

The Rev. David Gray

The Rev. David Gray, 39, is director of the Workforce and Family Program at the New America Foundation and is a parish associate at National Presbyterian Church. He has served as a lawyer and policy aid in both the legislative and executive branches of government, and is preparing to release a paper on the family aspects of America's Next Social Contract.



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

THE INSIDE VIEW

Do you consider yourself to be of a specific faith?

I was born and raised Presbyterian and am ordained and serve as a Presbyterian pastor. I appreciate the Presbyterian value of balance — between head and heart, word and sacrament, worship and service, creativity and order, vocation and rest, contemplation and action.

As a young person, did any person or event have a unique influence upon your faith or path in life?

My parents and grandparents had an important impact on my faith journey. Watching their faithfulness to church and religious practice as sources of personal and social strength influenced me to explore religion more seriously. Along the way, three pastors — a Presbyterian preacher, a Catholic priest and a UCC counselor (sounds like the start of a bad joke, doesn't it?) — modeled how great joy can come from service.

You've spent time studying America's work force. How do you find your own work-life balance?

Work and life balance is one of the emerging issues on the American policy landscape. For me, exercise and trying to be as disciplined as I can at work and spiritual practice all help me. In our research, we are finding that as American families change, there is a mismatch between the needs of families and the structure of work. Workplace flexibility is an important issue for policymakers to consider. Of course, the work-life balance I have now is about to go out the window, as literally tomorrow morning we expect our second son to be born.

If our cash-strapped local, state or federal authorities could do one thing tomorrow to better the lives of young people, what would it be?

The Child Well Being Index that the New America Foundation helps host tells us that being overweight or obese remains the greatest overall challenge to children's well-being. If we use the same principles that helped reduce teen smoking over the past generation — public service announcements, education, raising the costs of unhealthy habits and lowering the costs of healthy ones — and commit to applying them now — we can make a great difference in the lives of young people.

Government needs to make tough choices and still find ways to continue to make critical investments in early education, health care and infrastructure while renewing a commitment to frugality. Our economy and personal practices must change from being consumption-focused and debt-driven to being more frugal and savings-focused. Our policy leaders need to reform entitlement and discretionary spending to reduce the financial burden on young people and initiate a conversation about America becoming a saving culture. Last year, I hosted a scholarship contest for all high school seniors in D.C. asking what change the president should make to help our young people. We are making it a national contest this year and I imagine we'll get more essays about debt, spending and finances.

At your core, what is one of your defining beliefs?

I believe in the ability of faith to heal. I see it pastorally as I talk with people about hurtful issues they face. I see it academically as I study both the negative and positive influences of religion in the world. I see it corporately as I work with people of different faiths to address public policy issues. I see it privately as I work through my own challenges in life. — Leah Fabel