technology, and law enforcement?

KAMARCK: Well, let me give you just a little bit of a factoid to put this in perspective. The federal government is the most highly educated workforce in the country, if not in the world. It has more people in it with four-year college degrees than anyplace else, not to mention tons of master's degrees, medical degrees, Ph.D.s, law degrees. And the misunderstanding in the public is that the federal government is a bunch of paper pushers, paid a lot of money to get in your way and muck up things. The fact of the matter is that today's federal government is really scientists. It's people working at FDA, it's people giving out the grants at NIH, deciding which cancer researches we should go forward. They're molecular biologists, they're nuclear physicists, they're people like that. And the problem the federal government has, and this is a bitch of a political problem, is that guess what? We don't pay enough. We simply don't pay enough. If you're a molecular biologist, why should you go work at at NIH when you could go work at Bayer, or you know, or Gilead or one of the big pharmaceutical companies and make a lot more money. So we are going to have to come to terms with the fact that at the top of the federal government, the most skilled, sophisticated jobs, we actually need to come to terms with the pay gap. At the bottom of the federal government, ironically, the feds are paid actually a little bit better than people with a high school degree. And then in the middle, it's a little more competitive. But at the very top, we've got a problem. And of course, you can see what the political problem is. What's the average annual income of a family of four is about $85,000 a year or something. You can see how members of Congress might be loathe to go before their constituents and say, Oh, by the way, we really need to hire molecular biologists and we need to hire them at 280 to 300,000 a year. And everybody say, what, what? Cause they'll see them as a government worker, whereas they, as opposed to somebody who's very sophisticated about curing cancer.

MOYNIHAN: Yeah, I think the senior positions are a different sort of challenge to the junior hires that we mentioned before, and partly it depends upon the type of role. So, for example, I have some hopes that a lot of the technologists who left the federal

government will find their way to state and local governments. And I know some states have announced or planning to announce that they're going to create their own digital service offices to try and recruit some of these folks who are leaving. And in some ways, that might be a great thing. That might sort of increase capacity at the state level. There are areas like the SES which have themselves been politicized; the president declares for the first time that he can dismiss SES folks for reasons other than performance and so that has made the senior executive service or most senior leaders that has made that job simply less attractive. It's also a hard job right now because if you're one of those folks in the SES, much of what you're doing is trying to ensure or trying to assure the employees that work for you that despite mass layoffs, despite potential budget cuts, that the mission is still achievable. And having talked to some of folks in those positions, that is an incredibly hard message to carry if you yourself have doubts about whether the government will still be able maintain that mission. And I hope that in the future, there are going to be pathways for senior employees to come back into service and so that the federal government might be able to recapture some of that institutional knowledge.

I'm glad Elaine mentioned science, because I think that is another of these areas where we're learning in real time the scale of what the federal government does. If you look at scientific innovation, medical innovation, a huge proportion of that, something like 99% of new drugs are underwritten in some part by the National Institutes of Health. Like, it is an enormous enterprise that benefits the United States and has helped it to become the world leader in science. And so, I think once those people leave, they're going to be hard to recruit again in the future. The broader infrastructure of science partnership between higher education and the federal government, if that is collapsed, that is going to be difficult to rebuild. We're going to become less attractive as a venue for non-U.S. researchers to come and attract some of the best talent in the world. So I do worry there about permanent damage, not just to folks within NIH, but also the people whose work they fund and approve and peer review in order to keep scientific innovation going.

WEST: I mean Trump seems to think that Americans really want a widespread policy revolution here and even though people, as Elaine pointed out earlier, complain about government all the time, there's a difference between complaining about government and being upset about some agency, the IRS or another one, and wanting a wholesale dismantling of the federal government. I think he has misread his mandate. He did not win the election based on many of the things that he actually has been talking about in recent months.

I have one more question for each of you, then we're going to wrap up this panel and move on to our second set of panelists. and Elaine, I know you've written about this, it's a question of what happens to DOGE after Elon Musk leaves. He pretty much has left now, although Trump left it open, like Elon, if you ever want to come back you're welcome to do so, but at that Cabinet meeting it seemed like he was exiting. So what do you think will happen to DOGE and you know some of these efforts at downsizing government now that Elon Musk seems to have left that enterprise?

KAMARCK: Well, he's leaving behind people in each of the Cabinet agencies and those people, the DOGE people in, you know, the Defense Department or wherever are going to have to now interact with the secretaries of defense, the under secretaries, the assistant secretaries as they take their jobs. And the question is, if they come to an agreement on a plan, I think everything will be fine, right? If they don't come to agreement. Okay, if the cabinet secretary says, no, we can't do that because those people work on avian bird flu, for instance, right? Then I think the question becomes, do they send that up

the ladder to the White House? Do they go to the White House and ask Elon to come back in and take their side against the side of the Cabinet secretaries? Now, I worked in a White House long enough to know that one thing's that one thing my president, President Clinton, really didn't like was having to negotiate between warring factions in his staff. He just didn't have the time for that. You could pull that off maybe once, maybe twice, but you really couldn't keep doing that. And I think that my guess is Trump's probably no different there. So that's a risky strategy. Without Musk sitting literally in the Oval Office, he's gonna have to litigate these things before the president. And I think it'll be difficult for him. I think he will lose power just by not being there and having no official rank. Whether or not the DOGE people who are remaining can make a significant impact on policy remains to be seen. Because remember, we don't have a full government yet. We hardly have any assistant secretaries. In there. Over at Social Security, where by the way the DOGE team has been running wild and doing some very dangerous things, they had hearings for the new commissioner. The new commissioner has not yet been brought up for a vote. That's kind of serious. So you need a full government in place. You need a whole government in place and then we'll see what happens to the DOGE people. I think eventually they will lose. They will lose clout because they will not have Musk there every day campaigning for them.

