Shaping policy for a ‘new normal’

With vaccinations up and mask mandates rescinded in most of the country, many ventured a return to (almost) normal pre-pandemic life over the Memorial Day weekend. But how can we ensure that the lessons of 2020 are not forgotten — and deal with the longer-lasting impacts of the virus?

Vaccine expert and Baker Institute disease and poverty fellow Dr. Peter Hotez addressed these questions last week in a webinar on preventing the next pandemic. The Center for Energy Studies’ virtual Houston Freight Summit 2021, organized by energy and transportation policy fellow Ed Emmett, focused its first day on what’s needed for a robust rebound from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. And on Thursday, the Center for Health and Biosciences and The Hackett Center for Mental Health will examine mental health in the aftermath of COVID-19 — which has significantly exacerbated conditions such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Baker Institute will continue to analyze and address these and other critical policy issues as we move through the second year of COVID-19. We look forward to seeing you in person at Baker Hall when it is completely safe to gather inside. In the meantime, visit our events page for a full list of upcoming webinars, and check out the online research library for the latest work by our fellows and scholars.

Beyond the Headlines
**National debt at WWII levels?**

Recent news stories predict that President Biden’s proposed budget will push the national debt past World War II levels. But as Center for Public Finance fellow Jorge Barro writes, the projected surge in pandemic-related debt won’t look like the rise in the 1940s. Read why in "U.S. Debt at 100% of GDP: This Time Will Be Different."

**A ‘nimble and fair’ immigration court system**

The Biden administration announced plans last week to speed up the immigration court process — a bid to limit backlogs and long waits for cases to be heard. Learn more about this problem, and how to fix it, in the Center for the United States and Mexico’s report on “A New Opportunity to Build a 21st Century Immigration Court System.”

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**“Just when you think Texas couldn’t go further to the right, here we are.”**

Mark Jones, Fellow in Political Science, to The Economist, on Texas’ most conservative legislative session in a generation

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**Outreach and Accolades**

**Interview:** What’s next after the Israel-Hamas ceasefire? Baker Institute Director Ambassador Edward Djerejian discussed the issue with Sky News (start at the 2:14 mark), and later joined Houston Public Media for a deep dive into the history behind the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (start at the 1:22 mark).

**Well-deserved honor:** Congratulations to George Abbey, senior fellow in space policy, on his recent induction to the Lone Star Flight Museum’s Texas Aviation Hall of Fame! Abbey, the former director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center, was cited for his impact on aviation by a distinguished panel of aviation historians, authors, publishers and aviation experts.

**Congressional testimony:** The war on drugs is a failure, contends fellow Katharine Neill Harris, who testified before a U.S. House committee on alternative solutions based on racial justice and harm reduction. She later testified before a Texas legislative committee in support of a bill to reduce penalties for possession of some marijuana concentrate (start at the 48:00 mark). Harris is the Alfred C. Glassell, III, Fellow in Drug Policy.
**Member networking events return**

After more than a year of virtual events, the Roundtable Young Professionals (RYP) held their first in-person networking event with a happy hour at Kirby Ice House on May 20. Click here to view a photo slide show of the event. For more information on how to join or renew your membership to one of our premier forums, like the Roundtable or RYP, visit our website.

**Upcoming Events**

**Webinar — Opportunities and Challenges of Election Reform.** At this event, election experts consider how public opinion can affect efforts to promote nonpartisanship. It is the fifth and final webinar in our election series, co-hosted by The Carter Center. Be sure to check out all of the episodes here. June 2 | Noon CDT

**Webinar — Mental Health in the Aftermath of COVID-19.** Tune in Thursday to learn how Texas’ elected leaders responded to the mental health challenges of pandemic, and how their funding decisions will impact the delivery of mental health services across Texas and Greater Houston. Register here.

**Webinar — The Economic Effect of Remittances: Powering Economic Prosperity and Inclusion.** Hikmet Ersek, president and CEO of Western Union, takes a close look at remittances — also known as the money sent home by migrants working abroad, or “the hidden engine of globalization.” Register here.

June 9 | 11 a.m. CDT

**Roundtable Dialogue: The Overdose Crisis and the Drug War Amid a Global Pandemic: Current Trends in Drug Use and Policy.** At this member-exclusive webinar, Katharine Neill Harris, the Alfred C. Glassell, III, Fellow in Drug Policy, discusses the overdose epidemic in the United States, which saw a record number of drug-related deaths in 2020. June 16 | Noon CDT

**Roundtable Dialogue: The Biden Tax and Expenditure Plan.** John W. Diamond, the Edward A. and Hermena Hancock Kelly Fellow in Public Finance and director of the Center for Public Finance, explores the macroeconomic effects of President Biden's proposed fiscal plan. Join the Roundtable to attend this and other member-exclusive events! June 22 | Noon CDT

**Get Involved with the Baker Institute**

Become a member of the Baker Institute Roundtable and Roundtable Young Professionals. Contact our development office for more information on how you can join the conversation on the relevant issues and ideas that shape our world.