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Re-Engineering American Security: Cultivating Talent for Competitiveness

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Stephanie Ruhle:

Thank you all so much for being here. I am super excited to be part of this conversation. It's a hugely important one. I think everyone in this room would agree that the United States must have a renewed commitment to an education system that's compatible with training our workforce for the jobs of tomorrow. If we wanna lead in technology, we would all agree with that. So what we need to do in this session is figure out how we're doing now and what we're going to do to get in a better place. So I wanna just start by getting everyone's reaction to the report Secretary.

Condoleezza Rice:

Certainly. Well, first of all, thanks very much and thank you for, uh, this opportunity from the foundation. Um, I, I had a little bit of dejavu to be honest, because, uh, more than a decade ago, Joel Klein, the former chief of the New York City schools, and I chaired a task force for the Council on foreign relations called National Security and Education Reform. And, uh, one of the reasons that we wanted to do that was to bring to the attention of the national security community, the criticality, uh, the crucial moment that we were at in terms of this issue of talent. And to say, uh, you may think this isn't our problem, but it actually is our problem as people who are concerned about national security. And so, um, as I think about this report and some of the recommendations, uh, many of which I completely agree, uh, with on STEM education, uh, most certainly, I just had a little bit of deja vu. And I thought, this time, maybe we'll act because we've known this problem for some time.

Stephanie Ruhle:

Deja Vu in, in an upset way, in an optimistic way. You wrote that report 10 years ago. Yeah. And here we are. And here we are saying the same things.

Condoleezza Rice:

Well, it's because these are structural issues and structural issues take time. But I'm actually, um, more optimistic this time because, uh, the panel that just talked, we have the advantages of technology now in education, in personalized learning, in bringing, uh, education to people in more remote areas to underserved schools where perhaps the, uh, the teaching profession has not really fully taken advantage of the, uh, technologies that are available. And so I think this may be another inflection point, but let, let's make it an inflection point this time that we actually, 10 years from now, we're not sitting here talking about it again.

Stephanie Ruhle:

Dr. Howard, this is your report. So you are without solutions yet. What was just your biggest takeaway?

Chris Howard:

Yeah, so first off, I'm, I'm coming from Phoenix. I want everybody to know it's, it's a dry heat, so I want you all to know that it's 2000 degrees, but it's dry.

Condoleezza Rice:

Chris, Chris, my oven is a dry heat too, but I don't wanna,

Chris Howard:

I'll actually say this. So, so thanks for the que. So when I first came into, was asked by AA to do this, uh, work, um, I said, don't you remember that report that Secretary Rice and Joe Kle, I remembered, I actually pulled it out, dusted off, and I said, here we go again. It's like deja vu all over again. Um, my initial reaction is that it's great that we are talking about that question here. You know, Anya would say, in our conversation together, all these national security people, what do we know about K-12? Well, we better learn a lot because there's nothing that we are doing right now in terms of the great conversations about whether it be Ukraine, Afghanistan, nato, et cetera, that won't be addressed unless we get the human capital question, right? Every single one of us is in the human capital business, whether we like it or not.

We're educating kids, grandkids, sons dollars, et cetera, et cetera. We absolutely have to get this right. We do have more tools, and we have a moment and, and talk about solutions in a in a second. But if you leave with anything after I, when I, when I say this other than my corny joke about Phoenix, is that we are really at an inflection point. It is a Sputnik type moment. It is a Go Water nickels type moment. It is a morale act of 1862 where we created land grant schools and R o TC type moment. In fact, we wanna borrow that language later on. So I'm bullish on the fact that everything we do runs through this conversation around K-12. We don't get it right. And I'm so happy to use the term workforce because, um, PhDs are great, but people that technicians in some ways are even more important. So I'm happy to talk about that in a few minutes

Stephanie Ruhle:

Now. We need a lot more of them. Yes. What was your takeaway?

