

**The Social Diversity Challenges facing NZ**  
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It is significant that a conference of this level of seniority, at this time, is concerned with the public policy issues of social diversity and community formation that is with social capital. This kind of policy concern is now a central focus for governments of all persuasions. It is interesting to take a look at what is behind these changes, and what there is to offer to communities struggling to regain control of their own destiny. We have seen a move over the past 15 years, from the welfare state towards economic rationalism or neo-liberal reforms, and now beyond, to some new form of partnership between the state and civil society. The move away from the welfare state was driven, at least partly, by a belief that intervention by the state simply perpetuates a welfare dependency, a kind of passive, learned helplessness by the community, which then has to wait for the government to fix everything. The people then lose their capacity to take action on their own account.

The policies of economic rationalism turned attention from the state to the market. There was a discourse of privatisation and deregulation. Simply stated, economic rationalism is an ideology which rests on the free play of market forces. As public policy, the state adopted the mechanisms and principles of the market. The basic assumptions are that the individual citizen/ consumer should exercise their free choice in accessing goods and services according to their capacity to pay; the provider of such goods and services will continue to provide them as long as demand is strong enough and the quality of their services are sufficiently attractive. Quality is ensured through competition between providers. All agents are motivated by rational self interest. The philosophical position that justifies all this is a form of liberalism which rests on the core value of individual rights and autonomy.

Some of the negative consequences of economic rationalism have now become only too apparent. The market does not necessarily provide appropriate solutions, especially for those who cannot afford to pay. Some get richer, but many get poorer. The so-called digital divide is one of many examples where those who are already disadvantaged in a free market become even more disadvantaged. However, one of the most serious critiques of economic rationalism is that it systematically undermined the values of community and the capacity to develop community. In particular, economic rationalist policies have the effect of drawing on existing stocks of social capital, without providing the conditions for its replenishment or growth. In the long term this is a recipe for disaster. Government programs are now being put in place to attempt to reverse this process. We cannot go back to the welfare state, but we know that the market, if left to its own devices will destroy community. The solution must be found in collaborative partnerships between community, state and market. However this will only work if communities take the initiative, participate actively and use the resources provided by state and market for their own collective well-being. Leadership, I believe, must be returned to the people. Key to understanding this process is the concept of social capital.

### **What is social capital?**

Social capital can be developed and used wherever humans gather together for a common purpose. It is primarily associated with civil society, which I take as the space between state and market, normally identified as “the community”. I follow Walzer (1991) in defining civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the relational networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology, that fills this space”. Civil society, like the market, is made of a great many formal and informal organizations and networks whose aim is not profit, but the mutual enhancement of the quality of life of their members, or “the common good” as they define it. The key ingredient in civil society, is social capital. Let me outline, very briefly, the core ingredients of that concept. The definitions most often used are those of Putnam as “those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993) or .... “that

enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam, 1995)

If you don't like formal definitions, think about your own life. Think about a place where you have lived or worked, and the networks you formed there. Think about a problem that came up. Maybe you were in trouble and needed some help to solve the problem. Maybe the community had a problem, that could only be solved by people coming together to deal with it. A bush fire, or some natural disaster comes to mind for me. I am not talking about calling in the professionals, but using the informal networks to make things happen. That is social capital. At one level it is obvious. At another level it is new...and has never been formally recognized or accounted.

A lot of research and debate around the world has occurred in the past 5 years concerning social capital and what it does. Let me summarise some of that with a few basic propositions. There is some debate around each proposition, but together they are starting to add up to some very powerful ideas.

1. Social capital, like other forms of capital, like money, is an essential ingredient in social action. Social capital does not refer to the social action itself but to the essential prerequisite of social action. If you want something done, you need more or less financial capital, natural capital, cultural or human capital, and social capital.
2. Any community of people who form networks of common interest can generate social capital. Social capital is not something that anyone can possess as an individual, although individuals may make use of it. Essentially social capital resides in the connection between people.
3. Social capital has a number of elements; it is not a unitary concept. It is about the connectedness between people, about networks and trust and the capacity to work together. In my work with Paul Bullen, we found eight elements of social capital, including four “building blocks” referring to ‘Trust’, ‘Social Agency’, ‘Tolerance of diversity’ and ‘Value of life’. Underlying all these factors was the common or core ingredient of social connectedness. Four other factors referred to four distinct social arenas in which social capital may be generated: ‘Participation in the Local

Community’ (formal engagement with local community organizations, by far the strongest factor), ‘Neighbourhood Connections’, ‘Family and Friends connections’, and ‘Work Connections’. This suggests that social capital may be generated in a variety of arenas, and that people may have access to, or be involved in the production of social capital in different ways. To access the scale we developed, go to Paul’s web-site at: [www.mapl.com.au](http://www.mapl.com.au).