WEST: I think DOGE has needed an enforcer, Musk clearly has been that person, so I do wonder what will happen now that he is left. Don, your views on what will happen to all the DOGE downsizing efforts now that Elon Musk seems to have gone back to his businesses.

MOYNIHAN: Yeah, and you can take this for what it's worth, because one thing I think that has been true is that those of us who comment on and look at government completely missed the potential impact of DOGE. Like, if you asked me six months ago, what will Elon Musk do in the federal government, I would have said the likelihood is he would be given some blue ribbon commission, that he joined a couple of Zoom meetings, but nothing ever came out of that. And so we, and myself very much included, missed the potential impact of DOGE right until they actually started working. So my predictions about the future might be similarly off the mark. And I think partly we struggle to conceptualize DOGE because we thought of it as a government reform commission, similar to, say, reinventing government or the grace commission. And that is not what it is. And I still struggle to conceptualize what DOGE is, but it is, I think, closer to a network rather than an organization. They have officials in multiple agencies. There is no clear official leadership. Remember Elon Musk's role was that of advisor. And I think he will still exercise influence by virtue of the fact that many of the people in DOGE are personally loyal to him rather than to President Trump. And he also owns a social media platform that is a political messaging platform where he's going to continue to complain about government and what it's doing wrong. And in that way, we'll have multiple both outside and inside means to influence government. Ultimately, DOGE is not very popular with the public, and I think less popular as time goes on with Cabinet secretaries who may want to assert their leadership in organizations. And so I think because of that, it will decline in influence over time. It'll also start to try and build some stuff. It hasn't built anything yet, but it'll start trying to build some AI tools to solve what it perceives to be the problems. And if those tools don't work terribly well, I think that will be another black mark against its operation within government. So I think over time, it will probably lose clout and influence as Musk departs the scene, but it will still have done tremendous, in my mind, damage in the meantime.

WEST: Well, on that note, I want to thank both Elaine and Don. You've both done a tremendous job in sharing your thoughts about the civil service and public service in

general, both the current situation as well as how we might think about that in the future. So again, to each of you, thank you very much for sharing your views.

So we now are going to move on to our second panel. So we're going to continue our discussion with some other leading experts. We have two sets of experts who are going to be joining us. And they are turning on their cameras right now. So I'd like to welcome Max Stier. He is the president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, who works very much on this topic that we have been discussing. Our other expert who I'd like to welcome is Dan Chenok, who is the executive director of the IBM Center for the Business of Government. And Dan also has tremendous expertise. So Max, I want to start with you, just your assessment of the administration efforts to reshape government operations.

STIER: Okay, well, Darrell, first of all, thank you very much for inviting me into this conversation. It's a pleasure to have a conversation with you and with Dan, who has deep, deep, deep subject matter knowledge and obviously, you had Don and Elaine in the last panel and I got a good chunk of what they had to say, which is, I thought, very insightful and hope to add a little bit. The answer to the question you asked is very easy. We've never seen anything like it. They're burning down our public infrastructure in a profoundly scary and damaging way. And the consequences are immense for us, even with just the damage that's been done over the last 100 plus days. And we don't really know where this all ends. I think more fundamentally is this question of the move back to a different version of the foundation of our government, and one that is a return to the spoil system and a notion that public power is appropriately used for private interest, as opposed to the public good. And that public power can be used in this I think is, frankly unique or close to unique, if that's a possible way to say something, that the executive branch can function without any of the separation of power constraints that the founders were so keen on ensuring would prevent the kind of thing that we're having today. So we are in a crazy world. We're through the looking glass as far as I can see. And I think we all should be both scared and activated to address what is all chips on the table moment.

WEST: Well, the good news is I do think Trump has our attention right now. People are paying attention. There are many groups who are active on a variety of different fronts. So it'll be interesting to see how the various kinds of pushbacks that we're seeing now, what kind of impact they will have. So, Dan, I know you focus a lot on how to achieve greater efficiency in government and the center that you've run has spent a lot of time working on that. How can we do a better job in government?

CHENOK: So thank you for the opportunity, Darrell, to join you and to join Max on this discussion and also to Elaine and Don, both great colleagues. So we do a lot of research at all levels of government, federal, state, local, and also international, on elements that can drive greater efficiency. And I think at a time of significant change, like we're in now, it's important to think about those mileposts that you can look to. And you got into some of this with the discussion with the first panel. Around what are the areas that can lead to greater efficiency if you're thinking about really improving government. And some of the elements that we recently did a paper with the Technology CEO Council, which is a group of CEOs ,about how you could make change that's been proven successful in industry and drive greater efficiency across a variety of different areas in government. For example, rather than have 37 different redundant systems to do a particular function, government has made some steps toward using common systems or shared services to do common functions like HR or financial management. There is significant opportunity for continuation in that path. You talked a little bit about technology

in the last panel. Obviously, artificial intelligence is something that's revolutionizing commerce in the private sector, and it's coming to government. We've been working with a variety of organizations, including the partnership, on this topic for a number of years. We have a lot of research about how AI can both improve citizen experience, create a greater experience, better experience in working with government, whether it's a sort of a tax system, like as most governments around the world have, or just something that's a basic citizen service, like even reserving a campsite and make that a better experience, while also improving efficiency and reducing cost.

And then importantly, finding out where there is waste, fraud, and abuse. Because there is in any system, whether it's a private sector bank or the government, and GAO's high-risk list demonstrates this, there is opportunity, and this is a decades-long issue. How do you identify that in a way that finds the adversaries quickly, but also allows the vast majority of users of government services that are in real need to get the service faster and easier? And AI can help you get there as well. And there's other technologies that we can talk about that we found in terms of greater efficiency. You know, people talked about moving to cloud computing which is a more efficient way to deliver networking across multiple agencies, multiple enterprises in a secure way. A lot of government inefficiencies because of cybersecurity issues, and the Department of Homeland Security has done work across multiple administrations to identify this. There are a number of areas where if we think about, all right, what is the government that we want to move toward in terms of efficiency? What are those mileposts? How can we move toward those that research shows can be beneficial?

