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Keynote Speaker:

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Panelists:

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. WHITEHURST: Good morning. Welcome to Brookings. I'm Russ Whitehurst. I am director of the Brown Center on Education Policy here at Brookings and I'm very pleased to be at the podium to introduce our speakers today and to engage in what I hope will be a very interesting conversation about early childhood education.

Unless you've been on vacation with your TV and telephone turned off for the last month, you will know that the president in his State of the Union address introduced a proposal for a substantial expansion of pre-K for 4-year-olds in this country, accompanied by other proposals for expansion of early intervention programs from birth to 3, and, in fact visitation programs for low-income mothers who are pregnant. Clearly, the intent is to do something about what is a very serious issue in this country and I think it's an issue that is mirrored, though not precisely, in many other countries, and that is that by the time children begin formal schooling, whether it's in kindergarten or first grade, there are very large differences in their readiness for school. Those differences are reflected in knowledge of academic types of things such as letters of the alphabet, but more importantly, it's reflected in vocabulary and background knowledge and the whole cognitive development of the child. And those

differences can be quite large by the time children enter kindergarten in this country and they are important.

So, we now have at least substantial studies, one done in the U.S., two done in international settings, that demonstrate very strong relationships between children's abilities that can be tested when they're 5-years-of-age and later outcomes.

We have in this country a study called "The Tennessee Class Size Experiment" or STAR that involved a random assignment of children to smaller or larger classes in Tennessee back in the 70s. Those participants had been followed into adulthood. We know how they're employed and how much they are earning and one of the very interesting findings there is not related to class size, but just related to the predictability of their early ability. So, a one standard deviation difference for all of the (inaudible) in the audience, a one standard deviation difference and their test scores at age five is correlated with an 18 percent difference in earned income at age 30.

So, a child's ability to answer a question like "what's the name of this letter?" and related questions. Predict earnings, predict college-going, predict all sorts of important things in adulthood. And, so, these are differences that exist at the time children are entering the school house door that have lifelong consequences for them as well as lifelong

consequences for society.

So, we know that these differences are important and it's good, I think, that President Obama is focused on them, but it has raised many questions about what preschool programs should look like and some of those questions include what should the curriculum be? Should it be a curriculum that focuses on play and social interaction or should it be a curriculum that includes explicit attempts to pass on to children particular sets of knowledge and ability? Should teachers in a preschool program be worried about whether a child has low level of vocabulary and be engaging in specific interactions to increase that? And, as somebody is suggesting to me from the audience, of course, it could be both. So, we do have debates about the nature of what the preschool experience should be.

We have questions about the teacher qualifications should be. The president suggested that preschool teachers that are going to be a part of this new cost-sharing arrangement with the federal government should be paid equivalently to elementary school teachers and presumably should have similar credentials. Is that necessary? Would that have a positive impact on children? What would it do to cost? It's likely to drive up cost quite substantially because adults who work in pre-K centers in this country are not paid anywhere close to what school

teachers are paid, typically.

We have the issue of whether the program, as it is sponsored by the federal government or state governments should be universal, that is should be without cost to any parent who enrolls his or her 4-year-old or whether it should be targeted, that is that costs should be covered for lower-income families, but families who could afford to pay should be paying themselves.

We have the question of where the services should be delivered. Should they be delivered in public schools by extending classroom space down so that it accommodates 4-year-olds? In other words, should school districts be responsible for delivering this service or should this be a service in which a variety of providers are able to participate and parents get to choose whether they want them on a (inaudible) program or whether they want the state pre-K program or whether they want something else.

We have a very vexing question about how will we know what is quality? Should we measure quality by some arbitrary, though rational, set of inputs like how much money is being spent per child or should we focus on quality by looking at outcomes, by asking and answering the question of whether children who go through a particular pre-K program in fact are ready for school, an outcome-based assessment

versus an input-based assessment?

As I was talking with some of the people you'll meet on the podium later, earlier today, we got into the very interesting issue of the difference between the way education systems are managed in European countries and Nordic countries, where typically, there is a central ministry that makes decisions about what is going to happen versus the way it's managed in this country in a federalist system where the federal government traditionally has very little control of what happens in education and where even the president's proposal is going to have to go through a lot of knocks and slams before it's a possibility of impacting the decisions that states will make or local communities will make. So, there's the federalism issue and how that plays out here. So, there are lots of issues. We have been having an interesting discussion in this country about them since the president made the issue of early childhood education prominent through his State of the Union Address and through later statements and through the release by the White House of some more details of his plan.

So, we have all of this interesting discussion and I was very pleased that we had the opportunity to have some insight about how these issues are addressed in Nordic countries because they are different in terms of the way they approach this. I mentioned the ministry model. We

could look at differences in terms of level of investment, but there are also differences among the Nordic countries and how they address early childhood education. Again, from the earlier discussion this morning, Finland provides very generous parental leave, up to three years for a mother who wants to stay home or I suppose mothers and fathers can share that responsibility, a mother who wants to stay home with her young child, whereas in Denmark, by age one, most of the care is provided in a center-based setting. So, very -- differences in policy there.

So, I'm looking forward to the presentations we're going to have. I hope that I and all of us in the audience will gain some insights not only about what the Nordic countries are doing. It's cool to be Nordic.

We're in the middle of the Nordic Cool celebration. If you don't know anything else, it's going on in town. Please check the embassy Web sites. There are many opportunities. So, it'd be wonderful to learn what's going on and to reflect and discuss what that means for preschool education and the United States.

So, at this point, let me take the opportunity to introduce our principal speaker today. You will see who she is. If you can look at the overhead projector, Christine Antorini is minister for Children Education in Denmark. She's a member of the Danish Parliament for the Social Democrats. Education has been a cornerstone of her political work for a

number of years, being the spokesman on education for social democrats in the Danish Parliament. She's one of the most experienced and knowledgeable Danish politicians in the field of education and one of the areas in which she has been a leader is the introduction of proposals for reform of the Danish Public School System and the improvement of quality for youth education and she's had a particular focus on early education and care in an effort to bring Danish practice in line with the growing knowledge about the kind of learning environments young children prosper in. And, so, her emphasis has been on how to take an emphasis that has previously been a play emphasis and to combine it with a learning emphasis so that play and learning are both important.

