

Policy 360 – Episode 83 – The First Government Shutdown, Behind the Scenes - Transcript

- Judith Kelley: Hello and welcome once again to Policy 360. I'm Judith Kelley, dean of the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.
- Judith Kelley: My guest today is John Koskinen. John lead the Internal Revenue Service, or the IRS, from 2013 to 2017. He's had a long and varied career in public service. He headed Freddie Mac and President Clinton's counsel on the Y2K conversion and the US Soccer Foundation. He also served as deputy director of the Federal Office of Management and Budget, also known as OMB and as the district of Columbia's city administrator during the 9/11 attacks and afterwards. So, John comes to us today to Policy 360 with a lot of policy experience.
- Judith Kelley: Now we're talking today broadly about life in public service but first it's just so timely right now that you're here and the US government is in the midst of the longest shutdown, not just a shutdown but the longest shutdown in history. And it turns out that you actually ran, to the extent that anyone runs such a thing, the first real shutdown in the federal government in the mid-'90s, in 1995, while you were deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget. So, can you tell us what happens behind the scenes during a shutdown that the American public can't see and that members of congress may not appreciate?
- John Koskinen: Well, in '95 the government was, as it was thinking about shutting down, had never really shutdown for a lengthy period of time and the agencies did not have shutdown plans. So that summer of 1995 we asked all the agencies to develop draft shutdown plans and then my concern was to make sure that they were all consistent across the entire government. So I said we have to play it straight, we can't play favorites or decide that we're gonna make an example of somebody and so all the departments created plans that were then reviewed by OMB staff and myself so that if and when, and it turned out when, the government shutdown, everyone would know what to do.
- Judith Kelley: So you anticipated this?
- John Koskinen: Well we anticipated by the ... the 1994 election was when Newt Gingrich and the republicans ran on a balanced budget amendment, 54 new republican congressmen into the government and the control of the House of Representatives went into the hands of the republicans and there was immediately, of all things, a battle and a debate about a balanced budget and Gingrich was proposing a balanced budget amendment. It seems ironic today, with the deficits we're running, that the republicans once wanted a balanced budget. But then it was the basis for the disagreement and so by the summer it was fairly clear that there was some chance, now everyone hoped that it wouldn't happen, that you were going to end up with a shutdown.
- John Koskinen: So, rather than look like we were counting on a shutdown, we called it the Fall Working Group. And the Fall Working Group was composed of representatives

of agencies around the government because I did think it was important that if there was a shutdown we couldn't be making it up on the run and you had two million employees who you immediately had to advise whether they were emergency employees, necessary to protect life or property, or whether they were going to be furloughed.

John Koskinen: That time around it was also unclear, if there was a shutdown, if you were furloughed, and not working, whether you would get paid for that time, ultimately at the end of the shutdown. So there was a significant amount of anxiety across the board by the work force.

Judith Kelley: So what does go on then behind the scenes? So you got those working groups in place and it did happen and then what is it that goes on behind the scenes?

John Koskinen: So then what goes on behind the scenes is the plans have made a set of judgements of who's working and who's not working. In those days social security was paid on the first on the month, and now is paid according to your birthday to spread it out. So, the first shutdown for five days was in November and it started before the end of the month, so we shut social security down as well and one of our problems was the government cannot accept volunteer services, except the interior department, some agencies have gift acceptance authority but most agencies don't. So, part of the problem was to make sure employees didn't come to work if they were not eligible as emergency employees and I remember talking to John Sturdivant, who was the head of the AFGE union, talking about the fact that it was fascinating the number of workers who were insisting on coming to work, trying to get into the building to do their jobs.

John Koskinen: As the shutdown then ended after five days, primarily because the defense production plants all shutdown after a week, republicans opened the government, funded the defense department and then a little while shut it all down again. So, one of the things you have to do as the shutdown moves on is continually evaluate our emergencies now being created. Are life or property being threatened in a way after a couple weeks that it wasn't being threatened at the end of a day or two? So what happened is you got to the end of the month, it was clear that social security had to open up because people did depend among those monthly payments.

John Koskinen: So, I spent a lot of time with the chief counsel at OMB and the Office of Legal Counseling and the Justice department answering questions that would come in. The republicans, for instance, wanted to hold a hearing on some subject just to show the government was functioning and the position we had was cabinet officers, everybody confirmed by the senate, have a continuing appropriation, so the cabinet officers were working but I said secretaries and receptionists and people who would help cabinet secretaries prepare testimony were not emergency employees. So, we let the congress know you could have the secretary but the secretary was coming without prepared statements because

there was nobody to prepare them for him. They didn't hold the hearing as a result.