4. However, unlike other forms of capital, you don’t need to be rich to acquire social capital. There is little or no correlation between material well-being and social capital except for the extremely poor and disadvantaged. For these groups the more social capital, the greater chance of material well-being and visa versa. Or put another way, without some minimal level of material well-being, it is unlikely that social capital will be generated. Without some minimal level of social capital it is unlikely that material well being can happen.
5. Like other forms of social capital, whether it is used for good or evil is up to those who use it. It is always used for the common good, but that leaves open the question of “whose common good” and “who decides”. It is the case that there are nearly always winners and losers in the use of social capital, as with any other form of human activity.
6. Communities appear to be remarkably resilient. The denser the networks of connection and participation, the more resilient the community. The key always is in the relationships. In general, rural communities tend to have higher levels of social capital, at least bonding social capital.
7. There are two levels of social capital (at least). One concerns the bonding networks **within** communities, and the other concerns bridging links **between** different groups. The first is marked by what is termed “thick trust”, the mutual support of insiders, the thing that holds a small community together in the face of fire or the loss of banking services for instance. Bridging social capital is not about social support, but about drawing on resources from other networks. It also requires trust, but of a different kind. While bonding is important for mutual survival, bridging is important for getting ahead, for creating new opportunities, new growth. We need both.

8. Another essential feature of social capital is social agency: the capacity of people working together to take the initiative. It is about people as active participants, not as passive victims or even as “customers” or “clients”

### **Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital**

Recent discussions of social capital have begun to distinguish between “bonding” and “bridging” and “linking” social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital appears to be characterised by dense, multi-functional ties and strong but localised trust. It is the strong social ties that provide a sense of emotional support, of belonging, and personal identity. It is consistent with Coleman’s (1988) research in which the effectiveness of community networks depended on close, intersecting, multi-functional ties.

Bridging concerns the links between different segments of the community, or between the community and the outside world. Bridging links are about horizontal links, that is bridges across differences, not vertical or hierarchical connections. There are at least three ways in which bridging may occur:

- Relationships that cross demographic divides of class, age, ethnicity etc
- Bridges across structural holes, or gaps between networks which are not necessarily of dissimilar people, but where there has hitherto been little connection. Such gaps may occur for example as a result of geographic distance.
- The capacity to access resources such as information, knowledge, finance from sources external to the organisation or community in question.

It has generally been assumed in the literature that bridging links consist of a wider network of loose connections that are instrumental in nature, and characterized by a looser form of trust. However recent work I have done with a colleague suggests that most of us prefer to bridge to other groups and to access outside resources through our existing strong ties (using a friend of a friend) or else through trusted professionals who have demonstrated a commitment to the community in question (Leonard and Onyx, 2003).

Linking social capital also refers to connections outside the group or community in question, but this time in terms of vertical links involving power/ dependency relations. That is, the organisation or community must link up and out to agencies that can provide the required resources for development. Very often the more powerful agency is a government department that may provide funding or legislative oversight.

Networks that consist of unequal power are unlikely to generate social capital. There are several reasons for this. Social capital requires the voluntary and active commitment of energy, one that cannot be coerced. It also requires a form of thick trust that is unlikely to occur between unequal partners. Nonetheless, linking networks can generate social capital if trusting relationships are established; this may happen through the intermediary role of a third party which takes on the role of the honest broker. Sometimes a university or international NGO may take on this role. The third party must be seen by both parties to not have vested interests in the outcome, and be respected by both.

