Outline:

Hello and welcome back to WonkCast, the podcast about important policy topics past and present. My name is William Somes, and I'm your host for this season.

As you know, this season I've chosen to devote the first three episodes to "How the Government Works." We've looked at how the three branches of government exercise their power in the public policymaking process. We've also compared various electoral systems in the United States and Germany and explored their effects on partisanship.

The focus of the past two episodes has been on how institutions shape policy—whether it be the presidency, Congress, the bureaucracy, the plurality electoral system, or the courts. In this episode, though, I'd like to focus on how individuals affect the policymaking process because in our large federal system with myriad policy actors and players from all 50 states, the action of individuals often flies under the radar.

By focusing on individuals in this episode, I do not mean to imply that individual action is the only thing that matters, or even that it matters more. Sometimes policy problems are big and have no single actor behind them, such as the problem of choosing the right electoral system to represent a nations' interests. However, as we'll see in this episode, sometimes there are instances when individual power can and does make a difference—whether it be from a U.S. Senator, Representative, even a Mayor. And sometimes, the power effected by these individual actions can shake things up in some pretty big ways.

Individual action also just happens to be more inspiring than, for example, a joint resolution from Congress. And we need inspiration. In the following episodes, we'll be diving into environmental and social justice-related problems, which tend to be the opposite of inspiring and in some cases can be downright depressing. If you have ever doubted the goodness of government like me—if you have ever found yourself being cynical about policy outcomes like me—then the courageous acts discussed in today's episode will hopefully give you renewed hope.

In case you were wondering, I am not the first to tell the stories of the courageous actions of others. In fact, the stories you'll hear today come from a much-loved 1957 book—*Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy—and the *Profile in Courage* award established by President John F. Kennedy's family after his death. Both the book and the award commemorate the courageous actions of remarkable individuals in the public policy community.

The first story I want to share comes from Kennedy's book. And that's the story of John Quincy Adams, the 6th President of the United States and the son of President John Adams.

What many people don't realize about John Quincy is that he did a whole lot more than serve in the highest office of the land. He was also a Harvard professor; he served as Secretary of State; a Minister to the Hague, Prussia, England, and Russia; and he also served as a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. He wore many hats during his political career, but he always had what George Frisbie Hoar described as a "tenacity of purpose, a lofty and inflexible courage, [and] an unbending will, which never qualified or flinched before human antagonist, or before exile, torture, or death," (Kennedy, 2006, p. 31).

I am sure there are many stories worth sharing from John Quincy's life. However, this particular story, takes place during his very brief time as a United States Senator. It was the early 19th century, before the war of 1812, and tensions between the United States and Britain were high and rising. The British were seizing American ships, forcing American citizens to serve in the British navy, and confiscating cargo (Kennedy, 2006).

John Quincy had just been selected by the Massachusetts legislature to serve in the United States Senate (Kennedy, 2006). It was his first term in office, and he was building quite the reputation of being an independent mind—someone who would go against his own party in a heartbeat if it meant the nation as a whole would benefit (Kennedy, 2006).

That John Quincy was such an independent thinker might be surprising. We don't usually hear about Senators putting public interests before party interests. And when we do hear about it, the motive usually involves constituent pressure, where constituents want their Senator to vote a certain way, and to hold their seat in office, the Senator complies.

And this is exactly how other members of John Quincy's party, the Federalists, were behaving. Constituents in New England were benefiting financially from trade with Britain. Massachusetts was "the leading commercial state in the nation" at the time (Kennedy, 2006, p. 43), and constituents didn't *want* the federal government to take punitive action against the British because they knew it would hurt them economically.

While John Quincy's fellow party members were advocating appeasement, and in some cases even trying to explain away British actions, he was out attending meetings with the Federalists' political rivals, the Republicans (Kennedy, 2006). Against the will of his colleagues, he helped pass resolutions condemning the Brits' behavior, and he allied with the Republicans in a call for retaliation (Kennedy, 2006). Even as his colleagues became increasingly angry, he showed no signs of reversing his position. In fact, when President Jefferson called for a trade embargo against the British, John Quincy chaired the committee overseeing the bill and then helped it become law (Kennedy, 2006).