John Koskinen: So, you continued to have those kinds of issues. Secretaries all wanted to know what could they do? What was not allowable for them even though they were allowed to work? So, it was kind of a continued set of discussions. The second time around it was running now through Christmas and New Years. I decided that what we ought to do is remind the public what was not being done, how many SPA loans each day were not being given, how many FHA mortgages were not being given, how many people were being denied access to the parks, to museums around the country, and so a lot of that was important because some of those 54 republican newbies thought that the government was all foreign aid and welfare and if you shut it down who would care. And then they discovered that the government does a lot of things people take for granted but when you stop doing them people suddenly say, "Why is it not here?" And, "Gee, if that's what the government does, I support that."

Judith Kelley: So, is there something that you learned during that time from those shutdowns that you think is ... So, first of all, what did you learn and is that applicable today?

John Koskinen: Well, as I said then and I've said since then, it's a terrible way to run a railroad. In fact, it was viewed so negatively at the end of that shutdown in early January of 1996 that my prediction, incorrectly, was that they'd never do it again. That it'd been such a nonproductive waste of time, that congress did decide that they would pay people who didn't work, as well as the emergency workers who did, and so everybody thought so well then that really is a ... it's fair to the workers but for three weeks they didn't do anything, now they have to go back and try to catch up on all that. That doesn't make any sense at all.

John Koskinen: But in 2013 and now again people have decided well maybe they'll make a point by shutting the government down. But it's an inefficient, ineffective way to run the place and I think it makes no sense whatsoever.

Judith Kelley: The point you were making about the hearing, would that sort of - similar logic apply to what's currently being contested, which is the state of the union?

John Koskinen: Well, there's an issue about state of the union as to who's preparing those materials, that's not an emergency.

Judith Kelley: And the security people there.

John Koskinen: Well, the security protecting the president, security people working is fine. But policy people who're drafting position papers, drafting papers, should not be there and this administration has taken the position, on a number of issues, that well to lessen the impact on tax payers or on citizens they're gonna have certain activities take place. But that's not the standard. The standard under, and it's a

criminal statute, is that the only people who can work are either people who have funding or are people who are protecting life or property.

Judith Kelley: Right.

John Koskinen: And so I understand the goal of the administration to ameliorate or lessen the pushback but if you really are concerned about the convenience and important activities for citizens, you shouldn't shut the government down.

Judith Kelley: So you basically can't have your cake and eat it too.

John Koskinen: Exactly, I think the risk is that people are going to use shutdowns as a point of leverage to accomplish something that they can't get an agreement on and that will be a dangerous precedent for the country. First it discourages people from taking federal employment if every once in a while they're gonna go two, three, four weeks without getting paid. But beyond that it's just an inefficient, ineffective way to run an organization.

Judith Kelley: Well, let's switch to a lighter topic then. The IRS.

John Koskinen: And my fun-filled four years there.

Judith Kelley: Yes, so that was your final position before you retired, in quotation marks retired.

John Koskinen: I'm now on my third attempt at retirement.

Judith Kelley: Yeah, exactly. So we never know where that's gonna go. But you took over at a time of intense politic pressure. So, can you remind us what was happening then?

John Koskinen: Well what was happening, the inspector general had issued a report saying that the IRS in reviewing applications from organizations that wanted to be tax exempt was holding up the applications based just on the name of the organization. And what had happened in 2010, the tea party had formed in opposition to the affordable care act and citizens united came down and then turned out corporations could make contributions and everybody said, "Well, what would be great would be we'll form what are called social welfare organizations," 501c4 of the tax code. And those organizations are advocacy organizations but they have to be primarily involved in social welfare, rotary clubs, the Sierra Club. They can't be involved for the bulk of their activity in political intervention.

John Koskinen: So, the problem was you suddenly have created a lot of conservative groups, some smaller number of liberal groups, who by their name looked like they pretty interested in becoming politically active. So the IG said, correctly, you shouldn't be selecting people for review just on their name and because he had

been asked only to look at the status for the conservative organizations, he said they're being targeted. He didn't use the word target, he said they're being selected inappropriately by their name. So that became known as the targeting scandal. The position of the republicans was this was all directed by the white house, by the president, or by the Department of Justice, somebody outside the IRS, to try to make ineffective these organizations in the 2012 election.