### **Why is social capital important?**

Social capital appears to be essential for the individual, and for the community at large. A healthy economy, and a vibrant political democracy depend on a civil society with a strong stock of social capital. Basically, if any economic policy draws on, but does not replace the stock of social capital, it does so at its peril. When social capital becomes depleted, the capacity for society to pull together is reduced, as is the capacity for the community to support entrepreneurial activity of any sort.

As individual human beings, we need both bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The support of a close knit community of likeness (whether of family, friends, workmates, the local community) provides a sense of personal identity and support in adversity and meaningfulness in life. But bridging social capital allows growth, access to new knowledge and resources, tolerance, social justice and a sense of a common humanity.

What both of these have in common is a sense of the “common good”. Social life, even within a market economy, perhaps especially within a market economy, depends on the capacity to work together for the common good, as well as for individual gain. Short term altruism is necessary for long term personal gain. In simple terms, and as more than just a metaphor, if we do not get together to ensure clean air to breathe, well, before long we will all stop breathing. Social capital is a recognition that we are all in this together.

### **Challenges for Social Diversity in NZ**

I understand that New Zealand, like many OECD countries, is facing major demographic shifts. These include a shifting age profile, a continuing erosion of small rural communities and a continuing move away from the classical nuclear family of two parents and children. I also understand that the Maori population comprises 15% of total population and growing, and Pacific islanders 7% and growing. Let me spell out some of the implications of these demographic shifts in social capital terms. In particular, I would like to address first, the implications for ethnic relations, and second the implications for small rural communities.

### **Ethnic Relations**

With respect to Maori Pakeha relations, I have to express some embarrassment, speaking as an Australian scholar (though I am also of course a NZ Pakeha by birth). Our Australian record of relations with Aboriginal people is appallingly poor. There was some hope that we may be becoming a little more enlightened with the Mabo high court case and subsequent landrights legislation, but recent interpretations and administrative actions appear to signal a return to a very conservative interpretation of Aboriginal rights. Our treatment of refugees has been worse, and arguably represents a serious breach of human rights. In both these respects, NZ in fact represents a far more moderate and fair approach to similar issues. With respect to Maori Pakeha relations, I think the treaty of Waitangi has provided a historical base for the renegotiation of reasonable, respectful

and equitable relations. In Australia we still seem to be burdened with the myth of “Terra Nullus”

Nonetheless, if we take a value neutral examination of ethnic relations in both countries, but particularly in NZ, then several underlying principles appear to be apparent from a social capital point of view.

First, in Australia, but to a lesser extent in NZ, the imposition of colonial rule over the Aboriginal people, had a devastating effect on the bonding social capital of indigenous communities. This is most apparent in the case of the Australian stolen generation. The impact of this kind of massive government intervention in the lives of ordinary indigenous communities cannot be overestimated. Families were separated, sometimes for generations, language lost, sense of identity destroyed. These were replaced by helplessness, unemployment, welfare dependency, alcoholism, massive levels of domestic violence. This was all in the name of a paternalistic government who was supposedly acting in the best interests of those individuals and communities. I won't quote statistics at you, but instead will tell a real anecdote that I personally witnessed.

I was visiting a black and white women's shelter in outback Moree. While I was there, an old Aboriginal woman came in ...she was probably in her 40s but seemed much older. She was dishevelled but silent. The workers clearly knew her; they took her for a shower, gave her new clothes and a cup of tea, I don't know what else and a few hours later she left. The workers then explained that 20 years earlier she had her children stolen, and to this day was searching for them. That kind of story can be repeated thousands of times, and the reverberations of that government policy are still being felt today.

It is not that the government of the day intended such cruelty, but simply that we have been ignorant of the importance of social capital and the role that it plays in maintaining a community even despite adversity. Better to kill women and children than to leave them in that kind of endless, hopeless purgatory.



I should add that recently I attended a World Bank conference on social capital. After many disastrous interventions in the name of economic development, many in the World Bank are adopting the maxim “Do no harm”. I think that governments at all levels need to become much more cautious about the long term social effects of supply side policy interventions. I am very admiring of the work of Noel Pearson in the York peninsular who is trying (successfully it seems) to get State and Commonwealth governments on side to pull back the existing welfare regimes in favour of an indigenous-lead community (economic and social) renewal.

