

# CONVERGENCE

## 2025 ANNUAL SUMMIT

### SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



#### **Alison Acosta Winters**

Alison Acosta Winters is on the Board of Convergence. She was most recently a Senior Policy Fellow at Americans for Prosperity and the Charles Koch Foundation where she worked on trade, economic, and fiscal policy. While there, Winters participated in the *Convergence Dialogue on Building a Better Budget Process* with a broad array of stakeholders that resulted in a series of policy recommendations that have received attention in Congress.

Prior to that, Winters was the Director of the Roe Institute for Economic Policy at the Heritage Foundation. She wrote on a wide variety of economic issues, including coauthoring the Heritage Fiscal Plan Saving the American Dream. While at Heritage, Winters participated in the FiscalWake Up Tour which brought together policy experts from different perspectives to educate Americans about the unsustainable fiscal path the nation is on and policy choices that could address the problem.

Winters has appeared in numerous media outlets including Bloomberg, CNN, Fox, PBS and NPR. Her work has been seen in *USA Today*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and more.



#### **Stuart Butler**

Stuart Butler is a scholar in residence in Economic Studies at The Brookings Institution. He previously spent 35 years at The Heritage Foundation, where he directed the Center for Policy Innovation and served as Vice President for Domestic and Economic Policy Studies.

Butler is on the editorial board of *Health Affairs* and the board of Mary's Center, and serves on several advisory councils, including for the Peterson Center on Healthcare. He has been an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and was an Institute of Politics Fellow at Harvard University in 2002.

He has contributed significantly to the debate on health care equity and reform, focusing on social determinants of health, market-based approaches, and state innovation. Butler has also written on budget process reform, higher education, economic mobility, and entitlement reform.

Born in Shrewsbury, England, Butler emigrated to the U.S. in 1975 before becoming a U.S. citizen two decades later. He has his Bachelor of Science degree in physics and mathematics, a Master of Arts degree in economics and history, and a Ph.D. in American economic history from St. Andrews University in Scotland. He is married with two daughters and resides in Washington, DC.



### **Rob Fersh**

Rob founded Convergence in 2009 and served as its first CEO until 2020. He has spent over 45 years bridging policy differences and moving important public policy solutions forward in Washington DC through working for Congress, in the Executive Branch, and in leading non-profit organizations.

Rob captured his experience in a book co-written with Convergence CEO and President Mariah Levison and published by Wiley in July 2024. It is entitled, *From Conflict to Convergence: Coming Together to Solve Tough Problems*.

Rob was a 1994 recipient of the Prudential Foundation Prize for Non-Profit Leadership. He holds a law degree from Boston University and a bachelor's degree in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University. He is married, has four children, and three grandchildren. He resides in Bethesda, MD.



### **Howard Gleckman**

Howard Gleckman is a Senior Fellow at The Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., focusing on tax and retirement policy issues.

He is the author of *Caring for Our Parents* and writes for the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center's *Tax Vox* blog and *Forbes.com*'s weekly blog on aging issues. Gleckman is a member of the Advancing Family Caregivers Financial and Workplace Security Steering Committee and serves on the editorial board of GSA's *Public Policy and Aging Report*.

Previously, Gleckman was on the National Academy of Social Insurance's Study Panel on Long-Term Services and Supports. He was also a Media Fellow at the Kaiser Family Foundation and a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. He was a senior correspondent for Business Week, where he covered health and elder care, as well as tax issues for nearly 20 years.

In 2016, he was named one of the top 50 Influencers in Aging by Next Avenue. In 2003, he was a National Magazine Award finalist for "The Coming Revolution in Health Care" for Business Week.



### **Derek Kilmer**

Derek Kilmer is the Senior Vice President of U.S. Program and Policy for The Rockefeller Foundation. Prior to that, Kilmer served six terms as U.S. Representative for Washington's Sixth District.

As head of U.S. Program and Policy at The Rockefeller Foundation, Mr. Kilmer leads a new range of work to engage domestic and global leaders, civil society actors, businesses, and institutions to advance issues core to The Rockefeller Foundation's mission.

As the U.S. Representative for Washington's Sixth District and as a native of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, Kilmer passed a landmark economic development law to help economically distressed communities, establishing a program that became the most popular in the Economic Development Administration's history.