John Koskinen: Turned out after going through, and we provided 1300000 pages of documents, there was never a single email from outside the agency that said, "Wow, we should get these people and keep them from being effective." Nor was there ever an email internally where anybody said, "Well, what we ought to do, these people look like they're conservative, they look like they're republicans, let's hold them up." The problem for the IRS was there was for over two years trying to figure out how do they handle all of this.

John Koskinen: So as I said when I started, clearly it was a significant management mistake and problem. Nobody should have to wait two years or longer for an answer to a question. One of the ultimate ironies, that again people making a big issue of this never wanted to deal with was, you didn't need the IRS' permission to become a social welfare organization and go into action. So all of these organizations that were unfairly delayed didn't have to wait for the delay if they didn't want to. But the reason they wanted the IRS to review their activities was the risk, if they had to much political activity and intervention, was that all the revenues would be income and they'd be taxed on them.

John Koskinen: But the idea that somehow it was a political effort to keep them out of political races turned out not to hold water. But on the other hand it was a major mistake by the IRS from a management standpoint.

Judith Kelley: So when you were working at the IRS what were the biggest constraints that you faced?

John Koskinen: Biggest constraint by far was that long before the so called targeting [00:13:04] came up that congress had started to cut the IRS budget. So from 2010 until today the budget's been cut by almost a billion dollars. So, when I started there were a hundred thousand employees, when I finished there were eighty thousand because the way the agency had to deal with a lower budget was to simply not replace people as they left. So there are ten million more tax payers today than there were in 2010 and twenty thousand fewer employees to service them.

Judith Kelley: So you had fewer resources and you came into a situation where there had been a management mistake, so you were tasked, essentially, with restoring public confidence in that setting. So how did you approach that?

John Koskinen: Well, I approached it first of all by ... there were six investigations going on, two in the house, two in the senate, the inspector general was still doing work and

the Justice Department was. So my first position was that we would take any and all reasonable recommendations and implement them. The IG had a set of those and all of those recommendations were implemented 'cause I wanted people to understand that even if it wasn't politically motivated, the system ought to run more efficiently and effectively and certainly nobody should be judged just by their name. So I apologize at the front end for the delay.

John Koskinen: But what happened was particularly the freedom caucus in the congress had found a great issue that got them visibility and publicity, certainly, on cable channels, on YouTube, on Fox News. So the last thing in the world they wanted was the issue to go away. So they kept hammering away, "Why don't you provide the information faster?" "Gee, Lois Lerner's hard drive crashed two years ago, she must have meant to get rid of the evidence," even though we found 24000 emails from that period. So it was a constant battle to try to get people to understand that there had been a mistake, that we had fixed it and were anxious to move on but if you listen to the 20-25 contentious hearings you would've thought that we were going in the wrong direction.

Judith Kelley: Did you feel like you were able to accomplish what you wanted to accomplish or do you feel like there were things you would've liked to have done?

John Koskinen: Well the resource constraints obviously were significant. As I said many times, and I really meant, after 45 years, half in the private sector, half in the public running large organizations and difficultly, this was as good a workforce as I ever worked with. They are just terrific people dedicated to the mission of the agency. The commissioner's the only political appointee other than the chief counsel, which means that everybody else, the 100000 now down to 80000, are all career. And as a result, 'cause there aren't layers of political appointees telling them what to do, the deputy commissioners are career, there's an even greater dedication to the mission than you might otherwise expect to find. So all of the conversations I had with employees, and I spent a lot of time doing front line town halls, all of their concerns and questions were about how do we get the work done with fewer people?

John Koskinen: So, we made a lot of improvements internally and in terms of technology, IRS is still running programs that were running when John F Kennedy was president. It's an archaic system. Part of what the push against on the budget was, the reason the budget was being cut was the republicans decided if you couldn't defeat the affordable care act you could in fact try to underfund the backend of it and maybe it would just collapse. So the IRS did all of the backend functioning. So we spent a billion dollars of money on IT to implement the affordable care act with zero funding. Every budget zero'd out any money to support the affordable care act implementation.

John Koskinen: That billion dollars over the four years would've gone to modernization of the IT system. One of the goals we had, I have to quit saying we, one of the goals they had, but I was there, one of the goals was to give tax payers the same ability to deal with the IRS that they have with their banks, financial institutions,

mortgage companies, where you could have an online secure account, see what had gone on in the past, make payments, have a dialogue about your account without ever having to talk to anybody or go to an office. That's a complicated process, especially if you have an antiquated system, you can now make payments online, you can do installment agreements online, but there's still more work to be done to give people a full scale online account. The advantage of it is it would then get people off the phones who don't want to be on the phones, so when you call, because you needed to talk to somebody, it wouldn't be the backup that we had in several of the filing seasons 'cause we just didn't have enough people answering the phone.