WEST: So Max, I know you and your organization have spent a lot of time over the years working with senior managers and the senior executive level of the federal government. So I'm just curious, how do you see some of the changes that are taking place now affecting the leadership structure within a government and just the ability of agencies to perform their basic functions?

STIER: Yeah, so first I just want to foot stomp on Dan's proposition. There's a lot to be worried about right now. And there are a lot of opportunities for improvement, and especially with respect to technology and AI. Ultimately, however, I think it comes back to the question that you asked, which is a people issue. And amongst the people, it's going to be a leadership issue. And we've spent now going on five-plus years working with the senior executive service and senior folks in general in the federal government and out of state and local government in trying to upscale them around their understanding of AI, with the basic proposition that you can bring the technologists in, but if the leadership doesn't understand the value or the prioritization of it, you won't make the progress that you want.

Your question about where things stand, I mean, it's terrifying. Again, I'm going to run out of the appropriate adjectives. The reality is that, you know, we have an administration, and I'm just being direct and blunt because I think there's no purpose in doing it any other way, you know where the goal, stated goal was to traumatize the workforce. I don't know any leader of any organization that is sane or successful that has walked into their organization with that as their goal. And that is what this administration has done. If you go into any agency inside the federal government, you will find a workforce that is traumatized, that is fundamentally terrified about losing its job, it's confused about what it is that they need to actually get done. And we're seeing large numbers of people accepting this second offer for resignation because they're giving up. And this is true, especially at the leadership level, because it's the leadership in the federal agencies that has always been the intermediary between the new political teams coming in

and the larger workforce. And they're the ones that are bearing the brunt of the challenges that are taking place right now. Typically you think about the leaders as being, and we've seen this in our Best Places to Work rankings, typically they have a higher morale because they know more about what's going on. Right now, knowing more about was going on is actually not a plus because you've been more fundamentally targeted. And so you ask the question, I believe, like, what does this mean for mission delivery? And I think the answer is that it's going to degrade and it has already started to do so. There are some agencies where, you know, the entire workforce has effectively been sidelined, and that has resulted in that, you know, agency's work stopping entirely. In USAID, and to some degree CFPB would be examples of that. But I don't think any agency has actually been held harmless from the damage that has been done, especially to its leadership. I think there has been a targeting of leaders with a recognition that if you can sideline the leaders, the rest of the workforce is much less likely to put up a fuss and to speak up and speak truth to power. And I think that is part of the goal here.

And it comes back to that values point, that issue around the purpose of this action here. You're seeing a profound and deeply troubling move to make our government a instrumentality for a private agenda. And that is something we should not want or we should do everything we can to stop. And I'm happy to talk about what that looks like. But directly, leaders are terrorized, agencies are delivering less well. We have historically not great performance information, but the anecdotal information we're getting from the VA, Social Security Administration, IRS, you name it, is bad. And I think that we're seeing the front edge of harm becoming apparent, and it's going to get worse.

WEST: So Dan, how can we maintain the leadership structure within government and make sure that agencies can perform their basic functions?

CHENOK: For across many decades and the government has relied on, since 1978 specifically, a cadre of senior executives who are basically the leaders of the civil service in the federal level. Other governments have some similar structures where they have significant training for leaders. The issue, again, during times of significant change where there's workforce reductions, et cetera, changes to programs, changes to budgets, as Elaine said, it remains to be seen how the budget process will kind of flow through given the fiscal '25 and fiscal '26 decisions to come. But really the goal is to try to say how can leaders work and incentivize their staff at a time where there is these kinds of significant changes going on? How can we deliver better training to the leaders that are in government? How can we enable government leaders to work with academic and industry counterparts to create greater partnerships at a time where, you know, cross-sector partnerships are significant, especially in sort of the world that we live in in the 21st century, these kinds of partnerships often are the way that programs get delivered. So it's both how does the executive government manage their own workforce and how do they work across boundaries with other partners in doing so? And that can be from the non-government sector, the nonprofits, from industry partners, from academic partners, et cetera, and also importantly, intergovernmentally. I know we've been talking mostly at the federal level in this discussion, but a lot of the way the government gets experiences at the state and local level, there's gonna be different types of relationships that will occur between the federal, state, and local governments across the next several years. And how that kind of moves forward is something we'll have to also kind of take a look at in terms of how you how you encourage leaders to incentivize better performance from their teams.

WEST: So Max, I'm curious about how you see the role of Congress in this. Obviously, a lot of what Trump has done has been through executive orders, so he has, by

and large, bypassed Congress. But there have been some recent suggestions. He may put a rescission package before Congress and ask them to sign off on some of the cuts. Next year's fiscal budget already has come out and he proposed big reductions there as well. So how do you see Congress playing a role in this and what would you like to see Congress do?

