EconoFact Chats: Tariffs, Immigration and DOGE: Assessing the Policies of Trump 2.0

Binyamin Appelbaum (The New York Times), Scott Horsley (NPR), Greg Ip (The Wall Street Journal), and Heather Long (The Washington Post)

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Michael Klein
I'm Michael Klein, executive editor of EconoFact, a nonpartisan, web-based publication of the Fletcher School at Tufts University. At EconoFact, we bring key facts and incisive analysis to the national debate on economic and social policies, publishing work from leading economists across the country. You can learn more about us and see our work at www.econofact.org.

Michael Klein
President Trump took office in late January. He inherited an economy that, in the autumn, The Economist magazine declared on its cover as 'the envy of the world.' But things have not gone well over the past two months. According to MarketWatch, this is the worst start to a presidential term since 2009, when President Obama began his administration during the subprime mortgage crisis. Private forecasters have raised their estimates of the probability of a recession. And President Trump himself seemed to concede this was a possibility, but said that it is because the economy is in a transition period, and he predicted that the economy will become stronger than ever. The stock market does not seem to agree, since equity prices are plunging. So, which is it? Are the Trump policies, along with the many swings in the administration's positions, likely to lead the economy to tank? Or will tariffs, deregulation, tax cuts, and widespread firing of federal employees make the economy leaner, meaner, and stronger? To answer these questions, I'm very pleased to welcome back to EconoFact Chats our regular panel of economic journalists. Heather Long of the Washington Post, Greg Ip of the Wall Street Journal, Scott Horsley of NPR, and Binyamin Appelbaum of the New York Times. Heather, Greg, Scott, and Binyamin, welcome once again to the podcast.

Panel
Thanks for being here.

Michael Klein
Heather, your most recent Washington Post column asks, is the United States headed towards a recession? You spoke with Catherine Rampell and Natasha Sarin about this. What did the three of you conclude?

Heather Long
Well, yes, we answered all the questions. No, I think, you know, realistically, what's the latest? Goldman Sachs, I think, is at 20% recession probability. A J.P. Morgan economist said about 40.

Catherine Rampell said 40 to 50%. Larry Summers, I think, put it at 50-50 chance of a recession. And my colleague, Natasha Sarin, put it a little bit higher than that. I wisely did not weigh in on the actual spectrum scale. But I would say a couple of things. And that is, I think the direction is clear. Everybody's been raising the recession risks. And I think April is going to be the key month. Just how far is Trump going to go on the tariffs? He's really made this April 2nd date super important to when he will put on more tariffs on Europe, on India, maybe more on Canada and Mexico. And so he's really building up April as the month to watch and the month that's really going to determine where you fall, I think, on that spectrum. The question that I keep asking myself is, why is he doing this? Why is he willing to risk a recession in the U.S. economy? And I just keep coming back to two things. Number one is he seems to really have great admiration for the Argentine president, Javier Melei. And just this belief that he should follow that playbook of enacting a lot of pain right away up front and then with the hopes that it'll be short-lived, that people will forget it pretty fast, and that then he can do some sort of more expansionary policies, possibly later this year with tax cuts and lord knows what else. And then I think the other thing is he honestly believes that this is the right path forward for the economy. And I know in EconoFact there's been Pacific Ocean-sized holes that have been debunked about his beliefs about bringing manufacturing jobs back to the United States. But, you know, one of his advisors told me the other day that to really understand how Trump thinks about the economy is you have to think about it, that Trump honestly believes and sees the economy almost like his favorite child that he wants to protect. And this is sort of the tough love phase that's going on right now. So I've been surprised to hear how many people are still making the optimistic case that all of this could end up well. I certainly don't share that view, but, you know, there is a story you can tell that after all of this pain that we're going through, that, you know, we can combine a productivity boom with some tax cuts and bizarrely maybe end up in an okay place by 2026. But there's just so, so many risks to that scenario.

Michael Klein
So where does the economy rank with Don Jr., Eric, Ivanka, and Barron? Well, you don't have to answer that. Binyamin?