So, with that introduction, I ask you to help me welcome our guest and listen to what she has to say. Please join us. (Applause)

MS. ANTORINI: Thank you so much. I'm very excited about the opportunity of being a part of today's debate with all of you and a special, warm thanks to you, Russ, for hosting this debate. I'm very glad that we could do it here at this very experienced place.

I would like to start with this picture. This is a very typical Danish dad. Perhaps he's on his way to the daycare with his kids and even though working full-time, he and his wife still has time to be with the kids and enjoy a flexible work-life balance. And this is an actual part of the

flexible Danish labor market, where employment for women is among the highest in the world. Actually, we have the fifth highest in the OECD. We think it's very good. I know somebody would think it's not so good, but we are quite proud of that in Denmark. And even in these times of crisis, the unemployment rate in most of the Nordic countries is still relatively low compared to other countries.

In Denmark, parents can share up to one year of parental leave and after this first year of the child's life, both parents have returned to their full-time jobs. Actually, the dad on this picture, his name is Ahn and he's the head of the Department for Children, Primary School, and Low Secondary School in my administration. Even our permanent secretary still has time to pick up his kids from school some days. In this way, you can talk of daycare facilities as highly necessary, but they are, indeed, more than just practical arrangements.

And this brings me to today's topic on early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries. We like to think that having your child attending a daycare is part of a unique Nordic tradition, where care, playing, and learning are integrated. This is why daycare is actually preferred to home-based care.

In Denmark, I'm the minister for both daycare and primary and lower secondary levels of education and I have high ambitions about

improving the educational system all the way from 0 to 18-years-of-age. And this also why the government decided to establish a new ministry for both children and education. There was a need to emphasize that a child does not begin to learn from the age of 6, a child learns from birth.

I would like to begin by outlining the foundations for the concept of a specific Nordic road to education and does that even exist? This exact question is the subject for a new collaboration between all the Nordic countries: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. Finding the characteristics and the best practice for a new Nordic school from daycare to other secondary schools from 0 years to 18-years-old. And in light of this collaboration, I'm very pleased that two of my Nordic colleagues have joined us today, Göran here from Sweden and Tuula Peltonen from Finland and I'm looking forward to hearing your thoughts on today's subject.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Education has decided to set up a group to work with the Nordic (inaudible) to education. Going on input from experts both from Nordic and international countries and distinguished practitioners, the result of the work is scheduled to be presented at a Nordic conference in Copenhagen this autumn. So, now is not the time for drawing definite conclusions on this matter. However, I do believe it's fair to say that the Nordic countries share many values,

although our educational systems are far from identical in structure.

But they all stem from the same societal origin, the Nordic welfare state, and the core value is equal opportunities for all and this includes gender equality, free health care, high social security, also called “flexicurity” sometimes, a hierarchy of social trust. You could call it social capital. And democratic participation. Moreover, this ensures a flexible labor market and, in fact, 71 percent of the Danish models in the age from 25 to 54 with children under 3 are employed. Seventy-one percent.

Last year, I visited the U.K., and experienced how people were surprised that almost all Danish children attend a daycare from the age of 1. And maybe even more surprised that the women in Denmark don’t take it as a punishment. So, the Danish daycare system also sparks a vivid debate on gender equality. These Nordic welfare state characteristics were highlighted in a recent article in the magazine *The Economist*, about the Nordic countries as the next super model for state reforms. And I believe all of these aspects of the welfare state are influenced by and very related to the way our education system works.

For example, the Nordic countries are at the top of the world in terms of lifelong learning activities and this is an essential part of having a flexible labor market. We have free education for all, also at the universities, and generous students’ grants and loan schemes. In

Denmark, we have a vocational education and training system with a high degree of labor market involvement and workplace training. And in our primary and lower secondary schools, the pupils are generally very happy and thriving. They are integrated in one unity school, where the pupils stay together all the way through. The students excel in disciplines such as creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and democratic knowhow is essential. And all of the Nordic countries are in the top of 25 in terms of student performance.

However, in spite of these strongholds, we certainly also do have our serious challenges. So, I'm not just here to preach sort of the Nordic gospel here to you.

Regardless of substantial investments in education, the Nordic countries are still only a bit more than in the middle when it comes to the achievement of skills in math, reading, and science. With Finland, I must say, as a notable exception. And in Denmark, a much smaller proportion of the bilingual young people graduate with a general or vocational of a secondary certificate compared to the population in general, especially the boys fall behind.

These are challenges which we will and must address. But while trying to do this, we also have to be careful not to throw out the baby with the dirty water and I believe it's possible to cope with our challenges

with inspiration from (inaudible) so in order to develop our educational systems, we very much need to learn from the successes of other countries.

Today's topic, early childhood education and care, is in my opinion one of the strongholds of Danish and Nordic education. And, also, in this case, our early childhood education and care tradition is very much related to our welfare states. I would like to give you a short introduction to the development of the Danish staircase system.

So, first, let's go back in time. In fact, we can go all the way back to the time of the industrialization and urbanization in the 19th Century which led to a growing working class. They were in need of a third party that could look after their children. Asylums were established, but primarily with an approach based on supervision and harsh discipline.

The first real kindergartens were established in Copenhagen back in 1871 with a change of approach and pedagogical methods that focused on how to stimulate the child's development. The Universal System we have in Denmark today can be tracked back to the 1960s, where there was full employment in Denmark for men and a growing need in the labor market for more employees. And this was tackled by including more women in the workforce, and in 1970, half of all married women had entered the labor market, a very positive development important. And one

of the means of getting more women into the labor market was expanding the amount of daycare facilities. This is solution perhaps different than you would choose here.

In Denmark, a relatively sizable public sector is not considered a problem as long as it works. Today, the Danish Flexicurity model is highly depending on a universal and flexible daycare system. This system also creates a possibility of a coherent work life balance for both men and women, where it is possible to pursue both career and family goals. And the women like to work instead of being at home. And we have succeeded in creating a Danish daycare model with four important characteristics: high quality, a universal system that everyone has access to and can afford, public engagement, and a system that supports gender equality.

The figures support that. Nowadays, almost all children in Denmark are in daycare. Ninety-one percent of the children between 1 and 2-years-of-age and 97 percent of children between 3 and 5-years-of-age. Ninety percent of parents are satisfied with the daycare system and sixty percent of the staff is educated pedagogues and they have three-and-a-half years at a university college, which is a term we used for the educated staff in our daycare facilities.