STIER: I think it's pretty fascinating to watch Trump now start the normal processes of our system, submitting a budget, when in fact he is, up until now operating with the clear sense that none of those requirements apply to him. I mean, he has submitted a budget that a lot of members of Congress think isn't what they want, and yet he has done something much more dramatic, which is simply freeze the funding that Congress has already voted to appropriate for agencies. You look across the board, Trump's actions that are the most problematic are all actions that are within the purview of Congress. So you think about shutting down an agency like USAID, that's a statutorily created agency. Trump should not be able to do that. I mean, again, he's the executive. It's to execute, not determine whether an agency exists. And the same goes for freezing appropriated dollars. And the same goes for destroying the workforces of many, many agencies that are actually necessary to achieve the purpose of the agencies as they've been designed by Congress. I think if you had a chart of what's been broken, it begins with the president, who is the prime actor, but then Congress falls right afterwards because it's actually Congress that should be resisting the most because it is their prerogatives, more than any other entity in government that have been sidestepped by Trump's actions. Um, and this includes, you know, someone like Elon Musk, who, uh, is this, you know, free agent out there, not, you know, Senate confirmed and yet exhibiting, you know, extraordinary powers. And, you know, once again, there's no oversight, there is no, um response of consequence from Congress.

So, um I think that, and you had an interesting conversation about this before that with, you know, Elon Musk at least, you know, receding from the scene, that it is likely that DOGE does lose some of its power and that the agency leaders will be able to push back more vigorously and will have an interest in doing so because they're not gonna be able to get anything done because of the wrecking crew that DOGE has become. And so, I think the plans are for much larger personnel cuts. I think those will cause additional damage, substantially more damage, but it is possible that certainly the pace of destruction will diminish and it's possible that there'll be some kind of rebalancing. You know, you hope Congress will ultimately step up and do its job. Now, I say that when in fact, even beyond the present circumstances, Congress hasn't done its job and the fact that we have to go back to 1996 or something thereof to find a year in which they passed all their appropriations on time is a prime example of that. And it is also, you know, I think this is taking place in the context of, you know, battle between Congress and executive branch power that up until now has really been focused on trying to reduce the executive's power. So you think about the major questions doctrine or the pushback against Chevron, you're seeing these two things conflict and it's going to be interesting to see how the Supreme Court resolves that tension. But we're in a mess right now and unless Congress ultimately does its job, that mess doesn't have any hope of getting cleaned up.

WEST: So, Dan, I'm curious about the lessons from other countries. I know that you and your colleagues have looked not just at the United States, but looked at some other nations. Other countries are trying to figure out how to improve government, how to restructure things, how to do a better job. I'm just curious, what lessons have you picked up from other nations?

CHENOK: Yeah, I also want to just build on one comment Max made with regard to your question about Congress. We do have two significant budget processes -- I've worked at OMB for a long time -- that are sort of in play right now, right? There's the fiscal '25 budget discussion in Congress and then the president's recent budget proposal, which will be reviewed. And Max, it was 1997 that was the last year, I was at OMB at the time, and that they they did things on time. So those are going to, but how that process plays out, I think, will tell a lot about Congress's role in the prerogative and the ultimate disposition of a lot of the programmatic decisions that are happening right now will then get reviewed in that budget context.

If you look to other countries, one of the areas we've done is actually work with Australia. They just had an election recently, where they took a look at how do you build citizen trust at a time of significant technological change. We've had a number of different reports that we've done working with the government Australia there. And one of the key lessons sort of comes back to responsible use of technology and focus on service to the citizen and not sort of, you know, some other kind of ancillary task. Really communicate the benefit of the technology and that's something at a, you know, again, coming back to the thing that we want to have guideposts toward, how do we get to the government of the future that hopefully will carry the day over time? Australia has demonstrated that you can actually build significant trust at a time when a lot of people are saying technology can drive down trust by engaging with the public, by communicating effectively, especially about risk. A lot of times technology, people think that it will increase risk, right? If you introduce, let's say driverless cars in a city or something like that. Sometimes the risk of a new technology may actually be less than the current risk and governments can do a better job in communicating that. So one of those lessons is sort of applying it to citizens' real lives and then communicating in a way that makes sense to them.

I'd also look to some of the more technologically advanced countries that have long stood as a sort of a marker for advancements in the sector, like Singapore and Estonia, that have done a lot of digital democracy, direct democracy engagement with citizens and that sort of thing. And the last point I'll make is sort of a cross-border, international organizations have done a lot of research on this. OECD has a number of different studies, and again they come back to a lot sort of principles of good governance that should stand hopefully in the long term as markers for how do we proceed from this time of significant change.

WEST: OK, thank you. So Max, I'd kind of like to move from the present to the future and what you would like to see happen and what kind of government we would like to see in the future. And Dan has talked a little bit about the tech angle and how tech might be used to modernize a thing. What would you like government to look like in the future? What would like the public service to look?

STIER: Yeah, so look, I think it is important to be constructive and to think about where we need to go, not just admire a problem. And I do think it all begins with leadership, where you started. We do need leaders, ultimately, in my view, and I believe in sort of classic democratic view of the democratic process, that you want leaders who are fundamentally there for the public good and see their job as leading in the public sector, as being a steward of the public good. We do a ton of leadership training. We have a leadership model that we put together that is intended to provide guidance, and what distinguishes public sector leadership from leading in a private sector, and that really is a foundational element, the idea that you're there as a steward of the public good. So, it's

really important to start here, because if you don't have this, then none of this other stuff works. And I think we will see that in terms of incompetence and corruption, et cetera.

We also need leaders that understand their responsibility as stewards of the institution. And I think this is a problem that we've seen for decades and decades in our country, where the political leadership has largely focused on policy announcement and not policy execution and certainly not the health of the institutions that are needed to ensure successful execution over, you know, long periods of time. And we've seen what I would describe as rust in our government. We've seen, you know a legacy government that has not kept up with the world around it. And that is not to diminish in any way, shape, or form the accomplishments of our government, and certainly not diminish the civil servants who have been so fundamental in producing incredible results, despite the systems that have not been there to help them.

