

An NHA Congressional Briefing
by

Amy Gutmann
Michael S. McPherson

**ON THE PUBLIC PURPOSES
OF EDUCATION
IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

With Introductory Remarks by
Catherine E. Rudder

**National Humanities Alliance
Washington, DC**

With Support from the Rockefeller Foundation

1994

NHA

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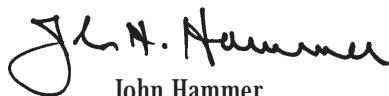


On the **Public Purposes of Education in a Democratic Society** is the first Congressional briefing of a new educational activity of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA). Through these briefings, the NHA hopes to demonstrate the value of scholarly research in the humanities to members of Congress and Congressional staff.

The National Humanities Alliance is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit 501(c)(4) organization that was created in 1981 to unify public interest in support of federal programs in the humanities. The NHA is comprised of scholarly and professional associations; organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, higher education, and state humanities councils; university and independent centers of scholarship; and other organizations concerned with national humanities policies. A list of NHA members appears in the inside back cover.

Most members of Congress recognize the importance of the humanities in school and college curricula; fewer, however, are aware of the potential role that humanistic scholarship could play in informing public policy. From the NHA perspective, a significant amount of scholarly work in the humanities is of immediate value in addressing both domestic and international policy alternatives of many kinds. The humanities offer insights that contextualize and identify sources of conflict -- whether they are economic, social, religious, or cultural: focus on moral and ethical questions upon which all good public policy is based; and illuminate the practical consequences of various strategic policy choices. The state humanities councils have demonstrated this value of the humanities through a wide variety of programs. No comparable effort, however, has been undertaken with respect to policy making at the national level.

The NHA has recognized the need for a broader understanding of the usefulness of the humanities for some time and developed the plan for the Congressional Briefing Program in 1992. A generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation has made this program possible.



John Hammer
Director

Congressional Briefing Session
National Humanities Alliance
December 6, 1993



Introductory Remarks:

Dr. Catherine Rudder, Executive Director of the
American Political Science Association and
Board Member of the National Humanities Alliance.

No issue strikes at the heart of the American dream more centrally than that of education. It is the route by which generations of Americans have bettered their lot. It is the central mechanism providing for equal opportunity, if imperfectly, for United States citizens. Increasingly, however, many citizens, policymakers, and experts perceive that our educational system is not performing its job, not only as a means for individual achievement, but as a necessary concomitant of national economic prosperity.

Today we have two distinguished scholars to help us grapple with proposals for melioration. They will examine issues of choice, accountability, quality and access in K-12 and undergraduate higher education. The system of graduate education in the United States, by virtually all measures, performs exceptionally well and consequently is not the focus of the panel this morning.

We will begin with political scientist Amy Gutmann, Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor at Princeton University, where she directs the University Center for Human Values and the Program for Ethics and Public Affairs. She will be followed by Michael S. McPherson, the W. van Alan Clark Third Century Professor of Economics, at Williams College where he serves as chair of the Economics department and Co-Director of the Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education. Professor McPherson will focus on quality and access in higher education. Upon completing their presentations, we will welcome questions from the audience.

PRESENTATIONS

PROFESSOR AMY GUTMANN:

It is unusual that a political philosopher and an economist come together to speak on the same topic, but Professor McPherson and I are part of a growing cadre of political philosophers and economists who are interested in ethics and public policy. We believe that a principled approach to public policy includes both a concern for moral principles and an attention to empirical reality. Knowing the facts of the case matters. In addition, as scholars increasingly recognize the interdisciplinary nature of our world, they use insights from more than one discipline to find more fruitful solutions.

To bring home the importance of knowing the facts, I tell my students a story about four men on an airplane that's about to crash. Of course, there are only three parachutes. Since I'm a political philosopher, they always think I'll focus on principles. The cast of characters are the President of the United States, the smartest philosopher in the world, a hippie, and a parish priest.

The story goes this way. The President of the United States gets up and says, "I'm the leader of the free world. The whole world depends upon leadership in the United States for guidance in liberal democracy." He then takes a parachute and jumps. Next, the smartest philosopher in the world gets up and says, "I'm the world's smartest philosopher. The advancement of knowledge and education depends on my survival." So he takes one and jumps.