During his time in Congress, Kilmer also served as Chairman of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress which passed over 200 recommendations to make Congress work better and which was described in the Washington Post as a story of "shocking function."

Prior to Congress, Kilmer worked as a consultant for McKinsey & Co. and for a nonprofit focused on economic development. Kilmer earned an undergraduate degree from Princeton and a doctorate from Oxford.



### **Mariah Levison**

Mariah serves as Convergence's CEO and President after serving as Chief Program Officer. Mariah uses a deep understanding of human relations to build trust and relationships across differences which lead to consensus-based solutions to complex and contentious issues. Her

work in consensus building includes assessment, design, facilitation, mediation, collaborative processes, dialogue, public engagement best practices, restorative justice, and program development. Additionally, Mariah has been teaching these skills for twenty years in settings ranging from community trainings to trainings for foreign governments to teaching the mediation clinic at the University of Minnesota Law School.

Prior to joining Convergence, Mariah helped to create and ran the Minnesota State Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution. In that position Mariah used a collaborative problem-solving process very similar to the one used by Convergence to build consensus on state, tribal, and local issues; built the capacity of government to work well across difference; and facilitated the Minnesota Legislative Civility Caucus. Before joining the State of Minnesota, Mariah worked for nonprofit dispute resolution centers in Chicago, New York, and Minneapolis. Mariah captured her expertise, wisdom, and years of experience in a new book co-written with Convergence Founder and First CEO, Rob Fersh, entitled, *From Conflict to Convergence: Coming Together to Solve Tough Problems*.

Mariah has a Masters in International Affairs with a focus in conflict management from Washington University in St. Louis.



### **Aparna Mathur**

Aparna Mathur is a Senior Research Manager in Economics at Amazon, where she conducts research on labor and employment issues affecting Amazon's global workforce to inform best policy.

She is a Visiting Fellow at FREOPP and was previously a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Mossavar-Rahmani Center. Aparna also served as Senior Economist at the Council of Economic Advisers in addition to directing the AEI-Brookings Project on Paid Family and Medical Leave at the American Enterprise Institute, for which she was recognized in the Politico 50 list for 2017.

Her work has been published in top scholarly journals and mainstream media outlets like The Economist, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal. Aparna has testified before Congress and appeared on NPR, CNBC, and C-SPAN. She holds a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Maryland, where she also serves on the Economics

Leadership Council. She is on the Board of Convergence, the National Academy of Social Insurance, Simply Green and the National Economists Club.



### **Manu Meel**

Manu Meel is passionate about empowering and elevating young people to move beyond polarization. Currently, Manu serves as the CEO of BridgeUSA, a national organization that is investing in the future of democracy. Through his work, Manu has contributed to several news outlets, advanced pro-democracy efforts nationally, and led the policy operation for a Baltimore mayoral candidate. In the past, Manu worked as an associate at the venture capital firm Amplo and at the Department of State as a political analyst in counterterrorism. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other media platforms.



### **Marc Porter Magee**

Marc Porter Magee is CEO of 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now, a nonprofit organization that works at the local level across the United States to advocate for a high-quality education for all kids, regardless of their address. Over the past 15 years, 50CAN has raised more than \$400 million to support local leaders and educational innovators in more than a dozen state and city campaigns who have improved the lives of millions of students across the country and secured more than 250 transformational policy victories.

Previously, Marc served as Chief Operating Officer at ConnCAN, research director of the Partnership for Public Service, and founding director of the Progressive Policy Institute's Center for Civic Enterprise. Marc is a graduate of Georgetown University and received his Ph.D. in sociology from Duke University. Marc and his wife Kathleen live in Alexandria, Va., with their three children.



### **Ashley Quarcoo**

Ashley Quarcoo is executive director of the Election Trust Initiative and oversees its portfolio of investments to advance evidence-based, nonpartisan improvements to U.S. election systems. Previously, she directed program, policy, and coalition development at More Perfect and served as a senior fellow with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where she examined threats to democracy and approaches to

building social cohesion. Quarcoo has also held leadership positions with the Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity Program, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. State Department. She is a member of the Advisory Council of the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.