Binyamin Appelbaum
Yeah, I mean, obviously one question here is by when? Like, of course, there'll be a recession eventually. Do I think it's going to happen in the next couple of quarters? No. And could it happen next year? Sure. But I think, you know, the predicate here is that Trump inherited a really strong and really healthy economy. You know, low unemployment, moderated inflation, a lot of momentum. Companies made a lot of big investments that are at least in theory going to come online in the coming years, thanks to the Biden administration's policies and general optimism about the trajectory of the American economy. So, you know, Trump inherited about as good a situation as you can find. And however bad his policies may be, they are chipping away at a really good situation. And so to me, that's one reason to have some skepticism. It's not about how

problematic his policies are. It's about the fact that we're starting from a place of considerable strength. And so it'll really take some work to get us into a recession. Which he may be capable of.

Michael Klein
Yeah. People describe the economy as more like an oil tanker than a speedboat, that it's slow to turn. But then again, oil tankers can hit icebergs, I guess. Scott?

Scott Horsley
Yeah, and this is not an iceberg. I mean, this is a deliberate decision to put your hand on the steering wheel and go in a different direction. Whether it's a minor downturn or an actual recession, there's going to be pain associated with these choices that the president has made. And this is 100% on President Trump. I mean, this is absolutely a deliberate decision to spin the wheel and see what happens. And he is going to own the results.

Michael Klein
Spinning the wheel is interesting, given that he owns a lot of casinos. A centerpiece of President Trump's economic agenda is tariffs. And he's put in place high tariffs, not just against China, but also against Canada and Mexico. But there's also this whipsaw effect with tariffs being put on hold and reimposed and being put on hold again. Also, countries are going to retaliate, and they already have, and put in place their own tariffs against American goods. Greg, you have a recent column about this. Can you recount what you wrote in that column?

Greg Ip
Well, I basically said that Trump promised us a golden era. But that golden era is beginning in a very dark way with essentially what is becoming the worst, most brutal trade war since the 1930s. I mean, just on the tariffs that are in place today, never mind the ones that have been paused, the U.S. now has the highest tariff rate in, I think, 40 or 50 years. If everything he says comes to fruition, it will be the highest since the 1930s. And it doesn't stop there. These things have a habit of cascading because countries have retaliated. Canada has retaliated. Europe has retaliated. Trump has promised to retaliate against Europe's retaliation. And it happens while even before Trump, there was a rise in protectionist sentiment, especially towards China, which has been trying to export its way out of its economic difficulties. On the sidelines, the World Trade Organization has completely receded as being an effective arbiter of these trade disputes. So you have an environment which has got a kind of a 1930s feel to it. Now, I don't mean to imply by that that we're about to have a depression like the 1930s because that was an event brought on not by protectionism, but by a series of really severe crippling mistakes by central banks. And I would say one of the reasons I don't expect a recession this year is that the financial conditions in the economy, they're really not that tight. Interest rates are not that high. The Federal Reserve does have the ability to lower them if it worries about the economy. The stock

market is only down about 10 percent. We've routinely had 20 percent or larger drops without that entailing more hardship for the economy. But the uncertainty certainly tends to build upon itself. We know that uncertainty can be paralyzing, that it probably means weaker growth for some time to come. And I think that what's often forgotten in this debate is that, like, you know, tariffs are taxes. Now, let's not get into this moralizing that all taxes are evil. Some taxes are necessary. They are the price of civilized society. We tax cigarettes because we want people to smoke less. And if you happen to think imports are bad, taxing imports with tariffs, as Trump believes, is not a bad thing. But it does have long-term costs. And the policy he's pursuing will make Americans on net poor in the long term. Will some jobs come back to the United States in cars or steel? Yeah. But Americans will be paying more for those things. I've seen a forecast to the effect that the 25 percent tariffs Trump plans on Canada and Mexico will eventually raise the price of an automobile assembled in North America by anywhere from $4,000 to $10,000. And one million fewer vehicles will be sold per year. So the cost comes to Americans not just in the form of the higher prices they pay, but the things they no longer get to buy. It also means that the industries here will be less competitive. For a simple example, look at American shipbuilding. If you can actually find any American shipbuilding, which has been heavily protected for over a century and is now basically completely uncompetitive and does not sell any ships worldwide, that is what the American economy will look like if Trump succeeds in essentially walling it off from the rest of the world. So my only point here is that there are these short-term costs, which I do not think will be enough to put the economy in recession. But there are very significant long-term costs. And, you know, it's interesting to hear Trump talk about how we have to accept some short-term pain for some long-term gain and think like the Chinese who have a 100-year perspective. If he has a 100-year plan, I haven't heard of it. I'd love to hear what his 100-year plan is. How all these things fit together.