However that does not necessarily help in the issue of ethnic relations. It may do so in the long term. But in Australia, and I think also in NZ there is a rather worrying backlash increase in racism among the anglo or Pakeha population. This appears to be fuelled by a growing resentment of the apparent privileges bestowed on the indigenous people. In Australia there is a widespread belief that Aboriginal people get huge undeserved government payouts, under special conditions denied to white Australians. In fact of course the statistics tell us that Aboriginal people are far more likely to live in poverty, to be imprisoned, to be unemployed, to die young. But the Aussie “battler” does not see that; they only see the apparent privilege.

In social capital terms we are talking about the difficulties of bridging social capital. There are too few bridges between Aboriginal and Anglo Australians. Perhaps there are too few bridges between Maori and Pakeha communities. If I could extrapolate from the study I mentioned earlier..... bridges are not formed from loose ties. They are about forming relations of trust and respect, built on common, overarching values. Bridges can be formed in two ways:

- From the work of trusted professionals within the community. These are people who may or may not be government employees, but people who both have professional integrity and who have demonstrated a commitment to the community in question. This commitment is demonstrated sometimes by their volunteer contribution to local groups, sometimes by the values they espouse in

their everyday work. They remain with the community over extended periods of time.

- From strong ties between real people. Most of us use our bonding links when we need to bridge to difference. These are strong ties that develop over time and shared commitment to common activities. They generate a respect and a trust that will withstand the strains of difference. I suspect the All Blacks have done more to develop good bridging between Maori and Pakeha than most organisations, although they are probably not primarily recognized for their social capital building.

I guess the message I am giving here is that social diversity, and in particular ethnic relations, is less a matter of specific new government policy, and more a matter of HOW that policy is implemented. We need to be far more cognisant of the importance of real human connections. This is not just a matter of encouraging good citizenship, but of recognizing that a great deal hinges on maintaining a coherent social fabric.

### **Community renewal**

I want to explore the capacity of local rural communities to find new pathways to renewal. Community development must be holistic. It requires breaking down the departmental or disciplinary silos that separate and disconnect much of our public life. The central concepts of development revolve around the four capitals: financial capital, natural capital, human capital and social capital. In particular we need to revision the relationship between the four kinds of capital. Traditional approaches to development have heavily emphasised the use of financial capital and the exploitation of natural capital. We need to move away from thinking in insular, discipline specific, or institution specific terms, and move instead to more holistic thinking. The argument is that action taken with respect to any of the four capitals will have direct consequences for the others. If used correctly, the mobilisation of one form of capital can multiply the effects of another in a positive, or virtuous cycle. Equally, the misuse, or overuse of one can destroy another.

The United Nations 'Agenda 21' was a principle outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio conference) which sets the agenda "to reverse the effects of environmental degradation and to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development in all countries" (Robinson, 1993, i). This agenda includes empowering communities. Section 3.7 establishes:

Sustainable development must be achieved at every level of society. People's organizations, women's groups and non-governmental organizations are important sources of innovation and action at the local level and have a strong interest and proven ability to promote sustainable livelihoods. Governments, in cooperation with appropriate international and non-governmental organizations should support a community-driven approach to sustainability..”(p26)

To do this, we need to pay much more attention to social capital, because social capital enhances returns to investment in other forms of capital. The point being that these various forms of capital are not independent, nor are they alternatives. They are interconnected in complex ways, and likely to be complementary, rather than substitutes. Thus for instance, to draw a rather obvious example, the investment in saw mills creates a capital asset which is of no use if the timber is all gone. An over-use of other forms of capital may well erode or destroy human and social capital, for example by processes of deskilling, and unemployment. A loss in these resources makes long term development unsustainable. Dale (1999) observes that 'communities, although at the base of the development chain, had become the missing link in efforts to refashion relations between environment and economy' (pxiv).

We need to understand much better what the role of the local community is. How can the local community mobilize the productive use of social capital, and what effect does that have.

### **Sweden: A case study**

It is always easier to look at how someone else has done it. Rural Sweden is in much the same plight as rural Australia, and I understand, rural areas of NZ as well. Areas of north and west Sweden in particular have been faced with falling commodity prices, global

competition making small scale production uncompetitive, industry restructuring, increasing unemployment, reduction in government welfare spending, closure of local public services, high levels of social distress and feelings of hopelessness.