Now Adams had already fallen out with his party for his nonpartisan and principled stances on previous Congressional measures… but *now* he had helped commit New England, his home region, to years of economic hardship, bankruptcy in some cases, and a drain of the population as residents migrated from New England to seek new economic opportunities elsewhere (Kennedy, 2006).

This was the final straw. Adams was an outcast within his own party, shunned by Massachusetts residents and merchants, and rejected even by his own friends back home. John Adams, John Quincy's father, wrote a letter to his son saying, "You are supported by no party; you have too honest a heart, too independent a mind, and too brilliant talents, to be sincerely and confidentially trusted by any man who is under the domination of party maxims or party feelings. . . . You may depend upon it then that your fate is decided. . . . You ought to know and expect this and by no means regret it. My advice to you is steadily to pursue the course you are in, with moderation and caution however, because I think it the path of justice," (Kennedy, 2006, p. 45).

John Quincy did not get the chance to pursue his course any further. The Massachusetts state legislature, who had given him his Senate position in the first place, voted for his successor as soon as they resumed session (Kennedy, 2006). Bear in mind John Quincy's term had not yet expired. They voted for his successor before he had even finished his term (Kennedy, 2006). That is how badly they wanted him out of office.

And so he resigned—with 9 months left to his term—because he felt he couldn't continue his service with a free mind and a free body (Kennedy, 2006). And freedom of mind was something of utmost importance to John Quincy. If he was not a free agent, he was no one. Sure, it got him into trouble—it caused him to lose office. But in his mind, if he couldn't serve freely he would rather not serve at all.

Years later, after the people of the United States elected John Quincy as their 6th president, he was asked to serve once again in Congress, this time in the U.S. House of Representatives (Kennedy, 2006). Before accepting the position, he told voters he would not serve unless he could do so unrestrained by party or constituents. He was elected. And by this election he was rewarded for his independence.

John Quincy, a man with tenacity of purpose and an unbending will, put the best interests of the nation first—no matter the personal cost. Although he faced impossible pressure and unimaginable shame for his individual actions to protect the United States from British aggression, today we look back on his life and we recognize and honor the tremendous courage he embodied until his death (Kennedy, 2006).

[Musical interlude]

The story of John Quincy is inspiring because it is rare. In Kennedy's words, John Quincy lived a life that "has never been paralleled in American history," (2006, p. 33). We may not live in the midst of an escalating conflict with Britain today, but we face many other challenges—among them climate change and a centuries-long reckoning with race.

How do we confront these challenges? We will need the right political institutions, for sure, but we also need people with the courage of John Quincy to speak up/stand up when all the voices around them are telling them to do otherwise.

Fortunately for us, the Profiles did not end with Kennedy's 1957 book. Kennedy's daughter, Caroline, edited her own book titled *Profiles in Courage for Our Time*, and the Kennedy family created an award called the *Profile in Courage Award* that is organized by the JFK Presidential Library and awarded to a deserving recipient each year.

The next two stories are about Bob Inglis, who received the Profile in Courage Award in 2015, and Mitch Landrieu, who received the award in 2018. I selected these phenomenal men, not just because their stories are worthy of recognition, but also because they earned their awards for work in specific fields we'll be discussing in the next two parts of this season. Bob Inglis, for example, earned an award for courage in the area of environment, the topic of the next part of this season. And Landrieu earned his award for courage in the area of civil rights/social justice, the topic of part III.

I'll share Bob Inglis' story first. Bob Inglis was a U.S. Representative from South Carolina's 4th Congressional District. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Duke University, then went on to study law at the University of Virginia. After receiving his J.D., Inglis practiced with a prestigious law firm in Greenville. In 1992, he ran for U.S. Representative, was elected, and served in this capacity until 1998. After a few years out of office, Inglis ran again in 2004 and served until 2010.