Looking at the Nordic countries in general, there are many

similarities in this aspect, although our systems also are not identical. In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, we have nearly universal systems where almost every child is enrolled in generally high-quality daycare.

Now, let me go a little bit more into details with the Danish Daycare System. Since 2007, daycare facilities have had their own legislation. The act on daycare sets out the objectives and the overall content of the daycare facilities and work in this way as framework legislation.

The municipalities are then responsible for meeting the objectives and carrying out tasks set out by the national legislation. The system is financed through public grants and parents' payment. The municipalities pay 75 percent of the operating costs, and the parents, a maximum of 25 percent. Low-income families pay between 0 to 25 percent based on the parents' financial situation. On average, Danish families spend 9 percent of their net income on daycare. All children have equal access to daycare facilities and all children are entitled to a place in a daycare from 26 weeks regardless of the parents' statuses, as for example, unemployed, in work, or students.

The municipalities are punished economically if they do not provide the guaranteed daycare. And the effect of this is evident. All 98 municipalities comply with the legislation.

To support families in finding a balance between work and family life, we have implemented a flexible system with different types of daycare options: affordable and accessible daycare and full-time opening hours. But not only is the framework important, in order to ensure quality in the pedagogical work in daycare facilities, we introduced an obligatory pedagogical curriculum in the legislation back in 2004. This contains specific pedagogical learning objectives in order to ensure high quality and coherence in the pedagogical work.

The pedagogical curriculum focuses directly on everyday activities, where play and learning can go hand in hand and where the children's early learning and development can be focused in six areas: language, personal development, social competencies, nature and natural phenomena, cultural value and artistic expressions, and what we could call body and move. We would like all children to move every day from when they're very small. So, we really like the campaign that Ms. Obama has pointed out. "Let's Move." It's "Let's Move," yes. We think that's great. Also with the small kids.

Daycare facilities are not schools with traditional blackboard teaching, but arrangements with friendships are formed and where interesting and challenging activities are managed by committed adults. In this way, we do not consider or call these facilities preschools. They do

more than preparing the children for school. Furthermore, language assessment and stimulation are compulsory for children who are assessed by staff to be in need of language stimulation and for all children outside organized daycare at the age of 3.

An important question is: Why invest in daycare?

International research gave us the answer. One example is Nobel Prize Winner James Heckman and his research that shows that the return on public investment in high-quality childhood education is substantial. This is not a new result. Since the 1970s, research has shown that for each dollar you invest by enrolling a vulnerable child into a daycare of high quality, you gain seven over the years.

More than 40 years of research, but what has changed the past few years is that everyone is now talking about the effect of high-quality daycare. You're doing it here today, and so are economists, the OECD, and the European Union.

And I know that President Obama and we have at least this in common: This is convincing evidence. I couldn't help but notice State of the Union where the president proposed a preschool education program that will work with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America and he received a standing ovation for this. This is important because we know from research that the first six years of a

child's life is most important in relation to learning and the development of basic competences. And the quality of early childhood education can actually protect children from the consequences of less-effective primary schools.

You must prevent that children start the race of life already behind, as your president expressed. Denmark has come a long way in this aspect where there are still important challenges ahead of us and we shall continue to work on raising the bar and improving the quality of all daycare facilities in Denmark.

This is an ongoing effort and the Danish government is now focusing on how we can improve the pedagogical practice and children's learning by improving the education of pedagogues and launching a daycare development program called the Future Daycare, where the goal is to improve the work with the themes in the pedagogical curriculum and the involvement of parents in children's learning and social inclusion. This would be done through research that is to give us knowledge of which strategies are the most fruitful in practice.

I'm looking forward to getting input on this important subject both from my Nordic colleagues here today and from Brookings Brown Center on education policy. Thank you for giving me the floor. (Applause)

MR. WHITEHURST: Well, thank you for the very interesting

address.

I'd like to introduce the two people up here that you have not been formally introduced to already. Surely, I've practiced how to pronounce the names, but it's given that I will mess this up. So, just bear with me.

Tuula Peltonen is our guest from Finland. As you know, Finland has been to go-to place in policy conversations for the last 15 years if you want to talk about education reform. She's a member of the Finnish Parliament, Social Democratic Party. She's a special education class teacher and has been focusing on education, social issues, and her parliamentary career. She's been a member of the Education Culture Committee since 2007 both in the Finnish Parliament and the Nordic Council. She was the chair of the Social Democratic Women of Central Finland from 2003 to 2011 and she has a master's degree in education.

Göran Montan from Sweden has been an active member of the Culture and Education Committee. There he is.

MR. MONTAN: Here I am.

MR. WHITEHURST: For many years, he's worked on issues such as education research and culture and new media. He's been instrumental in bringing about the decision to introduce a new Nordic Internet-based movie portal for all students over the Nordic region

intended to promote cultural awareness and intercultural understanding within the region and he's played an important role in the establishment of the new Nordic Education Summit. He's worked on political initiatives to reduce unemployment in the Nordic countries and to assure that it will be easier for young people to enter the labor market and secure a stable job, certainly something that we are interested in here.

So, our script for the rest of the session is that our two guests will make remarks and then we will have a brief conversation among ourselves and then we will open up the floor for comments and questions from the audience.

So, Tuula Peltonen, please.

MS. PELTONEN: Okay, thank you so much. I'm very pleased that the Nordic Council has been -- to contribute to this seminar and has been given an opportunity to participate in this (inaudible) about early childhood education. I would like to emphasize that the Nordic Council shares a great interest concerning Danish (inaudible) Nordic school launched it recently by the Danish minister (inaudible) has heard about it.

The purpose of (inaudible) is to be the bedrock for the progress of the Nordic societies and inspire education worldwide driven by a new interpretation of the Nordic tradition for a holistic approach to the

social, mental, and cognitive growth of children and young people.

The Nordic Councils have a democratic spirit, good energy, and honesty when it comes to collaborating between each other in field of education. There are a lot of lessons that can be learned from each country's recent experience and we should prepare ourselves how to deal with forthcoming challenges.