Michael Klein
One of the most controversial issues related to tariffs is to what extent they'll raise prices. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick recently said on Meet the Press that this won't happen. But, Scott, you reported that that wouldn't be the case. Can you tell us a little bit about that report?

Scott Horsley
Yeah, I think it was a preposterous statement that the Secretary made. And, Greg, your paper said it made them wonder if he knows anything about how commerce works. Certainly, the last trade war that President Trump launched during his first term in office, we did see the prices go up of things where tariffs were applied. Now, we were in a low-inflation environment at that time, and the tariffs were not big enough that they caused a massive increase in the overall cost of living. But the things to which he attached tariffs, those prices rose, and they rose whether people were relying on imports or domestically produced goods. I've talked to business people who supported the Trump tariffs in the first go-around, who opposed the Trump tariffs in the first go-around, but

they all agree that the prices went up. Even if they were buying domestic steel, domestic aluminum, the domestic steel foundries and aluminum smelters raised their own prices to match the imports. And we're seeing the very same thing happen this time around. Steel prices were going up in the U.S. Domestic steel prices were going up even before the tariffs kicked in, in anticipation of that. So there's no question the prices will go up. And we're in a higher inflation environment now. People are on more of a hair trigger. So if they start to see the prices go up, their expectations of greater inflation could kick in. And as Heather said, there might be a story you tell yourself that we come into some golden age at the far end of this with high productivity and lower taxes. But tariffs don't generally inspire greater productivity. I mean, protected industries don't have an incentive to become more productive. They tend to become kind of fat and lazy. And so tariffs are not a recipe for stronger productivity. They're not a recipe for lower prices. When the president promised during the campaign to lower prices, I don't think the stock market is what people were thinking about.

Michael Klein
I would agree with that. It's not the stock market that people were thinking about. You know, one of the things about the fact, like you were saying, that the steel price rose not just for imported steel, but domestic steel. During the campaign, Kamala Harris said that tariffs are like a sales tax, but they're actually generating much less revenue because when the price of foreign steel rises, the government collects tariff revenue. But when the price of domestic steel rises, they don't collect any revenue. So that's an important distinction.

Scott Horsley
Well, and this speaks to Greg's point. You know, it is like a cigarette tax. If you count on a cigarette tax to raise a lot of revenue, then you sort of become dependent on smokers continuing to smoke. And, you know, on the one hand, the Trump administration is counting on tariffs to produce a lot of revenue to offset lost income tax revenue when they extend the tax cuts. On the other hand, they're saying it's going to move manufacturing jobs back to the US. Well, it can't do both. If the manufacturing jobs come back, you lose the tariff revenue.

Michael Klein
Binyamin, so all of these things that Heather, Greg and Scott have been saying seem to mean that there isn't a strong economic case for tariffs. You've written that the tariffs are, in fact, not about economics. Rather, they're a way for Trump to assert power. Can you expand on that and what you meant by that?

Binyamin Appelbaum
So I wouldn't say they're not. Yeah, I'm sorry. I wouldn't say that they're not about economics. I think the administration has an economic theory of tariffs. You've heard, you know, some of the reasons why you might want to put too much credence in that. But I think that when you look at