Something unique about Inglis' first six years in office is that he was elected without the financial support of political action committees. For those who aren't familiar with this term, a "political action committee" (or "PAC") is an organized group of individuals who make monetary contributions to political campaigns. They are often viewed as controversial because of their outsized influence in helping get politicians elected and re-elected to office. By rejecting support from PACs, Inglis was able to maintain more control over his own voting decisions. He didn't owe anyone any "favors," so he could vote "yes" or "no" on bills without fearing PACs would withdraw support next election cycle and cause him to lose his seat—or at least this is the idea. What is doubly impressive is that he managed to beat out his Democratic opponent, who was also the incumbent.

Something else unique about Inglis' first six years is that he pledged to limit his own term. As I'm sure you know, the number of terms one can serve is unlimited—in both chambers of Congress. But Inglis was a firm believer in term limits, and even though the law did not require him to stop serving, he made a promise to his constituents and he followed through with that promise. Rather than running for re-election to the House, he ran instead for a seat in the United States Senate.

Inglis' first six years in office immediately set him apart from other U.S. Representatives. Even if there is nothing objectively wrong with accepting PAC money or serving unlimited terms, you have to admire Inglis for taking a principled stand and for following those principles from the time of his election in 1992 until 1998.

As we saw with John Quincy Adams in the last story, being principled is oftentimes accompanied by stubbornness or a tendency to be uncompromising. This doesn't have to be true all the time, but it was true a lot of the time with John Quincy Adams, and it was true for Bob Inglis when it came to PACs and term limits, as well as a third issue—climate change. You see, throughout Inglis' first six years in office, he had denied that climate change was real. Here's Inglis in an interview with Gina McCarthy at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health:

[04:00 to 04:28]

After Inglis was defeated in his bid for the Senate seat in '98, something significant happened. He began to reevaluate his position on climate:

[04:29 to 05:55]

As Inglis began changing his tune on climate change, he became more and more unpopular with constituents. In the primary elections of 2008, he was mocked by his Republican challengers for being a "climate science" believer. Then in 2010, Inglis was running again, this time during the Great Recession, and his constituents were in no mood to confront the immediate costs of addressing the distant and

ambiguous threat of climate change. Here's Inglis giving his acceptance speech after receiving the Profile in Courage Award:

[28:01 to 29:45]

Unsurprisingly, Inglis lost his bid for re-election. However, just like John Quincy Adams before him, he maintained the support of his family, which he said was "worth more than a voting card in Congress." Also like John Quincy Adams (Kennedy, 2006), he never regretted his principled stand on climate, even though it lost him job. Here's Inglis speaking at a 2018 TED talk:

[08:10 to 09:16]

The similarities don't end here. Just like John Quincy, Bob Inglis did not allow party politics to constrain his individual action. He faced unimaginable pressure to conform to the dominant opinion among his Republican challengers in order to hold onto his seat, but he didn't. Also just like John Quincy, Bob Inglis sought to serve the best interests of the nation as a whole, not just his own constituents in South Carolina.

As professor James Guth of Clemson University once said, "Whether you're liberal or conservative, it's hard to meet [Bob Inglis] and not feel he is a very genuine individual … Although he has a pretty clear idea on most policy questions … he gives the impression of … being more open to conversation … He has an ideological position, but he has the facts, too."

Today, Inglis works with an organization he founded, called RepublicEN, whose mission is "to persuade … three dozen congressional Republicans to support meaningful climate action by 2022 …" Time will tell whether he is successful on this front. One thing is for sure: we could use more people with the courage of Bob Inglis when it comes to individual action on climate change.

[Musical interlude]

Our final story is about Mitch Landrieu, who earned the Profile in Courage Award for his action on civil rights as New Orleans' mayor from 2010 to 2018.

Mitch Landrieu was born in 1960. He grew up in New Orleans, attended a Jesuit high school, then moved to Washington D.C. to attend The Catholic University of America. After earning his J.D. from Loyola University Law School and serving 16 years in the Louisiana House of Representatives, he ran for and was elected to the office of mayor of the city of New Orleans.