In recent analogies of Finland and its education (inaudible) made by (inaudible) Independent Policy Advisor Simon Anholt, it was noted that the Fins have the gift of being Nordic, with the (inaudible) in a strongly positive light. Being Nordic means reliability, functionality, peacefulness, and high level of wellbeing.

With regards to the Nordic education policies, they promote in many ways the welfare of children and youth and very often take into account a large variety of services and benefits targeted for the children. For instance, although the countries offer a wide range of health care services to under-school-age children and school-age children, the services are universal in coverage and offered free of charge.

First, education policies, the Nordic region, are high priority side and to main principles of education, equating equality and inclusiveness are seen as thriving forces behind the policies. And we have heard in the latest PISA test for 15-years-old, Nordic education

results differ considerably. Finland tops the field and Norway, for instance, is just below the OECD average.

The PISA survey is conducted every three years by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development and a survey compares 15-years-old in different countries in reading, math, and science, as maybe you know.

Finland has ranked at near the top in all three competencies in every survey since 2000, neck-and-neck with super-achievers such as South Korea and Singapore.

One of the main reasons why this is happening is that there are almost no private schools in Finland. Only a small number of independent schools exist in the country, and even they are publicly financed. None is allowed to charge tuition fees and there are no private universities. This means that practically every person in Finland attends public schools and nobody's allowed to run a school for profit.

Another factor explaining the country's PISA (inaudible) is the teaching of (inaudible) at the pedagogically appropriate time namely with regards to the teach education, a research-based master's degree is the minimum requirement to teach in Finland, and even nursery school teachers are trained at universities in Finland. A long period of higher education ensures that teachers have better competence. Also, teaching

and guidance staff within daycare centers generally have bachelor's degrees.

Other dominant factors that explain some educational performance in Finland are school (inaudible) and teacher professionalism. And also, of course, that compulsory education starts in the year a child turns 7 and lasts 9 years.

And then about the (inaudible) about today early education. In government program in Finland, we have also plans just now of actions related to early education. We have just begun to reform of the legislation and we are going to make the basics of the early education plan. And we are researching and transferring the preschool education obligatory.

Every child has a subjective right to an early education in Finland. It can take place at kindergartens or smaller family daycare groups in private homes. The fees are moderate and are based on parental income. All 6-year-olds have to try to participate in pre-primary education. Pre-primary-level children will adapt basic skills, knowledge, and capabilities from different areas of learning in accordance with their age and abilities. Learning through play is essential.

We want that schools' quality and accessible early education, preschool education guaranteed for the whole age group. Legislation on early education will be prescribed. Research is done on

transferring to early education obligatory to ensure that whole age group will ascend to early education. The preschool education and early education are developed as solid education to ensure the equal opportunities to learn. Then just we have done transferring from this early education and transferred from Ministry of Social Affairs and helped the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The goal of (inaudible) and health care will be increased, of course, and the opportunities to combine working life, just that we heard here in Danish regard have done and family life more flexible are supported regarding those with small children. We are doing this, things better just now in Finland.

Daycare will remain as child's subjective right. And daycare system also will be developed of better opportunities for families to use, just more flexible. Just had this reform.

The security and high quality are ensued. Daycare is developed as service that prevents social exclusion. Daycare will remain free for low-income families and fees will not prevent from being employed and single families especially considered. The right to attend the same daycare center will sustain even if the child is at home at times.

MR. WHITEHURST: Thank you.

MS. PELTONEN: Was it seven minutes? (Laughter)

MR. WHITEHURST: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Mr. Montan, please.

MR. MONTAN: It's me now, okay.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes.

MR. MONTAN: Well, I'm here, as you understand, just to make up for the gender balance. (Laughter)

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, it's true.

MR. MONTAN: Which is a topic I will come to a little later.

There's one big advantage of being the last one to make an address or a comment like this is that everything of value has already been said, which means I can more or less scrap everything that I put together before coming here and try to concentrate on some other issues that might be interesting to you.

First of all, of course I would extend my thanks to the Brookings Institute and for this initiative that makes it possible for us to come here and it's really a great pleasure to be here, I must say.

As been mentioned before, as we say in the industry magazine "*The Economist*," the Nordic countries seem to be sort of a la mode for that moment. And you, of course, say well, these Nordic socialist countries, what can we learn from them? First of all, we are not

Nordic socialist countries, depending on from what side you look at it. But one reason why we have become more successful than we were maybe 10, 15, or 20 years ago is that we have modified what you would call the socialistic influence, which is a lesser threat in Europe than you look at it here, although I will not comment on American policies right now. I think you have enough of that. When I'm looking at television, I see it goes back and forth all the time.

But, anyway, also I would like to comment on the initiative that Christine Antorini has done in the Nordic Council, raising the question of the new Nordic school project and I'm sure it's been described here before, so, I won't go into detail there and I'm sure that the Nordic countries including Sweden will join in that effort. The Nordic Council works very much in consensus. That has been the whole idea of bringing the Nordic countries together is that we have political differences, there are representatives from all different parties. My learned colleagues to the left are to the left of me even in politics and I'm a conservative liberal, "liberal" in the classical European sense. I have to explain that. "Liberal" means something else here, I know. (Laughter)

Anyway, even though we have maybe come in with different ways to look at a problem, we usually come out on the other side with a workable compromise, something that we can go on. One of the early

things we did already in the 50s was to abolish passports between our countries as an example of a practical thing, long before we got to that stage in the rest of Europe.

Preschool or daycare has a very long history in Sweden. Already in the 30s, the social reformer and social scientist concentrating on school and children, Alva Myrdal, some of you might have heard of her, introduced already then the possibility of being able to take care of children before school. And there's been a debate ever since, why should you do that? You can also turn the question around and say today, the situation we are in, can society afford not to? Can we afford to have countries where one-third or half of the population cannot join the workforce because they have to take care of children? Or if they are qualified, as we see now that women are taking the first places in university and everywhere, whereas boys' reading abilities are deteriorating, can we between without women? I mean, as a man, obviously, I say no. But not even in the sense of the society, we cannot afford being out of qualified workforce. Women have to have the possibility of making careers, even though they bear children and have been historically most involved in raising them.