Romy Drucker:

The pandemic has put a spotlight on K-12 education that is changing the conversation. And I think it's really important to just back up and take a look at what the system is experiencing right now. The pandemic erased two decades of progress in math and literacy and math levels in this country are the lowest that they have been since 1990. So, just to ground us in the data for a minute, this is an urgent moment. Um, and you are hearing from this illustrious panel, you know, that this is a, is a moment for urgency. It is a moment for an operation warp speed type response to addressing what is, you know, a deep structural and equity challenge in the K-12 system. What I'm optimistic about, like my fellow panelists, is that coalitions are coming together in new ways to solve this problem. And I wanna thank Anya for inviting the foundation into this community to be part of the discussion. Because the workforce challenge is a K-12 challenge. We need to be starting much earlier. We need to be thinking about innovation, and we need to be thinking about science and math and literacy education in a much different way. And I think that we'll talk about solutions, Stephanie, but the report starts to lay out a roadmap for how we can, you know, amplify and accelerate some of this innovation in this very important moment. But

Stephanie Ruhle:

Does the report highlight an opportunity or is it a flashing red light that we're in a crisis, right? When we talk about the data, it was in 2022 that the United States was something like country 25 out of 37 O E C D countries where we are in math literacy, right? In terms of STEM education. By 2017, China was churning out eight times the amount of people with STEM degrees than we were. So is this an opportunity or is this holy cow, we're in crisis because it's the country leading in technology that is the global power?

Condoleezza Rice:

Well, it, it's, it's both. And in fact, there's that old, uh, saying that, uh, the Chinese word for crisis danger and opportunity. I think we, we have both, uh, in this circumstance, and I do think it's a little bit of a splitting moment, uh, for a couple of reasons. One is that there is the China challenge in the way that there has not been an external challenge of that kind for a long time. Secondly, uh, we are seeing these frontier technologies like the discussion we just had on ai, which now everybody knows that, uh, the same skills and the same. It's, it's just not going to to work. And then finally, as you mentioned, I think there is a spotlight now on what in the world are we doing in K-12 education, and particularly for our underserved kids. I, I will tell you when I hear now the debate about the Supreme Court and affirmative action, and I think, well, part of the problem is that underserved kids have not been in a position to compete for these, uh, universities. And so we have a host of crises that have come together in a way that I hope is going to be a flashing red light, uh, for the country. And, and, uh, we won't skip to, I don't you don't wanna skip to solutions, but one thing that I really liked in the report was highlighting a couple of places in the national security

space around defense authorization, for instance, that we could raise the level, uh, at which people recognize the crisis that we're in.

Chris Howard:

Yeah, those are those, yeah, I'm just gonna say very quickly, those are in inextricably linked, right, the National Defense Authorization Act, which has a habit of passing every year, typically, um, with, uh, you know, billions approaching a trillion, uh, a trillion dollars almost is a great opportunity with a small amount of that to be carved off for K-12 education. Focusing on STEM could really go a long way.

Stephanie Ruhle:

But don't we already have a problem with the fact that we've got a 71 billion hole in terms of education Right now, public schools in this country are in crisis. So in some ways it, it feels like talking about AI and talking about STEM is amazing, but coming out of C O V I D learning loss is so enormous. Yes. We don't have the basics down. No,

Condoleezza Rice:

No. Learning loss is enormous. I'm not sure it's a matter of money to be quite honest, right? Because, uh, I'm, I'm learning about a lot of that c money in schools that wasn't even spent and still hasn't been spent. Lots of it. Uh, we did a study at Hoover for a state that shall remain unnamed, and it turns out that, let's

Stephanie Ruhle:

Guess yes, she's gonna describe it and everyone can guess.

Condoleezza Rice:

All of the, all of the technology was being used for administrative purposes, not for teaching in the classroom because the teachers were a bit fearful of it. Well, you can fix that. You can have the teachers learn how to use the technology. And finally, uh, we do have a habit in this country of sending the least well-performing teachers to the poor schools. That's not a matter of money, that's a matter of values, but how

Stephanie Ruhle:

Did we solve that?