And again comes back to Dan's points around technology, we do have old technology. We do have silos that make it difficult for people to work across lines, and still civil servants have managed to make things work. So you say, what should the future of government look like? You asked me that, and I would say it begins with a democratically determined leadership group, because that's what, the accountability piece is fundamental here, that sees its job as being a steward of the public good, that understands that one of their core functions is to mind the store, to look after the health of our government, and then is willing to invest in the talent that is needed in our government, ultimately, to be able to provide good service to the American public. And so that means that we're gonna need a more accountable workforce.

We're gonna a need a workforce that has the broad technology skills that Dan talked about. We're going to need a workforce that, in my view, moves more frequently between the private and public sectors. I think the problem sets of the day require not just what we've talked about already, multi-agency action, but multi-level of government, multi-sector action. And so having talent that moves and flows across more vigorously will be important. You know, the 1978 reforms that Dan also mentioned, I believe, the idea of the SES really was that this mobile set of executives, it's never been real. And it's actually now more important than ever. So, I'm focusing a lot on the talent piece because in truth, we're in a knowledge-based world and the talent is almost everything. We certainly need the investment in technology, etc. We need a culture that is focused on customer service. We need to culture that's going to focus on solution and not just problem. One of the reasons why we haven't made the improvements that we need is we have a lot of infrastructure to find problems in our government and very little to identify successes or promising practices that are actually solutions to those problems. And so, you know, some, some very concrete ideas, for example, would be to require inspector generals when they find a problem -- and now inspector generals have been fired; that's a whole nother set of problems -- but you want inspector generals who are are identifying promising practices and not just the problems, which is, you, know, it is an easy thing to do. The solutions are harder. And if we did these things, we would see, you know, marked improvement in government. Take for example, the VA, you know Bob McDonald arrived in the Obama administration, you know CEO of Procter& Gamble, very first thing he did is that the VA needs to be a customer-focused organization. At that time, customer satisfaction numbers were in the mid-forties. It took several administrations, but what he started was carried forward and then the numbers have been in the high eighties, I believe. So, but why only at the VA? And why hasn't that success story been repeated across government? And I think answering that question is gonna be what brings us to a much, much better world in government.

WEST: I like your emphasis on talent and, you know, for an administration that spends a lot of time focusing on waste, fraud, and abuse, like getting rid of those inspector generals within each agency was a terrible move. We definitely need to bring them back. Dan, what kind of government do you want to see in the future? And I know you've done work on technology. How might technology help lead us to a better government.

CHENOK: Well, I'll also kind of echo Max's point about the outstanding work that gets done across the government, across many different administrations of both parties, by civil servants every day, who provide many of the services that people need all across the country in many different areas, housing, health care, transportation. If you think about how you go through your day and you actually try to figure out, like, where does government touch you? It's actually all the time. And you just did not realize it. While you're driving on the interstate highway or while you are eating a safe meal or many other areas. And I know this is Public Service Recognition Week, so I think it's important to point that out.

I think that if we think about future elements, in addition to the technology points that I made earlier, one of the areas that government does not as good a job as many of the private sector transformations that have occurred over time, is it tends to think about technology in big leaps. So it awards like a major contract for a lot of money or drives program outcomes for a major system, and it doesn't kind of divide things up in an agile fashion, kind of in bite-sized chunks, improving learning as we grow. There's a lot sort of learning that can be done from not just the technology sector, but from other leading companies about how government achieves these kinds of modernization goals that we talked about earlier in terms of technology adoption. I'll also say that we're living in a time that, independent of who's in government, there are more events that happen that are out of anybody's control with greater frequency and with greater magnitude of harm. And these can be a cyber event, a supply chain shock, some sort of a natural disaster, et cetera. And we've done work actually with the National Academy of Public Administration to help governments think about, how do you move to become future-ready for these kinds of shocks that can oftentimes really devastate a local community or a region or even sort of an international geographic area.

And how do you work across boundaries, not just to recreate the effort, like every time there's an emergency you have to go and sort of gather up people and sort do the governance on the fly. But how do you move to a future where government kind of learns, not just in the emergency management community or in other communities where that's their job, but how can they teach other communities about moving from learning from one event that they had to significantly respond to in terms of a crisis management situation and learn in the future? And there are not just learnings over time, but learnings across domains. So if there's a cyber incident that gets resolved by the public and private sectors working together, there may be lessons from that that you could basically translate to supply chain or other types of collaborative activities. And there's not really a space for those kinds of conversations. And so this future shocks initiative work that we're doing is really designed to help governments move into that kind of a future where you can take advantage and anticipate problems and help, again, mitigate risks in the future going forward for citizens and driving that forward. So those are a few areas I think that that hopefully governments can do more work together to address in terms of helping their citizenry.

WEST: Okay, we're starting to get some questions from our audience. And those of you who are watching, I want to remind you, you can submit questions to us by emailing us at events at brookings.edu. That's events at brookings.edu, so we have a question from Elizabeth, and I'll pose it to each of you. What steps can be taken to encourage young people to choose public service as a career?

STIER: Go ahead, Dan.

CHENOK: Well, as the father of three young people, I think it gets back to, what is it that you are thinking about in your career. Max's point about senior executives moving back and forth, I think if you look at the way that careers have evolved now, it's not just that you're looking at the public sector as your only stop. It can be a stop in a career that sort of leads to a series of experiences in a mission space that's important to you. If you care about healthcare or you care about transportation or housing, there are opportunities at all levels of government to come in and learn. There are opportunities with nonprofit organizations that work in these different sectors and there are are opportunities in the private sector in creating a hiring system. Don Moynihan referred to this earlier that makes it easier to bring people on, and enables them to move back and forth to have these kinds of rewarding career experiences. That can drive a significant government improvement because they can have the types of skills that bring to government coming from the private sector or going the other way, bringing skills from learning about government that can help companies do a better job in regulated industries, let's say. So I think we need to encourage the ease of hiring. And also greater understanding among people coming into the workforce of the significant missions that government agencies perform that can be in the area of interest that they're really passionate about.