So, the question is always here then: Are we like before going to still just take care of children to make it possible for the parents

to, as we saw in the Danish pictures here, to be able to work full-time or are we looking at the other picture where you saw that an invested dollar early in life pays off? Change it around, can we afford not to give our children the best of opportunities? When they're not most susceptible, that's when we should maybe already start. But, of course, we can never forget that children are children and children should always have the opportunities to explore, investigate, question things, and social interaction, which has been mentioned here before, which is very important for a child later in life. Of course, there are some scientists who do not really need social interaction because they're sitting in their room just making huge projects that nobody understands anyway, but those are the exception. Most of us do have to interact with society and with the people around us.

So, one thing that I mentioned just at the beginning, and I will soon stop here, is the question of gender. That has been an issue in Sweden and it may be hit the debate from the wrong side, since everybody thought that the gender discussion was a female leftist discussion, which even though I'm not female and I'm not leftist, I think that this is a very important issue.

Gender education in Swedish preschools is increasingly common and the reason for this is, of course, to make it possible for both

genders to have the equal opportunities. We're not going to favor one for the other, but every child is a unique individual and should have the exact -- not exact. Nothing is ever exact, but they should at least be given the possibilities of their start in life equally. So, I think this is now universally agreed in Sweden, although it comes on the wrong footing to begin with and so many other things that females bring into the debate. It's always misunderstood by men, very often anyway.

So, I will say I filled out a few questions here, so, maybe that will help us and eloquently reformulate those so we can get a nice discussion later here. Thank you very much.

MR. WHITEHURST: Thank you. (Applause)

Background for those of you who may not have it there is an assessment that's carried out internationally by the OECD called PISA, the Program of International Student Assessment. It's given to 15-year-olds, representative samples of 15-year-olds in all the OECD countries, the 30 most developed countries, their affiliates, and many other countries, as well. And, so, it does, if you will, produce an international league's table in terms of the performance of education systems.

And, so, to try to create a little trouble up here and get an interesting discussion going, one of the things that I alluded to previously is that Finland has been at the top or very close to the top in terms of PISA

outcomes for the last decade and we tend in this country to think of Nordic countries as being very similar in what they do. So, I would ask, I guess, from Denmark and Sweden if they would to speculate on why Finland seems to have superior outcomes on PISA. (Laughter) Does it have to do with different populations or does it have to do with the nature of the delivery system? What are your speculations about the --

MS. PELTONEN: That's what they are asking all the time.

(Laughter)

MR. MONTAN: I was told by a Finnish school expert, not you, Tuula, that the reason why Finland is ahead, and they are, and you notice that I didn't comment on this at all before, right? (Laughter) Is the fact, they said, that while we were fiddling around with the system changing it around and introducing new systems all the time, the Fins stark by winning concept. They haven't changed it so much.

Is that true, Tuula?

MS. PELTONEN: We have changed it.

MR. MONTAN: Yes, not so much as we have.

MS. PELTONEN: No, not so much. Of course, we are doing better all the time. Trying to do better. Not so much, I think so.

MR. MONTAN: No, that is, of course, PISA is something that we're all looking at and we all notice that South Korea and we will see

China there, too, and this is not posing a threat, but a challenge. We will not in the future be able to compete on low salaries, neither United States, nor Europe. We will have to compete on the global arena with excellence and knowledge. That is the way that we can upkeep our standard of living and that's one of the reasons why education is so extremely important.

MS. ANTORINI: Well, maybe it's only a bad excuse, I don't know, but when we discussed what do we do in Finland, we lack very much at least even though that your children perform better than the Danish pupils, that the Danish pupils, they really like to go to school. And the Finnish pupils, they don't like so much to go to school. (Laughter) I know it's maybe an excuse that we focus on that, but on the other hand, we really think that the principle that you really like to go to school, that's very essential if we want to have a lifelong learning strategy.

And actually we can see that in Denmark, (inaudible) people, they use the (inaudible) training system that we have lifelong learning system very much and I think the reason why they do it, it's also because they have liked to go to school, and, therefore, they want to continue.

On the other hand, we really would like to learn a little bit more from Finland, and one thing that we can see is a difference between the Danish and the Finnish School System is that you have very well-educated teachers. We would love that there would be so many young

people in Denmark that would like to be teachers that actually there are too many that wanted to be teachers because I've heard the figures from Helsinki, your capital, that it's only 1 out of 10 that want to go to your university college there become into that education in Denmark. In some of our university colleges, almost everybody that wants to go there, they can start there. So, therefore, we have a discussion how to raise the level of the teachers. It's only a four-year teacher education that we have in Denmark. Your education is five-year and it's more research-based than ours. So, we are very much focused on how can we raise the level of the teachers' education.

MR. MONTAN: I must agree with Christina. That is really one of the main reasons we have let in Sweden both pay and status of the teachers slide, which means that young, talented people do not choose what I consider one of the most important professions in society. They choose to, they prefer going into television and being program leaders or something else that gives them more money and this is a tragedy and we will have to -- exactly what Christina is saying. We have to change this around and have talented people wanting to become teachers, raise the quality of the education. So, we have a lot to learn from the Fins, at least in this respect.

MR. WHITEHURST: Tuula?

MS. PELTONEN: Yes, that's the main reason I think also that we have so good teachers, and, so, high education teachers. And also we have to remember that in Finland, we have a very good aid and support for education for these children who have some difficulties in learning. So, special education, I'm a special class teacher, so, I have done the work and I know it's very work we are doing with these difficulties and we are giving a very good support for every child.

And also Christina said in Finland, children seem to dislike school. I think it depends on how you ask the children. Do you like the school? No, never. Oh, that's right.

MS. ANTORINI: But in Denmark when you ask that question, so.

MS. PELTONEN: Also, yes, that's the -- so, but of course we have noticed this matter and also the school violence is a big question in Finland and we are doing our best to get all these problems and also the smaller groups at schools, we are putting money for schools, \$60 million in this year's budget for only this, that the municipalities can have at schools very small learning groups. I think this is a very main thing.

MR. WHITEHURST: Do you want to comment?

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, one comment because I think it's a very important point that I've seen the figures from Finland, how you do

with the small pupils when they start when they are 7-years-old. You give them all the special support they need from very well-trained teachers and I think it's almost 40 percent of the small children that they are supported, what is very important for them quite individually, but in the group.