Judith Kelley: But a big upfront investment in getting that.

John Koskinen: A big upfront investment.

Judith Kelley: Now, so speaking of technicalities and antiquated systems and such things, I have to ask as an aside given that you were head of the IRS at a time when Donald Trump came to power and, as we all know, he did not make his tax returns public. So, did you do anything special to keep these returns safe? Is there some secret cabinet with 40000 keys that dwelled in your pocket or?

John Koskinen: Historically, presidential tax returns are kept separately and under lock and key. In the summer of 2016 though I did ask the senior executives at the IRS to make sure that everything was done to make sure that both secretary Clinton's returns, although she had released hers, but the details and certainly then candidate Trump's returns were protected and that meant that not only the hard copies but the electronic, access electronically, and I was told that would make it difficult even for his people to get access to them. I said that's fine. If everybody has to take longer, we need to make sure that there isn't any leakage, that there's a statute, again, that requires the IRS to protect tax payer information and all of those 80000 employees them took it very seriously.

John Koskinen: So, we did that. It turned out, somebody asked me, I thought there might be a safe, it turned out to be a locked file cabinet on the executive floor, but I had never seen it, in effect a closet. So the inspector general who worked with us to make sure, to review the system to make sure there was no way there would be anyway for someone to get in and said what you ought to do is buy a real safe as opposed to ... and so by now there's a safe for the president's returns. So I think ...

John Koskinen: People were offering up to five million dollars for a copy of the return. In fact, one day there was a headline, got up in the morning, and somebody had the 2004 tax return and I thought, "Ah, wonderful." But fortunately the front page on the bottom said client copy and so to the credit of all of these employees with all of the pressure on them, knock on wood, nobody's ever had access to those returns.

Judith Kelley: Well, it just reinforces what you said about them being committed to the mission.

John Koskinen: Yes.

Judith Kelley: Well, speaking of being committed to a mission of public service, let's switch to that more pleasurable topic. So what do you think is the biggest misperception that everyday Americans have about government service?

John Koskinen: Well I think a lot of people, not necessarily everyone, but there's an assumption by a lot of people that if you work in public service, whether at the federal or the state or county or local level, you're a brown bagger. You're somebody that shows up, punches a clock, you're there for whatever time you're supposed to be there, you don't necessarily work too hard and then you go home and you just sorta stay out of the way. And I think that's a misperception, it's furthered, over the last 50 years or so, by people running for president who run against Washington. George Wallace was worried about pointy headed bureaucrats. Ronald Reagan ran against Washington. Certainly Trump ran against the deep state as if everybody was in Washington protecting themselves.

John Koskinen: And so I think there is an image that somehow if you're in the government you don't have a bottom line, you don't have a profit measure for performance and success and therefore you don't work hard. And having now spent a lot of time at the federal level and at the local level, although the district is a state as well, I spent a lot of time trying to disabuse people of that notion. That people go into public service because they believe in the mission of the department or the area where they're gonna go work and they stay there. Some of the most talent people I've ever known are career government employees in various parts of the government whether it's at OMB, whether it's at NASA, whether it's the agriculture department, the education department. And they have any number of other options and they stay because they believe in the mission.

John Koskinen: As I used to tell people when asked what's the difference in the private and the public sector, I said, and I told employees, I said, "Great thing about the public sector is you get up on Monday morning and you don't have to worry about whether what you're doing is important. You know that the government plays a significant role for citizens." When I was the Deputy Mayor city administrator of Washington I used to get people in the federal government that they were two steps removed from reality. In the federal government you have a lot of important decisions to make but if you don't make them today and you make them two weeks from now, not a big difference unless you're running a war or dealing with emergency responses. If you're at the state, particularly at the local level, there's a problem at ten in the morning, everybody wants to know why it's not fixed at two in the afternoon.

John Koskinen: The private sector does important work, it's what makes the economy go and it employees significant people, but a lot of times whether you make more widgets or not may not make that big a difference. If you are in the government,

if you don't get the snow off the streets, if you don't get the right policy for healthcare done it significantly affects people in their day to day lives. So I think the vast majority of public service employees believe in that mission, stay in government, not because of perks, they don't get paid as much as they would in the private sector, I think they stay because they get great satisfaction outta doing work that makes a difference.