However, the Swedes have remarkably high levels of public participation in almost everything. Literally thousands of new community based organisations have emerged in the face of this crisis of the rural economy. All of these have been grass-roots driven. Often a small group of angry women start the process going, with a determination that their village is not going to die. With some help from professional advisers, and many months of discussion, they work out a plan of action, usually involving the whole community. New organisations are formed, often small cooperatives, or what they call “community businesses”. These cover an enormous range of potential production or services. Many set out to develop tourist services, or market handicrafts, or set up an aged care service or child care. They may take over the local general store or bank if these are in danger of closing. They may form economic associations for the production of local meat or timber goods. They build houses, or form new eco-efficient forms of power distribution. They lobby government and form partnerships with the local industries.

The point is that all these ideas came from the community in question, not by government, not even by local government. The energy and the commitment came from the community itself. They were able to mobilise the local networks. Of course they did not have all the knowledge and skills necessary, and seldom had much financial capital. But that didn't make them victims, or welfare recipients. One thing they did have, was access to outside organisations that were willing to help with the necessary technical knowledge. Sometimes the municipal council provided that. Sometimes it was a peak nonprofit body or a community development adviser from a state wide organisation. Sometimes it was a regional university. Financial capital sometimes came from local industry, or municipal council. Many groups were able to access a pool of state funding, not enough to run the service, but enough to get started, or to subsidize what would otherwise be a loss maker. Most successful organisations (and they were mostly successful) used a complex funding arrangement which was part state funding, part

market return for goods and services, and part community resourced (volunteer labour). However, it was always their show, never something imposed on them.

What did they gain? They gained a new sense of purpose and hope. Old people could 'age in place'. Young people could find employment. Many cooperatives were specifically designed by and for women with children so that they could gain an income while caring for children. Many created eco-communities so that they were able to rehabilitate their environment, find more effective methods of transport and heating. Above all they gained a strong sense of connection to each other and to the land.

What was the downside? Well several, depending on your point of view. Few if any got rich. We are talking here about collective survival and quality of life, not financial wealth. Some people, often the key initiators, felt burnt out. I know of several cases where the community funded key people to take a holiday. In social capital terms, massive bonding social capital was generated, but this did not always translate into tolerance for outsiders, or for minority groups. Although some of the best work involved groups of Sami people (Indigenous reindeer herders).sometimes there was ongoing conflict between different factions in the community, and where that was severe, little could be accomplished. I guess I would also have to say that this huge community effort on its own could not counteract the negative effects of the loss of major industries. Nor could it replace government. But by being proactive and determined it was often able to negotiate the gap left by the other sectors.

### **The Principles of voice**

In another paper, I have argued that community renewal depends on the voice of the community. There appear to be a set of common principles. These principles illustrate the crucial role of community voice, at several points:

1. An awareness of crisis, or in some discussions this is expressed as "a wake up call".  
What appears to be important, is not so much the objective conditions of the crisis, but a sense of urgency expressed by the community itself, that something needs to be done before it is too late. This ingredient appears to be present in every documented

case. It is the first expression of “voice” and means that the community owns and names the problem. The alternative responses are indifference, or resignation, or denial.

2. Some form of initial “call to action”. This is the second aspect of “voice”. The community, or some segment of it, takes the initiative. This expression of voice is one of proactivity. There is an awareness that someone has to do something, and that someone, at least in the first instance is the community itself. The effect of this awareness of crisis is to mobilise action. This raises the question of leadership. Leadership involves ordinary citizens. It may also include an outside change agent. However, successful community renewal is likely to be driven from below, and that means that leadership must essentially come from within the community itself. Quite often the initiating action is taken by a small group of women, who have standing in the community, but are not in positions of power. In my experience, they felt more able to act and to speak out because “no one could silence them” by threat of withdrawal of money or line management control. Ideally many members of the community in question take on leadership roles as necessary.
3. The third element of renewal also concerns ‘voice’: a collective expression of solidarity and determination. The community must come together with a (re)assertion of their common identity and a commitment to survive as a community. The expression of solidarity may take many forms, but will involve a public display of mutual interdependency. It may take the form of public meetings, demonstrations, (re)activation of community festivals, or the initiation of a community project that involves many people. These should be as inclusive as possible; public expressions of solidarity that leave out significant sections of the community are likely to produce or reinforce divisions and dissension; the prognosis for future action in this case is not good.
4. The fourth element involves a formal expression of ‘voice’. Often the local media provides the necessary publicity for community action, as well as notice of coming meetings and events. It is the formal instrument of the community voice. More than that, media staff can be a source of important media and marketing skills and

information. The local media can also stimulate a sense of local identity and pride.