WEST: Max, your thoughts on young people.

STIER: So, look, we spent 25 years focused on trying to bring a new generation into federal service. And I will say right now, that's not going to happen for the moment. We've got an administration that is trashing the federal workforce, that's firing all the young people. It's shut down the president's Management Fellows Program, the probationary employees, you name it. And I think we have to not sugarcoat that. It is a, it is a phenomenal challenge. I gave a talk at Georgetown to a group of students, and the moderator asked, you know, how many were there at Georgetown because they wanted to work in the federal government? Every hand went up. And then he asked, how many of you have your had your plans upended, and every hand in the audience went up. That is the reality for young people thinking about federal service today. And that's an immense problem, and it's an incredible waste, and one of, you know, a large bucket of issues that this administration has unnecessarily created.

Now that said, there are other ways to, even in today's world, participate in public service. And my argument is always to talk about purpose. I think most people are motivated more by purpose than anything else. And there is no platform in which you can fulfill that desire for purpose that is more powerful than working in the public sector, because you're doing it on behalf of all of us. And I work at a non-profit, it's still not the same thing. When you have the imprimatur of the public and taxpayer resources behind you, that is a different issue. You know, if you're, you know, my wife will say a fallen lawyer, you're a, you know, a lawyer in government, you can stand up and say, I'm representing the United States. That is a powerful, powerful, powerful statement. So what do we need to do in the here and now? We need to direct interested talent into other avenues like state and local government. Frankly, that's going to be true for existing

federal employees as well. We need to make sure that we're sharing stories about, and this comes back to Dan's point, about what those broader opportunities are in public service.

And we need to be sure we are clear that what is happening now is not normal. Because I would not want a generation of people coming up to think that what's happening now is what always has to happen, or what has frankly ever happened. And so that they see it as abnormal and believe that it doesn't have to be. And I think we hopefully will get to a point where, again, sanity is returned and we are rebuilding not to where we were, but to where we need to be. And that's going to have to involve bringing a new generation into our government. It was a problem prior to this administration. Only 7% of the workforce was under the age of 30. That number was about 4% for a technologist, which is, you know, obviously upside down and both numbers are way too low. But it is difficult. And I think you deal with this difficulty by taking it head-on in conversations with young people. And you appeal to the fact that this is the challenge, like this is how you make a bigger difference is bringing us back. So anyway, that's as quick an answer as I can offer.

WEST: Okay, thank you. So I have a question from Bianca and, you know, we know that public service typically has been seen as a stable and secure career with good benefits. And she mentions the fact that given the changes to the student loan forgiveness program, do you foresee an exodus of public service to the private sector because that particular benefit is no longer there? And I would just tack on to that, you know, if people no longer see the public service career as stable and secure and having good benefits, how are we going to get anybody to work in government if they're going to end up making less money than they might in the private sector? Either one of you wants to jump in on that?

CHENOK: So Max, you want to go ahead?

STIER: I'm happy to. I mean, look, I think this is a little bit unfortunate. In my view, the idea that the benefit of federal service or public service in general is stability, isn't the appeal that I particularly think that any level of government should be basing its value proposition on. And I think it is true historically that public sector jobs have seen you know, less of the, of what in the private sector is more turmoil in terms of changes in headcount, et cetera, in organizations. But I don't think that's the population that you particularly want to appeal to. I think the purpose piece is something that you want to appeal to. I think that the issue, and you talked about this with the prior panel, about pay is a real one. I think that we, like so much in government, we haven't modernized the systems in government. So you have a pay system at the federal level that was created in 1949 and was based on a workforce that was largely clerical and, as you heard from Elaine, is now extraordinarily professional. And what you had in '49 was a pay system designed to create internal equity and we need a pay system that has market connectivity now. So you're not gonna ever be in a situation where you're competing at the, at the highest levels of pay for the best talent, but you can be more in the ballpark than we are today and we can actually devote resources in some kind of proportionality to the market requirements to actually to create better and more comparable pay. So I think modernizing the pay system would be one way to address this at the federal level that would have huge benefits.

And so there's a lot of things like that that can be done, but, fundamentally, if you combine that core value proposition of purpose that the federal government offers with some, at least in the ballgame capability around leaders, you would have a value proposition that would be extraordinary. Our problem in the government, most people,

when they think about talent or the talent issues, think about recruiting talent into the government. That's actually a tertiary problem. The primary problem for our federal government has been that it has not actually valued talent and treated it in a way that it was a priority for bringing in the best talent and retaining that talent. That's certainly true for young people. There's been no demand signal from the government that they want young people. There haven't been investments in management to ensure that the young people are actually retained, and then the process of bringing people in has been broken. And it's only after you get through those three barriers that you get to the question, is there sufficient talent interested? If the federal government, and this is pre-Trump, had actually done a decent job with those first three things, it would be awash with extraordinary talent. And I think that's true in a post-Trump world as well. Like we need to focus on those front-end things before you even get to the question of trying to excite talent.

And I wouldn't worry about the stability piece. I do think that, as I mentioned earlier, that more mobility is actually a good thing. I don't think that has to come from the political appointees. I think there should be way fewer political appointees. You know, 4,000, I think it's a vestige of the of the spoils system. You know, most democracies, and Dan has done a really good job of comparing, they count their political appointes in tens and maybe 100, not in the thousands. Name another democracy that's successful that basically gives its ambassadorships to donors rather than to experts. That makes no sense. There should be no pay to play when you're dealing with public power and public stewardship.