That leaves the parish priest and the hippie. The priest turns to the hippie and says, "Son, my whole life has been devoted to doing the right thing, to being charitable. Please, take a parachute and jump." But the hippie smiles wryly and says, "Don't worry, man. The smartest philosopher in the world just took my knapsack and jumped out of the plane."

If the smartest philosopher in the world had paid attention to facts, the hippie and the priest would have faced a moral dilemma. Four people with three parachutes is an example of the hard choices that policymakers face continually. The first fact to note is a scarcity of resources. The second is limited generosity. These are the two circumstances of justice that philosopher David Hume delineated more than 200 years ago.

I also want to introduce two additional facts that make choices in a democratic society invariably difficult. We do not all share the same values and, as even the smartest philosopher in the world demonstrated, we have an incomplete understanding of how best to pursue our valued ends.

Today, I want to examine the impact of incompatible values on educational policy. I'll focus on choice in education which includes everything ranging from voucher plans to choice within the public sphere, which is increasingly on the political agenda, and on national standards legislation. I want to develop three lessons about the hard choices that policymakers face every day in the political world. These points go beyond education policy, but they are particularly applicable here.

Since we are dealing with incompatible values in education, no resolution to hard choices is without moral cost. Education entails authority. The determination of whose authority is more appropriate is highly controversial in any society, particularly ours. A moral good derives from parental authority over children's education just as it derives from the public sphere. Finally, there's a moral value in having professionals exert authority over education. The authority of all these parties cannot be maximized. There are no simple tradeoffs in efficiency when moral values are at stake.

A conclusion to be drawn from the fact that there are no morally costless solutions is for policymakers to avoid making claims that any single policy can achieve all goods in education. The statement that choice in and of itself has the capacity to affect the transformation that educational reformers have tried to engineer in myriad other ways for years is immediately suspect. I think that some form of choice is important in educational policy, but choice alone cannot bring us everything we reasonably want from public education.

When policymakers oversell choice, or any educational policy for that matter, they are more likely to adopt a bad policy. Even when a policy is good, it's useful to discuss its limitations and moral costs to avoid creating public expectations that cannot be met. One of the largest problems

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policymakers face today is mistrust of government. You can purchase short-term gains with long-term losses if you avoid the limited results deriving from any single policy.

The same principles apply to national standards in education. The policy will limit local autonomy. No matter how voluntary national standards may be, if they do their work, they will constrain the range of educational policies that can be considered at the local level. This may be a good thing, but it is not without its costs. The first lesson, then, is to attend to the moral costs of any policy.

How then can we choose a good educational policy if they all have moral costs? In a pluralist society with so many conflicting values, how can we determine which educational policy is better? The second lesson to be learned from the existence of incompatible values is that a good public educational policy must, at a minimum, address the public purposes of education.

Literacy and numeracy are important—indeed essential—goals of educational policy; but they're not enough. A cross-national study ranking students from fourteen different countries in mathematics and science found Koreans to be first in achievement and Americans to be last. When asked how well they thought they did in mathematics, Americans ranked themselves at the top while Koreans ranked themselves at the bottom. These findings call into question any policy that gives priority to teaching self-esteem over achievement. A genuine sense of self-esteem—one worthy of public support—should be based on educational excellence. However, literacy and numeracy are not everything. Teaching those skills is an important public purpose of education, but it does not substitute for teaching the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Public education arose in this country out of the need to imbue all future citizens with the skills and virtues of democratic citizenship. The vitality of public support for elementary and secondary schools depends on how well they contribute to an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

No educational policy should be defended independently of a concern for the public purposes of education. National standards legislation is a case in point. Originally civics was not part of national content standards. Recently, it was added and quite rightly so. A set of national education standards that excludes a concern for civics education is like a constitution without a bill of rights. It has value, but neglects one of its primary moral and political tasks. Without citizenship education, citizens won't be encouraged to develop the skills and virtues of self-government. Instead we'll have conflicting private purposes and power politics. A principled educational policy requires continual attention to the public purposes of education.