Condoleezza Rice:

Until somebody calls out, if you are a bad teacher, don't send the bad teacher to a school with poor kids, cuz you wouldn't want that teacher in your kid's school until we call that out as well, we are not going to solve, uh, this problem. And so, yes, I'm happy to have more money for K-12 education, but there are also some structural problems that we've gotta gotta resolve.

Romy Drucker:

We're seeing creative solutions. Teachers actually are leading the way. Their jobs have become unsustainable. So they are looking to technology to chat G P T to make their jobs easier, because what they wanna do isn't spend all their time lesson planning. They want to be building relationships with students. They wanna be building social capital. They know those are the things, personalization that is gonna accelerate students and support upward mobility. We released a poll this week that shows that 63% of teachers in America are actually using chat G P T to enhance their instruction. That is an indicator to me that this is also a moment where we're seeing new pressures, but also new energy for solving problems and reaching students in new ways.

Chris Howard:

Can I just piggyback on that with a specific, uh, solution and idea about that ties together both of these strands to some extent. So there's a shortage of approximately 200,000 teachers, uh, qualified teachers and growing and, and growing. And, and how do you address that? So we mentioned ROTC a second ago. So one of the ideas is for, um, you know, bringing national security into K-12 and higher education is to have a sort of an ROTC program for STEM teachers. I mean, who doesn't think that RTC is an important part of the fabric of America? And my father was an ROTC graduate Prairie View, a and m a historically black college university. Many people here made it into the middle class because of connection to rotc. Think about tens of thousands or more teachers that leave without debt because they serve their country and Secretary of Rices, to your point, and communities that needed it the most.

Uh, and to your point, Romy using technology like ai, like, uh, virtual reality. Um, so the RTC core idea for teachers is, is one idea. And I do think that in terms of technology, the thing that's really powerful, now, sometimes when teachers and administrators get it wrong, families can get it right. So like the Khan Academy Conmigo, have you seen that ai uh, property? We have something in Arizona State called the Max Accelerator, which we like to say we were regenerative AI before. Generative AI was generative ai. So having, having these sort of AI guided tutorials and, um, you know, student, uh, sort of teachers in your pocket is another example that can go right to the student, right, to the parrot, right to the guardian, et cetera. So that's another part of it as well, part of the

Condoleezza Rice:

Solution. I completely agree. I just, I just do wanna say though, until we realize that this is a structural problem for poor kids, uh, n nothing's going to work. And, and I also want to call out my own profession in this regard. So Chris and his colleagues are doing an amazing job of leveraging technology, um, and even for tertiary education. Uh, universities and schools of education are, are a bit whistling past the graveyard when it comes to what technology demands of teacher training, what technology demands of curriculum development, uh, what technology demands of, uh, training principles. We know that the quickest way to turn around a failing school is with a good

principal. And so that's a touch point with which you could work to get people really, uh, conversant with the technology using it. But there's a gap between our training and what is happening, uh, in the classroom. So I think our, our, uh, professions need to step up as well.

Chris Howard:

Well, secretary Rice, I was talking to Rami earlier about this, that we're proud at ASU to have, uh, 42,000 K through 12 learners in our prep digital university or academy. And we also have 3,200 charter school students. And their outcomes are, you know, about 90% go to college or community college or to the military. My point is that that K 20 idea is not one that we should forget, and that K 20 should include also upskilling and re-skilling and certifications to get us into the workforce. That's right.

Stephanie Ruhle:

Everything that you're talking about is energizing, exciting, positive people in the room are pumped about it. But that great principle that you're talking about right now is bogged down dealing with cultural issues in his or her school, because that is at the forefront. How do we balance the two? Because the stuff that we're talking about right here is so crucial to our future. And so many ways,

Romy Drucker:

