EDUCATION FOR ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: A FOCUS ON AND A VISION FOR OKLAHOMA

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Ever since at least the 1770s education has been considered public responsibility. Arguments in favor of and against public education oscillate between social and economic considerations. With a focus on education policy in Oklahoma, I address four of the main economic arguments (which latter dominated in the 20th century) against public education, provide counter arguments, and conclude that a solid public policy in education must be grounded in a balance between social and economic arguments and must benefit from true bipartisan input. Only this will assure that the State of Oklahoma will become the kinder and gentler society that provides good opportunities and a decent standard of living for all.

WHERE WERE WE, WHERE ARE WE, AND WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Few will contest the observation that education is vital to society. American government has embraced responsibility in this area since independence. In 1996, public education absorbed around 425.5 billion dollars (20.2 percent) of general expenditure which makes it the largest item on the budget. With respect to public expenditure on education per level of government, local governments spend more than 292 billion

dollars (68.7 percent) on education and state governments some 25 percent. Finally, local government expenditure on education in the U.S. averages around 36.9 percent of all expenditure, while in Oklahoma this is more than 45 percent (data derived from SA, 1999: Tables 504 and 525). What is subject to differences of opinion is the scope and nature of public education. Throughout American history, taxpayers, politicians, and members of the business community have been reluctant to support public education, basically because the societal effects of good education are very difficult to measure. Each of these groups often focus on the short-term effects of education with measurable outcomes (such as, GPA's, graduation rates, ACT scores, job placement, and so forth). The short-term motive for a strong education system is basically economic and has been advanced by the business community advocating the need for a skilled and educated workforce. Taxpayers, too, generally embrace an economic perspective in the demand for an education that provides young people with a good start in a career. Finally, politicians are almost forced to focus on a short-term perspective, for in their efforts to arrive at an ". . .authoritative allocation of values. . ." they need to justify expenditures for public education versus those for transportation, human services, and so forth. As a consequence, a long-term perspective on public education has been given short shrift, but should not be ignored. In fact, for a variety of reasons a long-term perspective on education policy is more vital to society than many realize.

In this article, I present a long-term and comprehensive vision for education policy in the State of Oklahoma. Emphasizing a long-term perspective is important for reasons that will be outlined in Section Two concerning the background of the development of public education policy in the United States and in Oklahoma. This vision must be comprehensive, which means that education policy should be regarded as an integral element in a wider spectrum of policies (especially including economic and social policy). In Section Three, I will specifically discuss the relation between education and the economy, presenting the arguments of critics of publicly funded education and advancing counter arguments. In Section Four I will present data that testify to the negative image of public education in general, some of the not-so-good rankings of Oklahoma and how these can be interpreted, as well as other facts about Oklahoma that may be cause for concern. These facts will be contrasted to information that provides a more positive picture of

Oklahoma. Americans often compare rankings among states and Oklahoma does not do so well. While these rankings provide an indication of where we are nationally, we should focus more on Oklahoma itself. When we allow national rankings to blind us, we may enter into a race that does not help our state. We should not look only for the weaknesses as they show up in comparison to other states, but should consider our strengths and how we can build upon them. Hence the title of my article: a focus on and vision for Oklahoma. Americans have also frequently looked for "lessons" elsewhere and so I will provide some comparative remarks concerning the importance of public education in other Western countries in Section Five. Again, that more impressionistic comparison is not made to put Oklahoma down, but to provide it with a mirror and help it to recognize its own merits. Finally, in Section Six, a comprehensive and long-term vision for Oklahoma education policy is outlined and advocated.

2. PHASES IN AND MOTIVES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION 1779 - PRESENT

> It was in making education not only common to all, but in some sense compulsory on all, that the destiny of the free republics of America was practically settled. (James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891, in his *Literary Essays, vol.II, 1870-1890: New England Two Centuries Ago*; as quoted in Bartlett 1992)

In this section I first discuss the development of public education in the United States at large then provide an overview of its development in the State of Oklahoma.

In the early beginnings of the American Republic, education was one of those issues that the Founding Fathers regarded as fundamental for both society and government. In his *Bill 79 for More General Diffusion of Knowledge* (1779), Thomas Jefferson regarded public education as an important bulwark against despots (Conant 1962; McKinney and Howard 1998), a motive befitting the revolutionary times. More generally, yet still important, is the notion that public education was regarded as an instrument of assimilation and the means to the formation of an American identity (Schlesinger 1992:17). The American

public school system was ". . .designed to foster learning and to facilitate temporal social justice and pass the culture from generation to generation" (Frederickson 1997:151).

When the lands north of the Ohio River (i.e. the Northwest Territory) were to be surveyed, Jefferson suggested that Congress pass an ordinance in 1785 to apply a system of rectangular survey that established townships of six square miles each. This system still exists and was important to public education because, back then, each 36 square mile area was divided into sections of square miles, hence 64 sections, the 16th and 36th of which were designated for public schools so that no child would have to walk more than three miles to get to school (Magruder 1947). The desire to have schools within walking distance prompted the establishment of many school districts. In 1914 Oklahoma had 5,889 school districts. Given the post-World War II depopulation of the rural areas that number was reduced to 3,300 districts through annexation or consolidation in the 1947-1965 period. Further reforms in the 1990s resulted in 544 school districts in 2000 (Oklahoma Almanac 2001).