And

5. The fifth element of 'voice' involves the expression and sharing of creative ideas for renewal. This involves breaking out of existing frameworks, or thought-worlds. It is a kind of expression of collective thinking 'outside the box'. It is response to the challenge "what can we do that is new or different". Expertise from outside the community may be necessary at key points. But the use of this expertise remains within the control of the local community. The means by which creative ideas are identified can be varied. It can be done through public revisioning workshops, or more formally constructed roundtables. It can be done using such public media as the local press or some sort of community display board. The best ideas are likely to come from face to face discussion, such as the Swedish 'study-circles'. As before, the best ideas will derive from a mix of people, as inclusive of all stakeholder groups as possible. The effect of this public release of creative ideas is several-fold. It creates a pool of ideas to work with, not all of which will be feasible, but some of which certainly will be. It creates a sense of public engagement or ownership, not only with the problem, but also with the solution. Part of the release of creative new ideas involves an analysis of local advantages, or unique community assets. It entails an examination of available resources with a view to identifying new ways of working with old resources, or ways of accessing previously inaccessible resources. It may include an audit of the human assets, skills, talents of those in the community. It may include a re-evaluation of the natural resources of soil, forest, desert, sea, water, minerals. It is likely that these can be used in new, productive, and sustainable ways. Almost certainly that will involve new relationships of natural resources, and human ingenuity.
6. A sixth principle of voice is the capacity to make bridges to outside resources, and to link into higher levels of power, authority and sources of knowledge and funding from both the market (corporate bodies) and the state. In terms of social capital, economic and social renewal requires not only bonding, but bridging to get ahead. It is particularly in this aspect that Community Technology Centres provide a huge advantage in creating internet access to the outside world. Rural areas in particular are

severely disadvantaged by their isolation, their inability to access outside resources. While rural centres often have good stocks of bonding social capital, they need to supplement this with good bridging and linking social capital. CTCs can provide this function, if used wisely by the community itself.

7. The engagement of local government is important. Local government can make or break community initiatives. Local government as such is unlikely to initiate community action, which may be seen as threatening to existing vested interests. However key individuals, either elected members or employees may do so, though usually at some risk to themselves. The function of 'voice' may be to debate, to contest, to advocate, to lobby. Ideally, local council takes a positive role as facilitator.
8. The continuation of an effective 'voice' requires some sort of periodic celebratory event. These events should be fun. They re-ignite community energy and enthusiasm, and they may be a source of new ideas and action. They serve to mark successes, to renew determination in the face of obstacles, and to keep the renewal action on the public agenda.

## **Conclusions**

There are other steps required in the process of community renewal, processes that go beyond the expression of voice. These include processes of education and training, and mechanisms of continued and sustainable development. Access to external resources is always important. No community is an island unto itself. External sources of information, expertise and funding are crucial at key points in the development of the community. But in every case what is important is that the community itself must control the way that these are obtained and used.

For governments the message I think should be clear. It is only too easy to destroy social capital, usually by inadvertent careless acts of neglect. It is also possible to nurture the development of social capital. It is not possible to command or manufacture it. In this respects government can be like the good gardener, preparing the ground, providing space and the necessary nutrients. It can facilitate and resource, but always in partnership with the communities in question, and with an eye to potential long term negative effects. It must resist the temptation to cash in on short term vote winners (eg feeding racist fears)



that will yield long term social divisiveness. No government in the current global climate can return to the excesses of the welfare state. But governments can subsidize, support and resource community initiatives that are attempting forms of entrepreneurial action that are likely to enhance local economies and local well-being. That of course requires a move away from the universalism that governments find so appealing, and work instead with the social, economic, environmental and human diversity that is the hallmark of our modern society.

I thank you for listening.

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