the way that Trump actually has used tariffs over time, both in his first administration and now in his second administration, what you see is that he does not actually do what he says he believes. He does not actually move immediately to implement tariffs that are intended to, you know, return manufacturing to the United States. What he does instead is that he uses tariffs as a club. He uses them like a bully. He targets nations against which he thinks the United States has particular leverage, like Canada, which is not our economic problem, but is a nation over which we hold tremendous influence. And then he uses tariffs to get them to bend the knee, to get them to kiss his boots, as it were. And that is often a more satisfying conclusion from his perspective than actually any evidence that manufacturing jobs are returning to the United States. And so what we see is this pattern where he repeatedly delays tariffs or decides not to implement tariffs or reaches deals with other countries that don't achieve the goals that he purports to be chasing because he's obtained something else, which is gratification for his ego. And that often seems to be more important to him than any economic goals that he might espouse in relation to tariffs. There's a quote, a new quote from his Commerce Secretary, Howard Lutnick, that nations should understand that Trump doesn't impose tariffs on nations that he's happy with. But if you make him unhappy, then he imposes tariffs. Trump's happiness is a very different metric for tariff policy than manufacturing jobs in the United States. But I think Lutnick has his finger on something real. It has much more to do with how tariffs are actually imposed than any case for protection of domestic manufacturing.

Michael Klein
Binyamin, you also said that Trump fails the marshmallow test time and again. What is the marshmallow test? How does the president fail it? And what are the implications of that?

Binyamin Appelbaum
Yeah, the marshmallow test is a psychological experiment. In a nutshell, basically, you put a marshmallow in front of a kid. You tell him he can have it right now, but if he can wait a few minutes, you'll give him a second marshmallow. And what you're basically testing is the kid's capacity to delay gratification. And my observation is just that Trump has zero capacity to delay gratification. But what you see him doing time and again is grabbing the easy return, squeezing the lemon, taking everything that's available right now, instead of thinking, I mean, Greg said earlier, there's no 100 year strategy. There's no two year strategy. There's no three month strategy. There's just…what are his impulses telling him to do right now to maximize the benefits to himself? And that's what I mean.

Michael Klein
Greg?

Greg Ip
I wanted to, I was smiling because Binya was quite funny with a lot of what he just said, but I do want to actually disagree slightly with two of his points. He made the point that Trump uses tariffs not for economic purposes primarily, but because it's kind of like a power trip. And I think that even people who are trying to defend him would say, oh, they're a negotiating tool. We want to accomplish something on the border or drugs or whatever. And I guess I don't agree with that because we have before us now a fair bit of evidence to suggest that it's not about any of those things. Canada and Mexico moved very quickly to meet his purported complaints about the border and drugs. And that wasn't good enough for him. And he has not rolled back the tariffs. At least half the tariffs are still in place. He has had carve-outs. He's had delays. But tariffs have gone up. The steel and aluminum tariffs went into place. I don't really think it's the case that it's just about leverage or power. And I don't even think it's really about who makes him happy or unhappy. Australia makes Trump very happy. He had a very pleasant conversation with the Australian prime minister a few months ago. And the Australians thought, oh, he's not going to tariff us. Sorry, they just got tariffed. You know, Trump is very fond of Doug Ford, the premier of the province of Ontario, who used to call Trump a marketing genius. Nonetheless, Trump walloped Ontario with double tariffs when Ontario threatened to raise electricity prices. Trump raises tariffs because he likes tariffs. End of story. He believes they're wonderful. He believes they're the Swiss army knife of economic policy. They will raise revenue. They will create jobs. They will balance the budget. They will propel economic growth. They will lower inflation. They will grow back your hair. If you don't have hair, they will get rid of hair in places where you don't want it. Tariffs are wonderful. He simply believes that. So I think that we can come up with all sorts of interesting explanations for why he did what he did when he did. And maybe on any given day, a particular reason will explain why he raised a tariff on one country but not another. But I think if you pull back, you have to get used to the idea that the only constant I've been able to identify in Trump's entire public life is that he loves tariffs. He thinks trade deficits are evil. And he believes that by raising tariffs, he restores American greatness. He's now in the early stages of probably his second and one assumes, you know, if the Constitution means anything, his last term. He has complete control over both chambers of Congress. The courts have been exceptionally deferential to presidential power, especially on matters of trade. Why would he hold back? Why is there holding him back from essentially indulging what is his most deeply held belief?