In Denmark, unfortunately, they don't give them this special training from the beginning and we can see that the Nordic country, that the worst, to keep the small children together with classmates. We sent them out of the class to special education schools and actually they are not helped by that strategy. So, we would like to learn how we can help them with the friends in the class with teachers that know how to work with special needs.

And when we talk about early childhood education, we want to start that very early, because everybody, they go, as I told you, 97 percent of the small kids when they are 3-years-old, they are in the kindergarten and we would like to have very, very good pedagogues there that know how to train them also for special needs so that they are helped before they start at school when they're 6-years-old and it's 6 years in Denmark.

MS. PELTONEN: Yes, in Finland, earlier, we have this system, their own classes for these children who have difficulties. For myself, I had to attend (inaudible) but now we are moving to the system

that every child should have this own class group and the aid, maybe there's two teachers, maybe teacher assistant, and not taking the child away from the old group. It's a very big challenge because municipalities in Finland, we don't have so much money to use, so, it's a big challenge to make this happen.

MR. MONTAN: Well, yes, I think --

MR. WHITEHURST: I will have another question in here at some point, I'm sure.

MR. MONTAN: Huh?

MR. WHITEHURST: I'm sure I'll have the opportunity for another question at some point --

MR. MONTAN: Absolutely, no, I was just going back to a little bit what was raised here, that one reason for enrolling children early is, of course, to give teachers or adults working with them the chance to detect things earlier. The earlier you can start helping a child, the greater the chances of success so that child will not fall back and be in the back of the class for the next 9 or 12 years or whatever and have a bad start. So, this is important and how to do that, well, I'm sure we'll have to go for the best solution.

MR. WHITEHURST: I'd like to get a sense if I can of relative levels of investment. So, in the U.S., our iconic federally-sponsored pre-K

program for 4-year-olds, Head Start, spends about, invests about \$8,000 per year per child. If we go to state pre-K programs, it is less. It depends, of course, on the state, but let's pick \$5,000 as a reasonable figure.

I just wonder if you can tell me what your costs are per child in Denmark, Sweden, or Finland.

MS. ANTORINI: Well, we thought you would ask that question --

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes.

MS. ANTORINI: Because you are very concerned about the investment.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes, yes.

MS. ANTORINI: Right, yes.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes.

MS. ANTORINI: So, what we can see is, and, of course, our investment rate is much bigger than here in the States, and you have the difference between the different states, but we use 0.8 percent of GDP for children under 3 years in Denmark. And what we can see from the states, it's 0.1 percent of the GDP. So, that gives some indicator of the difference of the investment rate.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes.

MS. ANTORINI: And, actually, the Danish people, they are

heavily taxed, as you may know. Somebody thinks that's socialism. We don't think that's socialism, but it's an average about half of the income they pay to a national and local tax. On the other hand, they don't pay very much for when they have their children in kindergartens, they don't pay for universities, it's free to go to school, it's free to use the health care system. So, and I would like to say here people in Denmark, they are very happy, even though they are heavily taxed. (Laughter) Yes.

MR. MONTAN: I must say, Sweden used to be in top of that league, but Denmark has taken over. We are happy for that. (Laughter)

MR. WHITEHURST: The tax rate or the happiness rate or --

MR. MONTAN: Both.

MR. WHITEHURST: Both. (Laughter)

MS. ANTORINI: No, no, not the happiness rate.

MR. MONTAN: We are happy, too.

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, you're happy, too. It's okay.

(Laughter)

MR. MONTAN: So, that is another issue. I mean, the taxes we have are high marginal income rate taxes. On the other hand, we do not have gift or inheritance tax, we do not have wealth tax. So, I would say many would consider us a tax haven. (Laughter) If you just have capital and no income, that's a good place to live.

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, that's true.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes, please.

MS. PELTONEN: Yes, in Finland, this educational funding is both from states and from municipalities, local (inaudible) and of course we have taxes and we are going to get some more maybe for the next year because the situation, it's not so good, as you know, in Europe at all.

And, remember, I don't have all these numbers here with me, but I remember that it's about -- from one child at school in Finland, it depends on municipality, of course, but it's from 500 to 800 euros per year. One child. So, that's the amount of money, but I don't remember this (inaudible) so.

MR. MONTAN: Well, the equivalent in Sweden, we have a maximum taxation on the fees that you pay. So, as I remember it, roughly \$200 a month is the maximum you can pay, whatever income you have, then you can pay lower if your income is lower. And childcare in that sense is not only municipality, it's also subsidized by the state in a rather complicated agreement. I can't refer exactly to how it looks. So, that's what you get back for your taxes, also.

MR. WHITEHURST: I'm not able to translate gross domestic product percentage differences and the dollar figures. I will say that using the gross domestic product, the percentage used for a service,

has always seemed to me a little bothersome. I mean, there are certain services that have a cost and whether the country is rich or not, that is the cost of the service. So, it would really be interesting, and I'll probably dig into this sometime next week, to see if we can figure out what the currency adjusted investments are for early childhood.

It is as a policy issue for our country such as the U.S. as thinking about expanding service, what it costs and what it should cost are very important issues. So, getting a good (inaudible) on what the Nordic countries actually spend from all sources, from parent tuition, from the state and local level, would be interesting. I don't imagine it is inexpensive. And, so, it would be nice to know that.

Another question that I have that wasn't addressed so far is about variations in the quality of services provided by particular centers. Certainly in the U.S., we know that is very wide. There are many types of providers from family daycare providers where a child is going to somebody's house with seven other children during the day to pre-K centers associated with universities and everything in between and one of the challenges for states, as I know they had in this area, is to figure out which centers are unacceptably bad, how do we get them out of the system, how do we assure high quality?

So, I wondered if we could learn something about variations

in quality, whether you acknowledge variations in quality in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, and how you go about figuring that out and doing something about it in terms of improving the lower-quality providers? Please.

MR. MONTAN: Well, here, when it comes to school and different providers, we differ from Finland here. Some 10 years ago or more, Sweden introduced a possibility of competition on the field of providers. So, we have in the (inaudible) school as also in the preschool, possibilities for what we call free schools, providers that are not in that sense linked to the state municipality.