Now the third and final lesson: an understanding of the public purposes of education does not resolve hard choices. We may agree that civics is an important component of national standards, but on-going disagreement about the content of civics and how to teach it will continue. The mathematics standards established by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics are the model for national standards. Educators argued about the right way to teach mathematics, but at least they agreed about the content and what it means. That debate will seem easy compared to the issues raised about teaching civics, the relationship between civics and history, what the content of these subjects should be as well as how to teach it.

The lesson to be derived from this is highly appropriate to educational policy: we should not avoid controversies, but take advantage of them to teach the real meaning of democracy. Educational decision-making in the political realm ought to be the product of *deliberation*, of a give-and-take among people who may still disagree about politically relevant matters. The best education policies are the product of an educational process. Education policymaking ought to be part of an on-going process that might be called “deliberative democracy.” Thus, democracy becomes a process of continually educating the public and policymakers in a dialogue to find better policies.

Deliberative democracy is the opposite of “sound-bite democracy.” The purpose of the dialogue is not only to come up with better policies, but also to educate. In order to come to any consensus on how civics ought to be taught, we need to foster conversation among policymakers who disagree and also between policymakers and the public. The third lesson, therefore, is that education policy ought to be educational, part of the on-going process that I refer to as “deliberative democracy.”

So, I will leave you with three lessons and I know Professor McPherson is going to add some more. Attend to moral costs, defend public purposes, and deliberate.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL MCPHERSON:

I want to continue discussing the role of values and ethical judgment in education, but within the context of the post-secondary sector. Professor Gutmann’s three lessons fit well with the issues that I’ll present. It’s useful to point out that the national discussion of postsecondary education has shifted from an emphasis on access, making it possible for everybody to get some kind of education after high school, to a greater concern for quality. Indeed, there’s a greater concern for a whole range of questions about the effectiveness of the schooling people get. Sometimes the issue is posed as access versus quality, implying that educational opportunities can’t be widely extended without watering them down. I don’t necessarily endorse that point of view but rather want to point out that quality is getting more attention today.

Many different kinds of issues come into play here. Do people have appropriate kinds of opportunities after high school? Does our money go to the right students? Is government money well-spent on these educational investments? These issues are very much on the national agenda and on the agenda in the states.

In this regard, it’s helpful to reflect on the origins of ongoing federal assistance to postsecondary education. The decisive moment came with the Education Amendments of 1972. In that legislation, Congress consciously decided not to make qualitative judgments about postsecondary education alternatives. The possibility of giving aid directly to institutions, to individual colleges and universities, was rejected in favor of giving aid to students in a portable form which they could then take, much like a voucher, to whatever institution best met their needs. These loans and grants permitted Congress to avoid deciding which schools should get what money. That was based on the sound judgment that the federal government was not in a position to decide how worthy 3,000 or more institutions were of support.

In effect, decisions about quality were delegated to the marketplace. But now, not surprisingly, there are pulls on Congress and on state legislatures to assume a stronger regulatory role to promote quality in postsecondary education. I think this is inevitable as the country focuses more attention on education policy and at the same time feels that its resources are limited. Incidents of fraud and abuse in proprietary schools stimulated the concern for quality in postsecondary education, but it's more critical to evaluate what happens to students who receive postsecondary-education subsidies. We should understand the values that are validated in subsidizing these programs. Professor Gutmann said rightly that solid thinking about ethics must be informed by the facts, so let me mention a few that I'm sure are familiar to most of you.

The first fact to note is that the Pell and Stafford programs, the basic grant and loan programs, are the largest federal job- training programs in the United States. That was not anticipated in

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The second fact is that most students who enter community colleges don't ever obtain a degree or certificate. Typically they take a few courses, often with some federal support for their efforts, and then they stop. Now, that need not mean that they didn't succeed. Indeed, they may have gotten exactly what they wanted and needed. But at a minimum, a fact like this should start one thinking about the definition of success.

Similarly, many students who enter four-year colleges never emerge with a degree. For example, the University of Minnesota, a leading public higher educational institution, has a five-year graduation rate of 26%. For every 100 students who enter the university, only twenty-six will obtain a bachelor's degree five years later. The fact that almost three-quarters of the students don't get over that hurdle again raises the question about what we mean by success.