CHENOK: Yeah, many of our peer democracies are parliamentary systems, so you have different types of incentives around the levels of sort of career versus political people in agencies in their civil services, et cetera. And I also agree with Max that modernizing the hiring process, you know, I mentioned this earlier, it's something that really can help bring in talent, I think, enabling these types of career ladders so that you can move back and forth and. And have that be part of a rewarding career. As I talk to young people, they talk about wanting to be able to move from opportunity to opportunity. And I think thinking about the government promoting careers, again, coming back in the areas that people are passionate about, where they can find purpose, as Max said earlier, is something really important.

One point about pay. At the entry level, I think Elaine made this point in the first panel, pay is actually fairly competitive across sectors. I mean, there are probably some, some areas where if you go into a financial services company, you'll probably obviously make more. But across the board, it's fairly similar. It's at the top as you get toward the management that these pay compression issues come into play. I'm on the board of the Senior Executives Association; this is one of the issues that the association has long talked about. So really it's, I think, thinking about enabling easier entry points, enabling more flexibility in hiring, modernizing systems, making it so that once you hire, it's a good experience to work in government. And that gets back to the modernizing technology Don Moynihan talked about. The point about the Privacy Act, which has needed to be modernized, I used to oversee the Privcy Act when I was at OMB and that was 25 years ago and it was old then. So we need to think about how do we bring these kinds of systems that govern how individuals in government do their work every day into the modern era.

WEST: So Max, we have a question from Christian, which I will direct to you. How are recent administrative changes and staffing cuts affecting civil servant morale and what can be done to support and motivate the remaining workforce?

STIER: So it's a very, very, very important question and it comes back again to, in a knowledge-based world, you know, your personnel is everything and their morale really matters. And any private sector, well-run company knows that. And frankly, any public sector leader should know that as well. One challenge for us is, we were instrumental in getting a law passed that requires federal agencies to conduct an annual employee survey. We produce the best places to work rankings over the course of more than two decades, and the Office of Personnel Management has delayed initiating the survey. That's the basis of most, but not all the data that we get. And they fired the people who actually do all the data stuff at OPM. So this is not a very good sign. And one of the challenges coming back to the root cause of dysfunction in our government is the lack of real-time performance information. This is really, really powerful information. To ensure better performance and to hold people accountable and to offer a roadmap for better management.

So we are flying blind. So what we get instead is anecdote. I don't think this is going to be very surprising to you or to anybody that morale stinks. How could it not? I mean, frankly, the goal has been to traumatize the workforce. And I'm not suggesting that every single Trump appointee is trying to do this, but the the broad actions that this administration has taken so far have really been directed in that regard. And there's some profoundly disdainful and wrong things that have been done and said, and you look at that very first email that went out, the fork in the road one that fundamentally said, give up on your public sector job and go to a private sector one where you have a higher productivity, higher value to perform. Like it's just wrong what they've done and they said.

Now, this is Public Service Recognition Week, and we just did an event here with Casey Cep, and we were involved in the book that Casey and Michael Lewis put together on who is government. And I was very pleased to see that the Office of Personnel Management put out a statement saying support public sector employees, they're important. That's the first thing, that's the very first thing that I've seen that is anywhere in the right direction. It comes on the heels of just miserable treatment of feds. So I think, as I said earlier, every leader I've spoken to about their agency, every line employee I've had spoken to, they've all communicated the same thing, which is they feel scared, betrayed, and frankly perplexed by what is being done to them. The flip side of purpose being the strong motivator for federal employees is that their core self is being hurt by the inability to do what it is that they're there to do. I'm very, very, very troubled by this. I don't think this is something you can turn around, you can rebuild trust in, even if there's an intent to do so, and I really have not seen that intent yet. So I think we're in a bad situation. I think people do not -- our government does so many things that we take for granted, and I think we're going to see people caring about our government because of absence rather than because of awareness of the good things that they're getting. We're going be losing so much, and people are going to be put at risk, and bad things I think have already started to happen in ways that will unfortunately be a wake-up call for the public. But I also think that we need to be very clear about the cause of that. And we need to make sure that those stories are being communicated truthfully and effectively.

WEST: Dan, your thoughts on how to motivate the existing workforce?

CHENOK: Well, I think finding examples of people that are making a difference, a positive difference, the partnership's done a program for many years, that there was two American medals, which is sort of the highlights among the best work that's done across the government. Max, I hope you'll continue that program because I think it's really important to provide examples of the people that in any circumstance are engaging there.

There are other awards programs in different areas that recognize good work. The Federal 100 recognizes some of the best work in technology. There are awards for financial management, et cetera. So thinking about telling those stories and providing examples for people to look to can give people a sense that there is something, again, that you come to the public sector primarily because you care about the mission of serving the nation. And it could be in a particular area, particular a topic, you know, defense or intelligence or a civilian topic like health care or education could also be because you think that, you know, government is there to serve the people and you believe in that mission in and of itself. Those of us that have been in and around government probably have drunk that Kool-Aid a lot over the years. So it's important to provide people with sort of that long-term milestone that we're as we move forward. From a times of significant change people can see that there is there is a positive future to build.

WEST: We have a question from Todd --

STIER: Hey, Darrell, can I quickly just say, just in response?

WEST: Sure, go ahead.

STIER: So we are doing the Sammies program. It's going to be different this year. It's on June 17th, I believe. And it will be at Johns Hopkins, not at the Kennedy Center. And more details to come. But I concur that it's so important. We need a recognition culture. That is how you get better behavior. No organization gets better if all you do is kick it. And this is an organization and workforce that's been getting a lot of kicks. That's not good. So I think recognition, I think community, when things are tough, it helps a lot to have other people around you who can share experience and support you. And I think all of us need to be supporting feds in every way we can. We have a website up called fedsupport.org that is trying to provide critical information, honestly, you know, a front door to legal help, coaching, everything we can possibly do, we're trying to do. We'll be doing a nationwide virtual job fair for feds. We have 130 state and local organizations that have signed up to offer jobs at that job fair in the next few weeks. So yeah, we ought to be doing everything we can to be supportive.