So, how are they getting paid? Well, every child in Sweden has let's say a school dollar. They have a certain amount of money fixed to their person which they bring with them if they leave the public school and go to so-called free school, which have to be accepted, they have to have a license, they have to show that they follow the general rules that apply and the school form and all these kind of things, formalities. But if they do so, they can open a school, and then the children's money go with them. So, that is how they get their money. Obviously, there have been good and bad free schools, but as you know, there are good and bad public schools, too. Very much depending on locality, I mean, if you have a high-income area, the public schools or the schools there tend to have

better results.

That's common knowledge and what do we do about that is a different question. But, sure, quality, the hope was, of course, and in some sense we have come right, that quality, it's a checks and balances system. I mean, if the school isn't good enough, parents won't send their children there. That's obvious, but it takes some time for this system to root. And as of today, Finland is still ahead of us, so, we'll know in the future, but personally, I feel that there should be a choice. Parents should have a possibility to make an intelligent active choice where they want their children to be educated from the very first.

MS. PELTONEN: Yes, in Finland, we trust so much a power of our public schools. So, we are trying to get them better and better of (inaudible) them by state and by municipalities. And we are not planning about opening (inaudible) for private schools, as I said earlier.

And it's just last season, I was in parliament. We had a university law, it's a major, new law, and that means that now in Finland, also, universities can get outside money to funding their work and this was very new for in Finland and (inaudible) discuss on a (inaudible) and we went to London to get some inspiration about that (inaudible) and now we have the possibilities, but now it's just of course doing the reports that what's happening in universities and the results has not been so good.

So, we have been waiting. So, that, we are all the time making this discussion about this public and about this private finance.

MS. ANTORINI: Well, in Denmark, we have different sort of daycare institutions. We also have private institutions, but private in Danish, that's not private; it's supported at least between 70, 75 percent by either the national or the local municipality. So, it's public private schools. Yes, you might say so.

So, this is the Danish Nordic way to do some different solutions, where the state and the tax system is a part of that and that's because we think even though we would like to have different sort of schools and daycare institutions, we think that everybody, also people that can't afford to pay a lot of money to a private school, they should have the possibility to take another sort of school than the public school, and, therefore, it's heavily supported by the state or the local municipality. That's also --

MR. MONTAN: But that's what I said, also. I mean --

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, very, very difficult to understand, but it is like that, yes.

MR. MONTAN: Parents do not have to pay extra for their children to go into a private school.

MS. ANTORINI: But I think you also talked about the quality,

and in Denmark, it's quite regulated. So, we have this national act on daycare. They all have to follow the six pedagogical themes how to develop the children. They are responsible on the local level to document that they follow the different pedagogical themes. The preschool teachers, the pedagogues, they are very well educated. Sixty percent of them, they are educated from university colleges, and it is like that all over the country. So, it's quite regulated.

And I had the chance to hear a little bit before we started this session to hear about the American system. And I must say there would be a revolution in Denmark if we had that very different way of qualities. Well, not so much quality because in Denmark, we wouldn't accept just to give our kids to a place where they don't have any education, where nobody follows the quality, where you don't have standards for what's going on there. We wouldn't accept it in Denmark, and that would be even though you were on the left or the right side, that wouldn't be accepted.

So, we have a lot of standards in Denmark and I'm happy that we have that because it means that this is really early education and not only a place where I have my kid because I'm working. I really want them to develop and I'm sure the quality is quite good everywhere in Denmark.

MS. PELTONEN: The same in Finland, we have a law, of

course.

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes?

MR. MONTAN: But on the other hand, if you compare to the United States, it's obvious that you have more Nobel Prize winners than anybody else put together and the reason for that is, of course, that you have universities of top quality there, absolute super level, maybe with a few other universities also in the world. The problem that you might have, and I'm maybe sticking my nose out here, is that higher education is very much depending on family fundraising, if I may say so. It's not inexpensive to go to a university in this country. And in Sweden or in the Nordic countries, university's free.

And up until last year, it was also free for foreigners. We have now introduced a rather small but still a fee and I think this is a basic thinking of so to say our social welfare state that basic needs of our citizens are to be paid through your taxes. But you never still get all your taxes back.

When I'm out talking to my constituency and they say I want more of my tax money back, and I say well, one way to do that is to enroll in hospital and lie there for a couple of months in the really heavy-duty, with all the things. (Laughter) Then you'll get your money back, but who wants to do that? (Laughter)

MR. WHITEHURST: That seems like a good segue point.

(Laughter) I would give you now an opportunity to address questions to any or all of us. If you would raise your hand, I will call on you. Someone will come to you with a microphone. Please tell us who you are, ask a question rather than making a speech, and we'll go from there.

Right here, the woman on the second row. Oh, yes, here. Here, yes. No, I'm going to try to maintain control here. (Laughter)

MS. ROCK: Thank you, all, so much. I appreciate Brookings doing this and for you all to come here.

My name is Edna Rock. My profession is early childhood education and child development. And I have visited centers in Sweden and in Norway, as well as throughout this country. We've had three consistent difficulties that have been addressed a little bit, but I would like to have you focus on what we might do based on what you've learned to do about them. One is that we don't have a system. The closest thing we have to a national system is the military, childcare, and Head Start. Other than that, we have 51 state systems.

The second thing is that we have almost always, for centuries, tied early childhood education and public support to poverty. In other words, it's okay to help working mothers who don't have much income or are single, but it's not okay to help all children, which is what

the president said in his State of the Union and I hope he holds to it.

And the third thing is that this country is 1 of 2 out of 193 that has not ratified the convention on the rights of the child. I know that all of you have.

MR. MONTAN: No.

MS. ROCK: Because everybody has except us and Somalia, and I think that's extremely important to have done and we're working on it, but there's a lot of competition.

So, those three things.

MR. MONTAN: I could take the last one. And you can add Sweden to that. We have not in parliament ratified the United Nations' Rights of the Child, but we are to 100 percent living after it. That's a different thing, but formally, we are in there with you and Somalia.

(Laughter)

MS. ROCK: Nobody's (inaudible) to know that.

MR. MONTAN: Now you do.

MR. WHITEHURST: All right, the woman in the fourth row back on your right, Ellie.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much for this exciting conversation. As a Korean, I certainly would like to point out that the law for education and the creativity is very important in these Nordic countries,

not only PISA study. Korea is certainly very high in math and others, but the need of paradigm should shift for these, even in Singapore. So, I don't think the student should be really worried about this comparativeness.