Judith Kelley: So, satisfaction. You've been through a lot of different types of jobs, so what has given you the most satisfaction?

John Koskinen: Well, people ask me, particularly because I have this checkered employment career going from kinda disaster management to disaster management, why I do that and obviously-

Judith Kelley: One might say you have a disastrous career.

John Koskinen: That's right. The thing that was probably the most challenging and the most fun really was the year 2000 because you were dealing with a threat to the entire critically infrastructure of the country-

Judith Kelley: Or the planet.

John Koskinen: And then I originally thought, "Well, my job is to worry about the government and the United States," and the next thing I know I'm organizing the response around the world. Ahmad Kamal, who was the permanent ambassador from Pakistan at the UN, I had met and gone to the UN to explain what we were doing, called me in the summer of '98 and said we've gotta do something to organize the world. I said the famous, "What do you mean we gotta do something?"

John Koskinen: So we organized, we had twelve Y2K commissioners in different countries, Bulgaria, Chile, Japan, wherever, who took on responsibilities for their continents and we organized then information sharing and exchanges around the world and conferences around the world. We ultimately ended up with a meeting of 170 countries in the UN, it was the largest meeting in the history of the UN that wasn't a general assembly meeting and it was reflection of the concern around the world about whether their systems were gonna work or not and their desire to work together to share information about telecommunications about financial systems.

John Koskinen: It was clear that the countries most at risk were developed countries, the developing countries primarily, if they had technology, was in telephonic work or in financial systems. The great advantage the newcomers had was that they had bought a lot of off the shelf systems and so for them it was just a question of getting the right patches, getting them installed and making sure they were efficient. But for industrialized countries, the United States [00:25:33], they had all of this computerized things that had been customized from the start. Social

security had 52 million lines of code, all of which were customized, all of which had to be checked to make sure the date function would work.

John Koskinen: So, as I told somebody who was working with me, I said, "You know, this is the biggest stage on which I'll ever get to play," and there were not just the usually doomsayers, placate carriers, the world is coming to an end, there were very thoughtful computer experts who said there's no way you can get it done in time. It simply, there were gonna be major shortfalls. So it was kinda an interesting challenge.

Judith Kelley: Yeah, we all held our breath.

John Koskinen: That night everybody can tell you where they were. And then as I told the London Times, it was the first I got asked by the president come back in the government in January of '98 and I told them, "Well, it's the world's greatest bag holder job," because if it goes well, as it did, people are gonna say, "Well that was just a waste of time, what was that all about?" And if it doesn't go well they'll say, "What was the name of that guy who was in charge?" And so sure enough because of a lot of organization, a lot of information sharing, a lot of cooperation by private industry and the partnerships we created with them, there were things that didn't work but there were no major disasters.

John Koskinen: And so sure enough, immediately there after there were people saying, "Well, that must've been a waste of time," and as I tell people, I said, "I don't know if anyone who worked in a major financial institution, a major telephone company, who thought that they had wasted their time." They all knew when they rolled their clocks forward their systems didn't work.

John Koskinen: And so, as I said, it was just an interesting challenge. Got to learn a lot about how the world works.

Judith Kelley: Yeah. Well, I'm glad it worked out that way even if it wasn't recognized as much as it should've been, I think that's a better outcome. Have you seen any change in the culture of government employees, government service, over the decades that you've been in?

John Koskinen: Well, it's interesting. You would think, and that's what I thought with the IRS, that you would find people with their moral sagging, grumbling and complaining. The so called targeting scandal was centered around the exempt organization work in Cincinnati, so I've always felt that if you wanna know what's going on in an organization just go talk to the frontline employees, the people doing the work. So I thought it would be important in January 2014 when I started to go to Cincinnati. I ultimately ended up talking to about 22000 IRS employees in person.

John Koskinen: But I went to Cincinnati to, in effect, show the flag, let them know I understood the pressure they were under and that we were supportive. So my town hall

was with a couple hundred frontline employees in a big auditorium and there was not a discouraging word said in the sense of, "Gee, I gotta hire lawyers and nobody likes me anymore," or the Cincinnati inquirer was writing a lot of negative articles. Literally all the time was spent on how're we gonna get the work done and we don't have enough employees and the problems in various areas that had surfaced.

John Koskinen: So I was delighted but stunned because I thought these people have been, for the last six to eight months, getting nothing but negative reinforcement and feedback. A lot of changes in the senior management as a result of the controversy. And so to that extent, while they measure employee satisfaction and the measures are declining somewhat, my experience with the people I've dealt with is they're still highly motivated, energetic, anxious to do the work. Now whether this present shutdown is gonna be the final straw of people not getting paychecks and suddenly having to figure out how to meet mortgage payments and educational costs for their kids, I don't know.