And then a final fact: the opportunity to attend a four-year institution is unevenly distributed. In many states the top subsidy available to a student from a low-income family will not permit that student to attend a state university. In those states, access is limited; if you're poor and live in an inner city, your choices are either the local community college or a trade school.

Facts like these have led governments, both state and national, to think more critically about the quality and effectiveness of the programs that their dollars support. My point is fairly simple: once you begin to ask questions about quality and effectiveness, Professor Gutmann's three lessons become central. Quality in postsecondary education is primarily about values and needs serious deliberative attention.

Reforms like TQM and Reinventing Government have promise, but they make the debate about quality and effectiveness appear to be simply technical matters. In fact, values are very much at

stake and need to be brought to the fore for public discussion. So, like Professor Gutmann, I have three questions that are challenging, even impertinent, in order to provoke thought about the values that underlie our policies.

The first question is what do we mean by equality of educational opportunity? Presumably this goal is the basis of our concern about access. Does equal opportunity simply provide everyone access to some kind of education, or does it guarantee genuine equality of access, that is, access to a reasonably comparable range of alternatives?

The second question is how much should we value the vocational and the liberal goals of postsecondary education? This corresponds to Professor Gutmann's point about the public purpose of education. What is the public purpose of education at the postsecondary level? Again, this may be impertinent, but let me make the issue clear by putting it quite sharply. Right now, federal programs for higher education offer about \$5,000 to anyone who needs it to learn to drive a truck or to learn to cut hair. What is the underlying aim of such a program? Does it serve a public purpose? I'm not arguing that we shouldn't do this, but it's quite distant from the original intent of the legislation that created these programs of support for higher education. Consequently, we need to ask what values we want to foster through these programs.

And then, finally, the most difficult and controversial question, who should go to college? Our political rhetoric often makes it sound like universal higher education is our ideal and the only impediment is financial. I have a hunch that even under present arrangements, a lot of people are in college, not because they have a passion to learn or because they see college as an especially valuable experience, but because they see it as the only reliable path to success in our society. I

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think this holds true across all socio-economic groups. There are many students with good SAT scores from good high schools who are at selective colleges, not because they think higher education is important in and of itself, but because they see it as a precondition to further their goals. Is this an appropriate motive for attending college? Is this why we're funding them? If so, making post-secondary education universal would not result in economic and social success for everyone. That goal would require other changes in society. If higher education were universal without changing other social and economic arrangements, another set of hurdles would sort people out. So it may be that in addition to educational opportunity, we should think about other ways to provide pathways to a good and satisfying life.

Now, again in Professor Gutmann's spirit, I didn't ask these questions because they're easy to answer or because ethics provides a magic formula for dealing with them. These are issues that have been pushed onto the national agenda by many developments in our society. They call for serious deliberation.

DISCUSSION

DR. RUDDER:

Now we'll open for questions. I'll give you a minute to gather your thoughts. You can direct your questions to Professor Gutmann or Professor McPherson or both.

DR. MANN: — *Sheilah Mann, American Political Science Association*

What would you see as the core of a civics curriculum?

PROFESSOR GUTMANN:

Certainly civics education includes both history and civics, but neither by itself. The battle was originally between historians and social studies people. We've gotten past that, partly through a process of political deliberation. In a society in which so many things need to be taught, one of the great temptations is to simplify and choose one or the other. Civics education entails knowledge of the history of one's own country and its relationship to the rest of the world. This requires a good understanding of the rest of the world. A good curriculum in history is necessary for that.

I also think that civics has to be taught separately from history; but it's not enough to teach students their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens. There is a very extensive literature on how ineffective civics courses can be when students learn a list of democratic ethics in much the same way that Marxist ethics was taught in the Soviet Union. You know, these are your rights as citizens; these are your responsibilities; this is what the Constitution says. Full stop. Now that's a caricature, but not very far from the way some civics programs were once taught.