I think that's at the forefront of the headlines. But when you visit schools, it's not what the conversation is about. The conversation is about how to best support students. I was recently in Bessemer, Alabama. I visited Alabama Aerospace and Aviation Academy, which is the first aerospace and aviation school in the entire state led by principal Ruben Morris. And he is educating the next generation of predominantly black students who are energized by the idea of joining the aerospace and defense industry. He's dealing with discipline issues like you would in any high school. And of course, high school kids are gonna be high school kids, but his focus is on creating a great learning experience for students. His teacher's focus is on a great learning experience for students. So I do think there is some noise out there in our politics that is just distracting from the good work happening in classrooms. It's our job to help direct the conversation and come together in ways that are gonna keep the focus on learning loss. To your point, Stephanie, because the magnitude of it is so great and the risk to our national security and future talent is significant,

Stephanie Ruhle:

Much of this report is about how the United States maintains its competitive edge in the global landscape. Secretary Rice, how do you think we're doing in terms of who is our biggest adversary that we should be worried about?

Condoleezza Rice:

Our biggest adversary is to us, um, that we don't get these things right. Uh, I really don't fear, uh, a country out there when I'm often asked, you know, when you look out to the future of what's the,

what's the danger that you see? And the United States can handle any challenge, uh, we'll handle the challenge of China if we do the things that we're, we're talking about, because I'll bet on free peoples any day. Not, uh, not people who, uh, suddenly wake up one day and oh, by the way, all of you, uh, all of those out there who have authoritarian envy, you know, oh, they, they build such great airports. Oh, their roads are so great. Just say two words, zero covid. That was a great idea. And it was one guy who thought zero covid was an idea, a good idea. So that's why I will bet on free peoples and democracies.

But the challenge for free peoples and democracies is then to organize themselves to do the most urgent task. And this is among the most urgent task. Another way that we're doing it, and we don't like talking about it these days, but we import a lot of our talent. That is one of the ways that we have stayed at the, at the lead edge. Uh, the, the truth is that if you are a young software engineer or want to be a young software engineer, you might want to be in the United States of America, because actually in a generation you could be American. And so, immigration, this is a country that has been fueled by immigrants. It is a country that has been made new and young every few generations by immigrants. You just go around and look at the people who are leading the knowledge revolution across the country.

They're immigrants. And so the other part of the story is that we need to educate our own, because it shouldn't be that you have to come here to be successful. You should be. Our two mantras have been, it doesn't matter where you came from, it matters where you're going. Right? That was true. You weren't trapped in your class. Your, your class of birth, your circumstances of birth. That's what we're talking about here today. Education is the way out of your circumstances of birth, but it was also, you could come here and be a part of this great place. And that's what's kept us at the edge.

Stephanie Ruhle:

Dr. Howard, what do you think?

Chris Howard:

Well,

I reflect upon, you know, the political football that is out there, and we had some pretty good marching orders when we started this conversation. Try not to go there. Um, try not to make this just a, a culture war as it was. A good friend of mine just became a superintendent of a school in Texas, and he said it's really, really difficult. But going back to my comment a second ago, we, we really are at a moment, and even though it's not just about China, it's not just about climate change. It is about those things. And sometimes somebody can stand up and say, we have some threats to our existence, to our way of life, and we need our human capital to rise to the moment, and we need to get away from some of those things. And you know, when you, let's talking, a lot of the conversation today has been about China.

It, it's not that China is, you know, our friend, our enemy, our frenemy, whatever you want to call it. But there is, there are RS and there are D's and i's that are rallying around that point, which gives us a moment to kind of look forward. We need those moments where we kind of bring together the

civic glue that is America to focus on things and get beyond the political stuff. So that's what makes me excited to open the door for the things that the secretary, uh, talked about, that Rami's Foundation graciously helped us work on that. This actually is one of those times, and I'm glad that I was able to mention the climate change piece because young people, principals, teachers, they see it happening in them, around them, and they think they want to do something about it as well. So the galvanizing moment right now, I think going back to your original question helps us maybe get around some of the political issues that kind of pull us down.