The one thing I want to say about Sweden is that even though you didn't want to use the word of a voucher, basically, this is the voucher for preschool and for Finland, when we went to Sweden to study for East African countries when I was working as a task manager at the World Bank, an astonishing thing was that even though only 1.8 percent of the students are going to the preschool, it had an amazing impact on public school because public school woke up to see that some of the students are leaving for these independent schools.

So, I really want to know more about that one and just more question is that, for example, Sweden has changed from 1930s you're talking about. So, it used to be very, very unequal country. More unequal country in the euro, but later on through the social contract, moved to very equal country and (inaudible) because education is so closely related to the culture and society. There must have been some afflictions to certain things and Finland used to be the most behind, but now it's sort of like a leading country. There must have been some intentions in this change of the Finnish system.

So, as a development economist, I would appreciate how

you sort of like overcame kind of the social tension and the culture change and how it was initiated. Thank you very much.

MR. WHITEHURST: There was a lot in there, so, let me try to make that one question, which is we have three politicians here, people who run for office, and you really haven't talked about whether there are political tensions in your countries around issues of pre-K. And if there are, how you're handling them. So, let me put the question that way, if I may.

MR. MONTAN: I can volunteer to answer it very quickly. The word "voucher" is of course, the most great one; I just didn't find it. We have just like you, in Korea, and as opposed to England or Great Britain and America, we have to learn another language, too, not only our own as to be able to get around in the world. So, maybe sometimes I lose a word. You're quite right and I tried to touch on the fact that introducing free schools, as we call them, they are paid for by these vouchers. So, as I said, the parents don't have to pay extra. Maybe they have to pay extra because it's further away to have to drive them there or something like that, but it's true, it shook up the whole system and many of the public schools who were not doing so well or maybe not giving the quality that we wanted have become better. It's a process.

When it comes to equality, it's an ongoing discussion and

neither women or men -- most men are not happy with how it is, although it's getting a lot better and I don't think that we were in the bottom of the chain totally. I read how it is in the U.K., and we're well ahead of that for sure.

But there is always something to do and women are taking the lead now. I mean, obviously, in Sweden now, the majority of new enrollments are women, are girls. They are in the top of the class in the higher education. So, whether we men want it or not, we will just have to lift ourselves by the hair like Münchhausen and try to get back in the race. Maybe it's too late for me, but the young ones.

MR. WHITEHURST: Did you want to --

MS. ANTORINI: Yes, because we have quite a lot of guests from Korea coming to Denmark to visit our school system and daycare system, and what they would like to learn is how we work with the children so that they learn to think by themselves and not just do what they are asked to do. And I think that's because we have the same pedagogical view from they're small and during the school system so that it's a balance between pairing and having an environment where the children, they play to learn, also the hard core issues.

And, actually, talking about the boys because we have the same problem that we can see that more and more boys, they just quit the

school system and one of the things that we are working with is to be much better to remember the good tradition we've had in Denmark and in the Nordic countries to combine theory and practice all the time to include how to move during the day, and these are very concrete ways to learn and we want put much more emphasis on those pedagogical issues in the future.

But I think that the only discussion that we have between left and right in Denmark is not the fundamental of this system. Everybody loves that we have a childcare institution. It is how much should we measure, how much should we test, how much should we make some sort of ranking list?

We don't have ranking lists in Denmark, but we have the discussion between right and left there and I must recommend don't do too much of that. It's not very good if you want to have a system where everybody -- if you want to raise the bar for everybody. So, we have few national tests, we don't have rankings, and we don't want to introduce it to the daycare system.

MS. PELTONEN: Yes, in Finland, we have a very good harmony between left and right about these public schools. We don't need to change this system, I think. But these are very big questions, equality, et al., and also between boys and girls, but in Finland, we have

noticed that there's increased disparity between schools and now we are putting money for schools depending on how are things going and there's some shared indicators which describe the school's environment that (inaudible) population, the unemployment rate, and the level of education up to adult population. So, we are dealing with these indicators and the state is giving money more, these schools have a bigger challenge to make (inaudible) teaching.

MR. WHITEHURST: Thank you. We have time, I believe, for one more question if it's short and if the answers are short, as well.

Here we go, in the front row.

SPEAKER: Hi there. Michael, Education Writers Association.

My question pertains to length of time and day at early education is provided to children. So, in the U.S., there's a conversation regarding how much time is necessary. Half time, half of the day, full day, a few hours.

In your early education systems, is pre-K given for eight hours, for six hours, for four hours, does it matter?

MR. WHITEHURST: Yes.

MS. PELTONEN: In Finland, we are just discussing about this. Just today, there was announcement in my iPhone that we are

calling to the system that it's flexible for parents. So, they can choose. It's maybe one hour, two hours you can take your child to the kindergarten and so on and also eight hours and also the whole day and maybe nights. We have this kindergarten, as well, children stay at nights because --

SPEAKER: It was just introduced or --

MS. PELTONEN: No, first one, this flexible system is now going. We are going to have a law about it and it makes big possibilities to parents to full time (inaudible) and so on. And that children are staying nights, that doesn't mean that the parents don't want them at home, but also some work at night, so, that's why.

MS. ANTORINI: Well, in Denmark, we have full time opening hours, so, you decide yourself as a parent how long you want them to be there. There are also a few half-time places, but normally, parents say they want to have these full-time opening hours so it's flexible. So, sometimes a father can come a little bit earlier, sometimes the mother, but they pay for the same quality. They're not just paying for the hours they are there, they are paying for what's going on during the day in the daycare center and it's open 5 days a week and average about 50 hours a week.

MR. MONTAN: We had just had a discussion what to do to help people who work at night as to have at least some daycare become

also night care centers because it's been impossible for maybe a lone parent that works at night, what do I do with my kid?

Another thing is that everyone has the right to send their children 15 hours a week for free. It's the cost comes after that, which makes it also possible for parents who are out of work temporarily or for that moment to be able -- they don't have to take their children out of daycare or preschool, which would be a social trauma for these children. So, I think that's a good thing.

MR. WHITEHURST: Well, this has been interesting for me. I hope it's been interesting for you. Thank you very much for coming. Please give our guests a round of applause. (Applause)

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