The third lesson, deliberation, provides the key to the way civics ought to be taught. It should be presented as a series of arguments about democracy, our common purposes, and where common purposes break down and debates begin. There is an illuminating account in Diane Ravitch's book, *The Schools We Deserve*, about a high school teacher covering the United States' role in World War II. He prepared his students with documents and background on Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima and asked them to be ready to discuss the issue. He conducted the class in a Socratic manner, and when one student said the bomb should be dropped, the teacher asked "Why? How do you know? Does anyone disagree with this student? What are the arguments on the other side?" That's an example of teaching civics as a lesson in deliberation. Without that, we're not teaching democracy. Democracy is about disagreeing, finding common values, building on those values, and then continuing our disagreements. It's harder to teach deliberation than routinized learning. Deliberation requires both cultural literacy and real thinking skills. It encourages such democratic virtues as toleration, respect for people who reasonably disagree with you, and consideration of arguments that you would never consider if other people didn't stand up for them. That's a rough sketch of what civics can and should be.

DR. RUDDER:

Can I challenge your premise that we have to attend to the big moral questions? As you know, the mainstream in political science would argue that we should not attend to the big moral ques-

tions but tinker and make incremental changes. If we confront big moral questions, we'll hit an impasse because, in fact, we so fundamentally disagree. Would you respond to that?

PROFESSOR GUTMANN:

I'm really glad you asked that question because I may have given the wrong impression. There's much truth in that point of view. When we teach deliberation, we should not restrict it only to the big moral questions. In educational policy, Professor McPherson and I were arguing that there are moral questions involved in all the details. There's no such thing as pure bargaining of interests because interests always contain and even more explicitly express a moral argument. For example, because people who are over sixty in our society tend to vote in a block, we think of them as an interest group just as we think of labor and business as interest groups. When you think about the interests of these groups, you see that they have moral components. If, for example, the goal is to protect or increase productivity, productivity is valued because it allows people to live better lives. Groups that support social security and health care for the elderly speak about the value of sustaining people in their old age. This is a moral value worthy of everyone's consideration. There are, of course competing moral values that other interest groups are more likely to express. But we should not dismiss these values or be cynical about their legitimacy because they are defended by interest groups.

There's some validity to the political science convention that you don't focus only on the big moral issues in a democracy. They're either too simple or too hard. Either everyone will agree: who is against the principle of equal freedom? No policymaker would speak out against the principle of equal liberty. But if you go below that level of generality, that's where productive disagreement begins. Ask if the principle of equal freedom ensures no restrictions on television broadcasting, either on language or the amount of violence on TV. These issues are matters of considerable moral value and they are supremely practical. If we look not only at the big moral values, but at the details, we are more likely to make better policy. Furthermore, there is more room for compromise. We can find a policy that safeguards free speech while preserving the quality of life for children. So, civics should teach not just the big principles, but also how to negotiate, bargain, and settle disagreements, at least provisionally, in our political system. We need to teach what might be called the nuts and bolts of democratic politics. The skills and virtues of deliberation are of course, part of the nuts and bolts. The political science literature makes a very important contribution to our understanding of the basics, but we must supplement that literature with a fuller and more explicit recognition of the moral elements of everyday political argument. We cannot meaningfully reduce morality to self-interest or to a group's interest.

DR. JAMIL ZAINALDIN: — *President, Federation of State Humanities Council.*

In a deliberative process, people can only work together if they share public purposes.

PROFESSOR GUTMANN:

Recall the second lesson: attend to the public purposes of education. Public purposes include inculcating values such as toleration and equal opportunity which support deliberation. If we don't share these values, deliberation can't take place. For example, consider the principle of the separation of church and state. It's a source of great controversy. The court is always renegotiating exactly where the line should be drawn, with the dual aim of respecting religious differences and preventing private differences from overwhelming common purposes. So you're absolutely right, deliberation has to begin with common purposes. Our common purposes develop over time as a result of previous deliberations.

MS. ELAINE FREEMAN:

— *Director of South Carolina Educational Television Endowment*

Public policy must take note of older people who re-enter higher education when they are twenty-eight or thirty. It seems our resources are totally inadequate for adults who want to go back to college.