Binyamin Appelbaum
And we don't need to go back and forth on this here. But I'll just note that he does hold back. He doesn't always do it. And I think it's an interesting caveat. I agree with much of what Greg says. But I think one needs to account for the fact that he doesn't always do it as well.

Scott Horsley
Well, and there had been some expectation that he would again use the stock market as kind of a scorecard. And when the scorecard didn't look so good for him, that might modify his behavior. We've seen some evidence of that. I mean, I think he did suspend the Mexico and Canada tariffs back in February after the market plunged. He may be getting a little more immune to stock market plunges. We'll see how that pans out. But there's certainly not as much stopping him inside the White House as there was last time around. Last time around, he had advisors who would try to tie his hands when he wanted to impose tariffs. Now he's much more of a free agent.

Michael Klein
Another striking feature of this new administration is that so much power was given to Elon Musk and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency. We're all for efficiency, but is what DOGE doing, promoting efficiency? And what about cost cutting? Government spending hit a new record in February of $603 billion. Greg, you've written that DOGE won't save much money by firing civil servants and closing agencies. Why not?

Greg Ip
I think there's a fundamental misconception by Musk and the people applauding his actions about how government money gets spent. In a company like, for example, Twitter slash X, most of your expense is salaries. In most companies, most of your expenses are salaries. But most of the federal government's expenses is not salaries. The entire federal civil service accounts for, at the most, $300 billion a year. That's less than 5% of federal spending. Most of the money that the federal government spends is checks, social security checks, Medicare checks, Medicaid checks, checks to defense contractors, checks to state and local governments for school and so on. We collectively call these things mandatory programs, entitlements, et cetera, et cetera. This is where the money is. And that is not, quite demonstrably, where the spending is being cut. Quite the opposite. Like last December, when Elon Musk was demanding that Congress not pass a continuing resolution because it was too expensive and that it be slimmed down, Congress was at the same time passing a massive expansion of social security with a price tag of $200 billion over 10 years. Co-sponsor J.D. Vance, the new incoming vice president. So this is an administration that is indeed ideologically very committed to shrinking the federal workforce, but not shrinking federal spending. They're not the same thing. The federal deficit is now running around $1.8 trillion to $2 trillion a year, given the tax plans that Republicans have in mind and all the additional ones that Trump wishes to add, it's not going to be going down much, if at all, from that number. And like I said, all the cuts that DOGE has done, and I think the Washington Post and we at the Wall Street Journal have found that the amounts of money they claim to have saved by cutting contracts are significantly exaggerated by things, for example, like double counting. So it's great theatrics. It's great for the base. He may indeed find some inefficiencies in the way services are delivered. And I suppose taxpayers should all applaud that. But the idea that this will somehow solve the federal deficit problem, no, it's not going to do that.

Michael Klein
Heather?

Heather Long
I would just jump in and say, I don't even think it's great theatrics in the sense that the way they're doing it seems to be heightening what's being called job anxiety. So not only are federal workers scared that they're going to be terminated, possibly tomorrow and in some 11th hour, very difficult to understand email. But of course, government contractors are worried. You've got people worrying who work in research labs and universities. I've even heard from people who work at daycares who say, OK, well, if all these parents are losing their jobs, are they going to pull their kids out of daycare, and now I don't have a job. Or restaurant workers. Is nobody going to come to the restaurants now? And so in some ways, you're starting to see in a lot of these consumer sentiment surveys that not only are people worried about the tariffs and the rising prices, but there also been a huge spike in people worried that in six to 12 months they will be financially worse off, or that they will, or someone they know, will lose their job. And so that starts to exacerbate the ripple effects of the pain that's going on.

Michael Klein
So Keynes would have said that the first thing you mentioned is the Keynesian multiplier of the reduction in government spending. And the second thing is animal spirits. And both of those would be working in the direction of a recession. Binyamin?

Binyamin Appelbaum
Yeah, I just want to note there's one other big category of federal spending, which is federal spending on interest to fund the federal debt. That currently is about three times the federal government's payroll. And it is headed up. If Donald Trump succeeds in extending the basic framework of his tax cuts, it will hugely expand necessary federal borrowing, and will put potentially upward pressure on interest rates. And so, you know, if you were trying to reduce government spending, you would go about it in a very, very different way.