When Landrieu was elected, Louisiana was recovering from Hurricane Katrina and one of his primary responsibilities was to help the city rebuild—rebuild its schools, rebuild its recreation centers, and rebuild its hospitals. While he was rebuilding, the main question on his mind was how to more inclusively represent the city's history and values. Landrieu's father, Moon Landrieu, had also been mayor of New Orleans, and he had garnered a reputation for supporting civil rights issues. So this was something Mitch Landrieu grew up around and was familiar with. And when he was mayor, it was an issue that very much influenced his actions.

There were four confederate monuments in the city at the time, and Landrieu knew they were a source of pain for a majority of his constituency.

I want to play a clip from one of Landrieu's speeches to the people of New Orleans because it gives some valuable context to this time in New Orleans' history and provides important background information on the monuments themselves Here's Landrieu:

[01:24 to 05:25].

When Landrieu first took office, he began discussions with other municipal officials about removing the monuments. And shortly after the massacre at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, he ordered them to be taken down. While Landrieu wasn't the first mayor to propose removal, he was the first to do so successfully.

As you might imagine, the decision to tear down these symbols of the confederacy sparked outrage amongst some constituents who considered the monuments cultural artefacts, and, as such, believed they ought to remain in place. Landrieu received threats from confederate sympathizers, and the car of one of the city contractors was firebombed.

Facing threats of violence by an enraged section of his constituency, Landrieu could have backed down. But rather than yield to the pressures of public opinion, Landrieu proceeded to remove the confederate monuments. While he may not have lost his political position for this decision, as John Quincy Adams and Bob Inglis did, his political future in the South remains uncertain:

Here's Landrieu speaking in an interview with Chuck Todd on Meet the Press:

[08:19 to 10:10]

Landrieu's individual action required sacrifice, as well. It took foresight. It took determination, and a willingness to propel society forward. And this is really the thing that binds all the stories—all the profiles—in this episode together. John Quincy Adams broke with party and constituency to defend the sovereignty of the United States. Bob Inglis broke with party and constituency to devote this next chapter of his life to getting people on board with climate science. And Mitch Landrieu broke with history to begin repairing a centuries-long conflict of race relations and move society forward.

Even if individual action doesn't permanently change the course of public policy, it can still make a splash. And splashes have ripples. The courageous actions of Adams, Inglis, and Landrieu are inspiring and empowering. They galvanize others to act courageously, too.

As we'll see in the next two parts of this season, we still have much more work to do on climate change- and social justice-related issues. Along the way we will depend on the decisive action of all three branches of government. We will depend on the right electoral systems to give voice to the desires of the American people and of future generations. But we will also depend on the individual actions of courageous individuals.

I am inspired by the tremendous courage exhibited in each of the stories I've shared in this episode. I'm empowered and I'm galvanized to move forward. To do, in Landrieu's words, the "right thing, not the easy thing." And I hope you are too. The time to address the issues of s

I hope you were inspired by the stories in today's episode. But more than that, I hope you were galvanized to begin—or if you have already begun, to continue—acting courageously in your own life—whatever that might mean. We all have power to effect change in our own social circles. Even with actions that are seemingly small—this power matters. It's important. And your individual actions have ripples, too.

[Outro music]

Thanks for tuning in this week to Wonkcast, Episode 3: Profiles in Courage and Modern Bulwarks of Justice. As always, I encourage you to submit your comments, insights, or questions about the episode to me, William Somes, at wonkcast@gmail.com and I promise to include them in the next episode.

Next time on Wonkcast we'll begin part II on "the Environment" with a special guest from the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

WonkCast is a production of the Trachtenberg School at George Washington University. Transcripts and citations for each episode are available on our website, www.policy-perspectives.org. Music for today's show was created using Soundtrap, a Spotify company.

Thanks for tuning in. See you for the next episode in a few weeks.