John Koskinen: I always worried that there were 30% of the IRS employees were eligible to retire, 40% probably in short period of time. And I always worried if life really gets difficult enough, these people can retire and it was amazing to me the number of them who didn't. I used to tell them at the start, "Don't retire, things are gonna get better, hang in there." So I think you can't tell the impact yet. This has been a difficult couple years for federal employees, they've taken a lot of additional guff but my experience was, for the first year, I was there until the end of 2017, the IRS employees were diligent, energetic, committed to doing the work.

Judith Kelley: Right. So those are folks who've been around and their moral seems to be holding up but is there a different risk facing the young people today who are watching the disfunction in government and thinking of it ... We always used to talk about politics and dirty politics and we would have those words associated but has it grown to a point where young people today where we worry that they're not entering into public service?

John Koskinen: Well, it's an important question to address and focus on and worry about. Fortunately, young people tend to always be energetic, idealistic, anxious to change the world. There has been, over the last fifteen to twenty years, more of them who've decided the way to make an impact is in the nonprofit area, maybe at the state and local level rather than at the federal level 'cause then, especially over the last couple years with the gridlock, it's discouraging, I think, for young people to say, "Well, if I go there will anything really get done?" Or, "Are we gonna get stuck in the middle of these arguments where nobody's given ground and nobody's moving the ball forward?"

John Koskinen: So, our experience at the IRS, as I say, we were not hiring very many people at all but there was, after a filing season in which the tax payer service was miserable and at an appropriation hearing near the end of the filing season I was tasked because I was favoring implementing the affordable care act and I

said, "Affordable care act is a statutory mandate and we do statutory mandates and if you don't give us the funding we have to find the funding elsewhere." And so the ... and I had, I said, "I told you last year, if you keep cutting the budget the service would get worse and it has gotten worse."

John Koskinen: So the next year they actually increased the funding modestly for tax payer service and otherwise. And the budget, actually, a slight increase. And that allowed us to hire some people. So, it was interesting to me, in the middle of all of this negative publicity about the IRS, would there be people anxious and I was delighted-

Judith Kelley: And young people.

John Koskinen: Young people, and a lot of young people showed up at interviews to be hired and they had enthusiasm for it. Our broader concern about not hiring people for, in effect, eight years was you lose connectivity with all of the feeder entities, colleges, graduate schools, nonprofits, where when there's interviews at business schools and otherwise at public policy schools, if the IRS isn't there, after a while people forget about that as an opportunity, as an option. And so my concern was that if you're not bringing people in on a regular basis, suddenly you're not on the radar screen anymore and people, as they look at career opportunities, just don't think of the IRS.

John Koskinen: I mean the IRS is in some ways a difficult sell because nobody loves tax collectors. So for somebody to say, "Well, I'm going to go become a tax collector." But when they understand the IRS is one of the biggest social welfare organizations, the IRS puts out a hundred billion dollars a year in payments to working poor, to students, to-

Judith Kelley: Redistribution.

John Koskinen: Whether that's a good thing for tax administration or not is another question but there's a lot that goes on in the IRS that's not chasing people down to get them to pay their taxes.

Judith Kelley: Is there something you think can be done to make public service even more appealing to young people?

John Koskinen: Well, I think a lot we're going to hear this weekend from Max Stier and the Partnership for Public Services, I've supported and known every since Max started, I think what has to happen is what Max is doing, a lot of people doing, we have to give visibility to the great things that public servants do. The Sammy awards that Max puts out every year, that's really stunning accomplishments by federal employees and so it's important for the public to see that but it's important for young people to say, "Wow, you can go in the government and really work on space exploration or-

Judith Kelley: And make a difference.

John Koskinen: And make a huge difference. So it's the classic don't hide your light under a barrel. I think we need to continue to publicize and give visibility to not only the important work but the great and exciting work that's done in the public sector.

Judith Kelley: Well thank you so much for joining me today John. And for your service to our country.

John Koskinen: It's my pleasure, I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to have this discussion.

Judith Kelley: John Koskinen is former commissioner of the IRS, he's at Duke University to be part of a discussion about young people and public service and he's also a former Duke University alumnus and he will be delivering the distinguished Terry Sanford lecture this evening with us.

Judith Kelley: We'll back soon with another episode of Policy 360. I'm Judith Kelley.