Michael Klein
We have a couple of really good EconoFact memos on just that point. One is by Dan Bergstresser at Brandeis, who dug into the data and looked at the maturity structure of the debt. And the other is by Karen Dynan at Harvard. And both of them, you know, make the same point you do, Binyamin, that this is a large and increasing proportion of government spending. Scott, you had a recent broadcast about the effect of job cuts on the ability of the IRS to collect taxes. Would these cuts then be counterproductive in terms of the budget?

Scott Horsley
Yeah. In terms of saving money for the federal government, cutting the IRS is particularly brain dead because this is, you know, the one department, one agency in the government that actually brings in money. In fact, they bring in most of the money that the government collects. And for, you know, for a decade after 2010, the IRS was really starved for resources. And that, you know, hurt customer service, it hurts technology, but mostly it hurts the tax collectors' ability to go out and collect the taxes that are owed, especially by wealthy people with sort of opaque sources of income. During the Biden administration, Democrats in Congress did allocate $80 billion to beef up the IRS. Some of that was supposed to modernize their antiquated technology. Some of it was to improve customer service and have somebody answer the telephone when taxpayers called with questions. But a big chunk of that was to beef up enforcement and collect the taxes that people already owe but aren't paying. And, you know, Republicans had tried to chip away at that funding. And when the CBO, the congressional bean counter, scored it, they found that every dollar that was cut from that IRS allocation wound up costing the government money in less revenue coming in. So every dollar they cut out wound up costing more than a dollar in lost revenue. We've already seen six or 7,000 IRS employees laid off. Word is that a lot more layoffs in the agency are in the pipeline. And to the extent that that affects the tax collector's ability to actually go after wealthy tax cheats, it's not just, you know, a drop in the bucket. It's actually counterproductive. Every dollar they'll save in salary will be more than offset by lost tax revenue.

Michael Klein
We have an EconoFact memo by Bill Gale of Brookings, and I think the figure he came up with was every dollar cut costs $5 in forgone revenues.

Scott Horsley
There's a pretty wide range of estimates out there, but they're all substantial. They're all many, many multiples.

Michael Klein
And also, as you mentioned, it's very regressive. The taxes that aren't paid are more by the richer people who have ways to get around tax codes, as opposed to middle class people who just fill out, you know, an easy form or something like that.

Scott Horsley
Yeah, if your income is a salary and you've got a W-2, there's just not a lot of opportunities for you to cheat on your taxes. But if you're a, you know, if you've got your own business, if you've got a partnership, if you've got opaque sources of revenue, there's all sorts of ways for you to evade taxes.

Michael Klein
We recently had Erica Groshen on EconoFact Chats. She's a former commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And she spoke about the problems that would arise from a cut in resources to collect statistics, like the unemployment rate or the inflation rate. Scott, you had another recent broadcast about the effects of job cuts on the collection of economic statistics. What did you find in that broadcast?

Scott Horsley
Yeah, I mean, I suspect everybody on this podcast is a pretty regular consumer of the reams of statistical data that the government produces. You know, we get a steady diet every month of data on how many people are working and what the cost of a bag of groceries is and just all sorts of sliced and diced numbers. And I've always put a great deal of faith in that government data. It's collected professionally, it's vetted carefully, it's delivered in a spin-free way, unlike a lot of the numbers that come from the administration, for example. And there are a couple of threats right now to those numbers. One is just the background threat that comes from their budgets, the statistical agencies of the Commerce Department, the Labor Department and the Agriculture Department. Their budgets have been basically flatlined for a decade, so they're trying to do more with less. They're trying to measure an ever larger economy with a shrinking budget and a shrinking workforce. There's also the challenge that fewer people are answering their surveys. You know, we've all got survey fatigue. Every time I order a ream of printer paper from the store, somebody wants to survey me about how my printer paper experience was. So, you know, we're all getting sick of that. And it's harder to compile data when you're relying on surveys and fewer people are answering. Same kind of thing that political pollsters are dealing with. But then there's also, you know, the threat of something more sinister, which is somebody actually trying to manipulate the data, either for political gain or even economic gain. And Donald Trump himself has suggested in the past, frequently, that that kind of thing goes on. I've always been pretty skeptical because I felt like, you know, the professionals in the statistical agencies would scream bloody murder if they thought that the numbers were being toyed with. I thought that the business community that depends on this data would also scream bloody murder. But there have been some warning signs in recent weeks. On the one hand, we've had the administration disband a number of voluntary advisory committees that kind of helped out with gathering those statistics. Those would have been some of the watchdogs who might have raised a fuss. And then we've had the Commerce Secretary himself suggest that he might want to change the way that GDP is calculated to remove government spending. Now, that's kind of an ideological statement about, you know, the social value of dollars spent by the government. But it would be a break with tradition and a break with the international standards of how we calculate GDP. So I'm not saying that the administration is preparing to monkey with the data. But there are some sort of caution flags out there in addition to the kind of background challenges that statistical agencies have.