PROFESSOR MCPHERSON:

That's true. One of the things I regret about teaching at Williams is that there are almost no adults among the students. When I taught at an urban university in the Midwest, there were adults in my classes. In subjects like economics and politics—but it may be true across the board—students with experience of the world enrich a teacher's classes. People with such busy lives who find the energy and commitment to tackle school are admirable. National policy has not really addressed the range of issues involved in adult education. Financial aid was conceived within the context of parents paying for kids. The independent adult was an afterthought. Thus, the scheme to provide finances to adults is a gerrymandered version of what's done for young people. It doesn't make sense. More often than not, people are treated either more or less generously than they should be. Given that technological and demographic changes in society require massive retraining for employment, we need to think harder about the goals of adult education. For example, what is a reasonable way to provide financing for someone who is earning a good income, but wants to go to school and is willing to live on substantially less in order to do so before returning to a full-time income. This is a very different picture from the one presupposed in the current financing system. The current system doesn't really make much sense. If the goals were clearer, we could start to think about some effective mechanisms.

MS. JANE HOOD: — *Executive Director, Nebraska Humanities Council*

I'd like to return to Professor Gutmann's point about the importance of correct data. How frequently do students who drop out return to higher education at a different stage of life?

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PROFESSOR MCPHERSON:

We have some information about that. If you were to extend the period of analysis for graduation at the University of Minnesota from five years to six, seven, or even ten years, you won't see a

very big increase. Many people start college and never finish. We don't have sufficient data to know whether they may have enrolled and graduated elsewhere, but we do know how many people start and how many graduate from the same institution. Within those parameters, we know there is a lot of dropping out. The big question is whether this is very important. If you are concerned about the effectiveness of support for college, you need to determine what effectiveness means. Is getting somebody in the door, in and of itself, success or does something more have to happen? Getting a degree is a quantifiable measure that something has happened to a person's life, but it would be foolish to say that not getting a degree means that the educational effort was a failure. You have to know what a person is trying to accomplish in order to know whether he or she achieved it. It's not adequate to measure effectiveness by the number of graduates, but it's also insufficient to measure effectiveness by the number of entrants.

// Suppose you're a thoughtful policymaker dedicated to deliberation. There's a real problem that arises after you deliberate. How likely is it that your position will be reported to the public in the nuanced way in which it you formulated it? Will only the snappiest thing you said be reported? //

MS. HOOD:

I very much think we have to resist the idea a person who did not complete a degree has failed. He or she may have had a very good reason to drop out.

PROFESSOR MCPHERSON:

Right, there are going to be very good reasons to drop out.

MS. HOOD:

I would think student retention must be higher at a later stage in life?

PROFESSOR MCPHERSON:

Certainly that can be true, but it's also clear there are lots of people for whom that's not the outcome.

MR. PETER COBB: — *Deputy Chief of Staff, Joint Committee on Taxation*

How do you make your deliberative approach work in the context of a legislative system that is increasingly caught up in issues of turf and process rather than focusing on substance or the goals of particular legislative proposals.

PROFESSOR GUTMANN:

The current reality is obviously more complicated than that. You are talking about a trend that is not entirely the responsibility of the legislatures and policymakers. My reference to sound-bite democracy was a considered one. Suppose you're a thoughtful policymaker dedicated to deliberation. There's a real problem that arises after you deliberate. How likely is it that your position will be reported to the public in the nuanced way in which it you formulated it? Will only the snappiest thing you said be reported? Since policymakers are ultimately accountable to the voters, simplified reporting is a serious problem. But politics should be about doing the right thing when others aren't, so I don't want to locate the entire problem outside Congress or the Executive Branch either.

As a political scientist, I see hope for change because the current system doesn't benefit policymakers either. When a policy is too simple, it doesn't work and feeds distrust of government. Two educational policies that have followed quite different developmental tracks are national standards legislation and the California voucher plan. [GOALS 2000 had not yet become law when this seminar was held.] The national standards effort was the product of considerable deliberation. Not only was deliberation built into the process of developing standards with oversight committees and boards, but the process will continue. Accountability has also been built into it. Despite all the internal deliberation, the public remained almost unaware that national standards were in the works or knew what they were. A lot of education is going to be necessary to bring the public along. Still, this legislation is an example of a public policy that received a lot of deliberation.