Stephanie Ruhle:

But it's the political issues, or at least the political gridlock that is holding us back in some ways, right? At the State Department right now, you've got 62 people awaiting confirmation, right? There's something like 30 8:00 AM ambassadors waiting. Almost all of them have careers in this that they should blow through. But you've got a political system right now that prides itself on gridlock. How do we maintain our competitiveness? You know, when we think about national security education, that's something that should bring us together, all Americans, but it doesn't. The signature right now is let's get nothing done. But,

Chris Howard:

But the CHIPS act did pass. That's a great point. And the National Defense Authorization Act will pass because congressmen and, and senators like to get reelected, so they do pass that bill. Amen. Um, and so there are, we gotta find those, those, those moon beams that actually work and, and ride on 'em. And so let's go where the light is and where those things work. And do this R o TC program support JR RTC programs with STEM dollars, which actually do make it through. And by the way, the Coast Guard is launching JR. R T C, the president of Arizona State University was a JR RTC person. So there are these slivers, and then again, that CHIPS act, which pulls together national security, industrial policy, foreign policy, competitiveness. Actually, there's, there are real dollars and real opportunities around that from upskilling and from the educational piece.

Romy Drucker:

I agree with that. Another proposal in the report is the, i, uh, the creation of a DARPA for Education, which would really, we're talking about the aspiration of the American dream here. And to do that, we're going to need to accelerate innovation. We're going to need to build more solutions that are gonna address these systemic issues and these structural issues. As Dr. Rice said, that is an idea that is moving forward. We helped put together a bipartisan coalition called the Alliance for Learning Innovation, 40 cross-sector organizations who are pushing forward for this idea. We've gotten 30 million, it's a small start, but we need to be working with agencies. We're working with NSF I e s. Did you say 30 billion? You know, I said said 30 million. It would be nice if it was 30 billion. Um, but that's what we need to do. We just need to keep pushing. And I do feel like there is traction, um, to Dr. Howard's point, the chips acts passed, people are thinking about education in a different way. And so continuing to build that coalition is a big priority.

Condoleezza Rice:

Yeah. One of the complications that we have, and I agree, I think if you could have a DARPA that was more like an accelerator of good ideas, um, not because, you know, we tried the common Core at one point and it fell because everybody said, don't federalize education. We do have a very decentralized K-12 system. The most important level in K-12 in the United States is probably the board of education or maybe the state chief. Uh, and so, uh, Washington can only do so much, but I think what Washington can do is it can help to accelerate good ideas. There is an awful lot of experimentation and innovation going on though in the states, uh, in localities. You mentioned Bessemer, which is about, uh, 15 minutes from where I was born in Alabama. And so, uh, we should really welcome that as well. Well, we should welcome that innovation that's happening, uh, in our very decentralized system.

Stephanie Ruhle:

But how do we solve for these amazing innovations, right, that are gonna impact some areas and some communities when our poorest areas are suffering so much, right? When you've got the poorest schools, remember during covid didn't even have access to, to the internet, to wifi, and then we flip the page and we're all talking about ai. There's no, there gotta be any AI in towns where there's no wifi.

Condoleezza Rice:

Well, it, it's not, look, it will be a bit bit provocative. I do believe in competition for public schools. So I, I actually believe in school choice. I actually believe in charter schools. Um, you know, and, and, and I'm gonna tell you, every time I hear somebody say, charter schools or voucher vouchers or school choice will damage the public schools, I say, fine, write that editorial in the Washington Post, but then don't send your kids to Sidwell friends. Right? So, so that's what I mean, that's really what I mean by where are our values here. Uh, one thing that we tried to do with the report a decade ago Yeah. <laugh>, was to say, uh, if a poor kid is not learning because of our national security challenge, that's actually your problem. And so don't just think that if your kids are learning and your kids are doing all right, that we're all right, you were really have to care about, uh, the, the weakest link in democracy as

Stephanie Ruhle:

Well. Why on earth would you send a kid to Stawell friends when you could go to St. Albans <laugh>

Chris Howard:

Or, or Episcopal, my

Condoleezza Rice:

Or St. Mary's Academy and no, so, and

Chris Howard:

Whatever. No, here. Yeah. So, so I, I wanted to go back to your point, and you make a great point about how tough it was during Covid. Kids didn't get broadband. I, I ran Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh before I came to be, uh, the COO at Arizona State. And we had poor kids in college too, that didn't have access. But you know what we did? We got together with Verizon, we got together with at and t, we created hotspots. I had my technology people driving out the rural communities across Pennsylvania to set up hotspots so kids get access. We did some things in the heat of the moment that we had to do to get kids educated and give them access to technology. We have great broadband initiatives here at Arizona, at Arizona State University. We're working with big companies and with the governments, what have you. So let's not forget that we are getting some things right, even though it's a difficult road ahead. But we've done incremental innovative things that keep building up to do great things because we did get access to kids, um, uh, in broadband, access to kids during covid in a way that people are not really writing about. We actually did to have some solutions.

Stephanie Ruhle:

And that's continuing. How excited are you about all the companies out there who realize they need to go into schools, they need to offer training programs to find the right workforce? Because what colleges are educating our students for, or high schools don't align with the jobs of tomorrow and now maybe more than we've seen in a modern era. So many companies saying, we gotta dig in and solve this to get our next workforce.

Romy Drucker:

I think one role that philanthropy can play is to help facilitate the co-creation of solutions. We need companies and partners working hand in hand with teachers and students in developing these solutions. We happen, happen Phil Philanthropy,

Stephanie Ruhle:

Right? Cause people think of philanthropy in like this sweet loving way. This is an economic solution because these companies need to be a success and they need great, a great

Romy Drucker:

Workforce. It is. And if they want their products to be purchased and used at scale, they need to be co-developed with teachers and students. So we wanna help facilitate that kind of inclusive r and d when we talk about innovation and the kinds of solutions we need. That has to be part how we think about how we develop them. Um, and if we do, to your point, Stephanie, I think all those companies and partners would be really successful.

Condoleezza Rice:

I, I, I just wanted to say too that I, I do think that it's in their interest to do it. Absolutely. But I also see in that community a real sense of obligation to the country, uh, that having an untrained workforce is not good for our democracy either. And so I'm encouraged by that. I'm encouraged by the fact that they see their interests, of course. But I think values are also driving some of this, let's, let's help make the country better.

Chris Howard:

And the last one I was gonna mention in that round of applause, please,

Condoleezza Rice:

<laugh>,

Chris Howard:

It's hard enough being by Secretary Rice, like Gladys Knight and the Pips <laugh> young people like what's a pip? Older people. I used to listen to that. But what I'm also excited about, uh, Madam Secretary is, um, putting your provost back hat back on, is that faculty actually are getting it as well. Yes. Uh, faculty members understand that an energized, whether it be liberal arts, whether it be technical schools, whether it be, uh, big state universities, they know that the nexus between in education and skilling and learning and training and getting a job and having a great life, they're recognizing that in a way that maybe they didn't 20 years ago.

Stephanie Ruhle:

I think you're right. All right, we are out of time, but I wanna end, of course, in this education segment with a homework assignment. Secretary, I would like you to give this room of national security experts and enthusiasts. It's a call to action for everyone. What do they need to do? What do they need to talk about? What do they need to write about and get excited about?

Condoleezza Rice:

Well, you need to bring it up in every national security form in which you, uh, are operating. If you're in the government, you need to make it a national security issue. But I often think we talk about structural, and it sounds so big. If each and every American decided, what am I going to do? Am I gonna go and help in a boys and girls club? Am I gonna give a little money so that tutoring and, and broadband is available? You know, if each and every one of us, uh, did our part, it would not only be good for, uh, uh, the cause that we have, it would be awfully good for us because there is nothing better than dealing with people who have less than you have. It makes you less entitled, less aggrieved, and more a participant in democracy. George Schultz used to wear a tie that said, democracy is not a spectator sport. So that's the call to action.

Stephanie Ruhle:

Yeah. Wow. We're gonna end on that high note. Thank you all so, so much. Thank what an honor.
Thank you.