Michael Klein
Yeah, you know, these are really important points. And I would commend the interview I did with Erica. She brings up a lot of the points that you talked about. And, you know, having been the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, she is in a great position to discuss these things. Binyamin?

Binyamin Appelbaum
Yeah, I mean, I just want to emphasize that, you know, some of the policies that the Trump administration is pursuing are, you know, perfectly understandable goals for people who hold a particular perspective on the role of government in our lives. You know, there is a reasonable argument to be had about how much money we should be spending on foreign aid, or on, you know, what role the federal government should play in education, or what type of environmental regulation is appropriate. These are political issues, and they deserve to be adjudicated politically. This attack on the ability of the federal government to gather and produce reliable statistical data is a form of sabotage. It is not an ideological brief, except in the sense that it undermines the ability of a democracy to function. Data is the basis on which we make policy. And when you have a government that is actively firing the people who gather and curate and produce that data, and in some cases disbanding entire portions of agencies that are dedicated to that function, I think one needs to understand it not as an attack on a particular policy, but as an attack on the ability to make policy. And that is a very different place to be and much more worrying.

Scott Horsley
And it's in keeping with the way that the administration sort of works the refs of all kinds, you know, it's, it's in keeping with his effort, the President's efforts to sort of discredit independent journalists. It's in keeping with their attack on the judiciary. It's anybody who might question what this, what this administration does, or provide objective information that would let voters make their own decision, is being discredited now.

Michael Klein
So I'd like to conclude with one other major part of the President's platform, and that's immigration. The President wants to cut back on immigration at a time when the growth of the native-born workforce is just flat. Binyamin, you had a recent opinion piece on the need for immigrants in the United States. What did you say in that piece?

Binyamin Appelbaum
The argument that piece makes is basically that in the United States, one thing we no longer make enough of here is babies. We are not producing enough population to meet our workforce needs, and that situation is projected to get a lot worse in the coming decades. We need immigrants to maintain economic growth, to provide, you know, for the people who live here

already. And it is just a huge mistake to be treating immigration as a negative force in American life. Our immigration system needs huge adjustments, and I won't go into all of the adjustments that piece argues for, but it's clear that the system is broken and needs to be improved. But the fundamental goal of finding a way to allow the immigration that we need ought to be the priority of public policy. And it's fascinating, you know, to watch the Trump administration confront this issue, because most of what the Trump administration is doing right now is unbuilding, taking things apart, trying to reduce the work that government does, that's relatively easy to do. What we've seen in the early days of the administration, you know, is that it's one big effort to expand the role of government, which is to create a huge new apparatus devoted to rounding up immigrants and deporting them from this country, is proving much slower going, because that's a building project that requires an expansion of the capacity of government. And that's just much, much tougher sledding so far.

Michael Klein
Yeah, it's tougher to build a building than to bring it down. Well, once again, thank you all for joining me on another EconoFact Chats episode. It's certainly interesting times, and it's great to get your perspectives on an environment where things are changing so fast and so dramatically. So thanks again.

Panel
Great to be with you. Thank you.

Michael Klein
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