Now consider the California voucher plan. It's a good example of a plan that would not have emerged out of a thorough deliberative process. If it were passed, \$2 billion would immediately go to subsidize upper middle class families who already send their kids to private schools. The designers had little sense of what it would take to make a choice proposal that satisfied the public aims of education and could be justified to the public. If the plan had been accepted, it would have created chaos. It could never have been sustained. So, you see the problem. It's not insurmountable because it's in the interests of policymakers as well as the public to move in a more deliberative direction. It requires some institutional changes to do this. There is a real overload in Congress and consequently a short-term benefit in not deliberating and devising simple solutions to complex problems.

// We have the most universal educational system of any society...if we err, we err on the side of pressuring everyone to go to college, but there's no other equally open and diverse society in which every child born has or can have as great a chance of attaining a university education. //

PROFESSOR MCPHERSON:

Over the years I've gotten close to various reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act. There are some quite positive things to say about some of those internal deliberative processes. Unfortunately many of the student-aid provisions are semi-technical, making it hard to have a public discussion. But I've found that people in the Department of Education, on the Hill, or at the associations

are remarkably well-informed, public-spirited and understand the ramifications of these conflicts of value. By the time legislation gets to the floor, formulations are a bit cruder and some of the more imaginative parts have disappeared. Still after reviewing legislation of the last twenty years, especially the big choices about where to take these programs, I think policymakers have tended, on the whole, to make the right choices among the options before them. Almost everybody at mid-level career positions would desperately like the process to be better than it is. They really think very hard about issues and know what it would take to make things better. There's a lot of frustration, which may be a force for positive change.

MR. RICHARD JARUE:

— *Counsel, Labor Management Subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee*

The national standards setting process left a lot of people out. At first Congress was not intimately involved. Then opportunity-to-learn standards were added, leading to a lot of conflict. How can the standards setting process get everyone involved? How can it be successful?

PROFESSOR GUTMANN

Well, one way of getting everybody involved is to reiterate deliberation. I don't think you begin by bringing everybody in. That would make beginning almost impossible. I focus on deliberation because the strength of educational policymaking in this country is that, characteristically, it has been very deliberative compared to other realms of policy. It would be ironic if educational policymaking weren't educational; if it eschewed the single most salient educational aspect of political decision-making more generally. Educational policy is extremely decentralized in this country compared to most others. I think we have the greatest educational system in the world from kindergarten up. Of course we have profound problems. To say that our system is great is consistent with the claim that we're in dire need of improvement. We have the most universal educational system of any society, and it may be, if we err, we err on the side of pressuring everyone to go to college, but there's no other equally open and diverse society in which every child born has or can have as great a chance of attaining a university education.

Deliberation that begins behind closed doors is not a priori bad if it gradually opens its doors and is receptive to revising policy on the basis of subsequent deliberations. One needs some consensus to get started. One can then build consensus on consensus. The opportunity-to-learn standards are highly controversial, especially in a time of scarcity. Hard choices are harder when there's scarcity. The states are rightly concerned that the federal government will saddle them with requirements and then say, "Sorry, we don't have the money to help you satisfy them." That's been the legacy of other federal regulations on states, such as education for the handicapped. Unfortunately I don't have a magic wand to bring forth a perfect solution. At least we have a process that, by bringing in the states and reaching a reasonable compromise, moves in the right direction. However we don't have the resources to move there all at once.





SPEAKERS

Amy Gutmann is Laurence S. Rockefeller University Professor and Director of the University Center and the Program in Ethics and Public Affairs. Among her publications are *Democratic Education*, *Liberal Equality*, *Democracy and the Welfare State*, *Ethics and Politics* and articles in journals such as *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, *Political Theory*, and *Ethics*. She serves on the Executive Boards of the Association of Practical and Professional Ethics and the Center for Policy Research in Education, has been Vice President of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy and the Institute of Society, Ethics, and Life Sciences, and has served on the faculty and Board of Directors of the Salzburg Seminar. She has been a Visitor at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and Visiting Professor at Harvard University.

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