WEST: Well, I'm glad to hear you're continuing your recognition ceremony. I agree that's really important. It's great you're doing the jobs fair and that website, I believe, is fedsupport.org. All right, great. So Todd has a question and he wants to know, what will it take for the U.S. to develop the next generation of public servants across several key areas? And he specifically singles out areas of diplomacy, the intelligence community, and federal law enforcement. Those are areas that have faced significant cuts lately. So how can we develop those particular areas?

CHENOK: So I'll start out. So actually the budget situation is differential across those three areas. You know, in intelligence and law enforcement, I think, you know, there's the budget that's been proposed is actually seeing some potential increases as well as some different programs to decrease. Clearly diplomacy is an area where the State Department, you know, is uh, being affected by the current current recommendations in terms of that. So, how do you think about, uh identifying areas for people to come into work in those communities? I think it's sort of a, another version of, um how do you continue to show that, you know, the U.S., um, and its work to protect the public through law enforcement to, um uh, work in the international community and intelligence circles and in, in sort of diplomatic circles. Something that's so important to the future of the country that gets back to, again, the sense of purpose. And there are many people who

are in public policy schools, many students now, who are looking to say, what are the opportunities for that future coming in? And as they do, this gets back to, if we have a government where it's easier to come in, easier to perform your stated mission goal. And we work especially, I want to come back to, we work with schools to provide education that's sort of practical and give students an understanding of what it's really like to work in government in those areas. A lot of times schools do a great job sort of teaching more theory, but not so much on the practice side. And in all three of those subject areas as well as many others, there's a real practical element that it takes a while to learn. If we can do a better job training entry level government workers who are in school sort of learning about these topics, to say, all right, how do I come in and be successful in these three mission areas or others that the schools can help provide for a better pipeline in that area?

WEST: Max, your thoughts on that?

STIER: I'm going to steal from Dan, and that is that in today's world, no matter what you're talking about, law enforcement, intelligence, diplomacy, whatever else it is, really having a good grounding in technology and AI is going to be important. And so that is one differentiator from the past that I think is, no matter what it is that you're doing, having that facility is going be critical. I do think even in those areas, which are you know, so prominently inherently governmental, I still think that that exposure to, you know whether it's global environments or different levels of government, the private sector I do think that broader sense, I think mobility is just really, really important. And it's always been true but I think it's even more true today that when you walk in other people's shoes you understand their, their issues, you have relationships, and it's like travel where you learn about your own home country. So those would be some things that I would emphasize more in the world we're entering into.

WEST: Okay, one last question for each of you, and then we will close things out. And this concerns what is happening at the state level. I know each of work at multiple levels of government, and I'm just curious, what are we seeing at the state level? Are there states that are mimicking what we're seeing at the national level? Are there states that are doing other things? Are there states that are introducing important innovations in their particular workforce?

CHENOK: Thanks, Darrell. I'm actually, as you know, talking to you from Boston, the capital of Massachusetts. Yesterday I was in Atlanta, Georgia, and last week I was Albany. So I've been with state officials in three different states, and they're looking at challenges that are similar. How do they, in a world where the federal-state relationship is changing and is likely to change again in the future, how do they develop leaders that can act in a sort of a different way in terms delivering programs where there may be more state autonomy, where in the past there might have been more sort of federal regulation and the federal government may basically ask the states to do more in terms of a particular programs and budgeting. So how do they develop leaders in that capacity? How do they modernize their technology stack? A lot of the topic that we've been discussing here, a lot of government at the state level are the first, sort of the first line, especially, and also their counterparts at the local level, sort of, the first line of experience for citizens. So how can they work to introduce some of these technologies? How can they use artificial intelligence to improve citizen experience? These are challenges that they are, they're facing. And then they're also, again, interested in how do we work together at a time when there are risks that are continuing to occur? I talked earlier about the Future Shocks Initiative that we're doing with the National Academy of Public Administration. That initiative is intergovernmental, and the states are looking to see how can they, who have to, again be

sort of the first line of response to citizens in those areas, how can they do a better job working across in a multi-sector with industry, with academic institutions in their states, and with the federal government do more? So technology, people, and partnerships are clearly at the top of mind in the conversations I've been having recently.

WEST: Max, what are you seeing at the state level?

STIER: So I will be a little bit less diplomatic than Dan. The turmoil in the national level is causing a lot of grief at the state level because you have a federal government that has receded in its responsibilities in many places. And you also have the exertion of federal authority to push particular ideology in a way that frankly, certainly not at this scale has ever been seen before. So I think state governments are scrambling to try to figure out how to manage the increased workload that they have, the decreased budget that they're gonna have to address, and the difficulty of dealing with in some instances, a hostile federal government. So I this is so early in that states are still trying to figure this out. I think part of the backdrop where almost all states are, you know, diminished, you know, budgetary situations. And so I think this question, frankly, of effective government is made even sharper for the state government. I think is also true at the local level. And I believe that the public demand for better from government, which frankly is part of what has fueled the original energy behind DOGE, I think that it was taken in a very bad direction, is something that states and localities have to address. They need to figure out how to better meet the public's expectation, and they need to do better government. And so I'm hopeful that we'll see more experimentation, more investment, more focus on better delivery of services to the public, and more learning, something that, again, Dan talked a lot about, which I think is so fundamental, both in our own country as well as learning from global example.

WEST: Well, Max and Dan, I want to thank each of you for sharing your insights. Each of you are doing terrific jobs at your respective organizations. Here at Brookings, we write regularly about these topics on our FixGov blog. You can read that at brookings.edu. So thank you very much for tuning in today. Thank you.