Jefferson's main objective, to provide free elementary education for all citizens, would not be achieved during his lifetime. For much of the nineteenth century, in fact, the American taxpayer was only willing to provide elementary education for the very poor (Conant 1962). The Morrill Act of 1862 established a system of higher education where each state could apply for and receive federal funds for the development of so-called land-grant agricultural and mechanical colleges (Conant 1953 and 1962). Finally, the combined effect of population growth and rapid industrialization resulted in a push for educational reform, starting in New England, that, for example, resulted in the State of New York in a free elementary school system for all children (1871) (Conant 1962).

Jefferson also desired to establish free education of a more advanced nature for a select group of lower-income students through the establishment of a series of residential grammar schools. University education would be provided at public expense for those who would benefit from this and were willing and ready to serve in a public career because of such education. It was not until the 1950s that these principles were embraced (Conant 1962). In the course of the twentieth century, the traditional long-term objectives of forging an identity, achieving a sense of social justice, and transmitting culture from one generation to the next, were joined by two relatively new motives, both with a more

short-term focus: public education for a professional public service and for boosting the economy.

From the 1880s on, the public sector embarked on an era of reform that has still not ended. The main object during the Reform Period (1880s-1920s) was to create a less corrupt and more efficient government through a variety of measures. In the field of personnel management this resulted in the Pendleton Act of 1883 which provided the foundations for a merit-based, instead of patronage, civil service. In the field of local government the reform movement prompted the establishment of a council-manager form of government from the early twentieth century on. Several research bureaus were created at local and state levels and were aimed at providing state and local governments with data upon which policy could be developed. At the federal level a variety of reforms was aimed at strengthening the executive branch. All of these reforms in the practice of government called for the establishment of public administration and political science programs in higher education. From the Great Depression on, government at large assumed ever increasing responsibilities for the well-being and welfare of the nation. In the words of a former Harvard University president the ". . .practice of government is so important and so complex, [that] the country badly needs able, well-trained public officials"(Bok 1990). This was true in the 1930s and it is even more true today. In a landmark study, originally published more than three decades ago, Mosher observed:

> As in our culture in the past and in a good many other civilizations, the nature and quality of the public service depends principally upon the system of education. Almost all of our future administrators will be college graduates, and within two or three decades a majority of them will probably have graduate degrees. Rising proportions of public administrators are returning to graduate schools for refresher courses, mid-career training, and higher degrees (1982).

From the 1960s onward universities expanded or created schools of public administration and public policy (Bok 1990). In addition to full-time curricula, these institutions have increasingly also developed programs for mid-career professionals in the civil and military services. The College of Continuing Education at the University of Oklahoma is nationally prominent in the provision of Advanced Programs for these

categories of students. Obviously, a highly trained professional public service is an objective with long-term ramifications, but the immediate emphasis is on a public service that is responsive to public demand, which is a more short-term motive by nature. Not everyone, however, is convinced of the need for a highly educated public workforce as is illustrated by the following observation:

> A vision of higher education that promotes the forging of views of students in the foundries of the state, the crafting of a cadre of highly trained workers to execute the designs of government agents, and the fusing of minds to missions of national purpose is precisely the ethic many Americans have fought against and died to prevent when governments, fascist and socialist alike, have imposed it on their own people (Sommer 1995).

The motives of old, identity, social justice, and culture, were integrated into the liberal perspective on educational reform that dominated the debate in the 1930s and the 1960s-1970s and that

> . . .argued for [a] well-rounded and more balanced reform of education rather than a narrow emphasis on the basics. Liberal reformers[. . .]did not promote a narrow technical or vocational education programs [sic] but stressed the importance of literacy and computation skills and sought to socialize youth more effectively... (Martin 1991:351).

From the beginning of statehood, Oklahoma politicians tried to make education (especially higher education) accessible to all "sons and daughters of ordinary people" (Morgan et al. 1991:12). However, in the words of Paul Sharp, former president of the University of Oklahoma (OU), "The commitment to academic life is basically not part of our culture" (Morgan et al. 1991:13). Although Oklahomans in general regard public education as important, student performance in elementary, high school and college institutions persistently ranks low compared to the national figures (see also Section Four). Oklahoma has focused more on developing and funding a vo-tech system, which is among the best in the nation (Morgan et al. 1991).

Of the various reforms in Oklahoma public education I would like to mention three. Upon his vision for economic modernization the oilman

and governor Robert S. Kerr (1943-1947) in 1944 obtained popular approval for a constitutional amendment creating a board of regents for OU and for A&M colleges (nowadays, OSU) (Morgan 1991). Shortly thereafter, desegregation of public schools entered the public arena. The Jim Crow Code, introduced in Senate Bill 1 in 1907, had provided for segregation of blacks and whites in education, as well as in public transport and public facilities. The atmosphere of the day is perhaps best captured in H.L. Mencken's observation that:

> . . .the Negro, no matter how much he is educated, must remain, as a race, in a condition of subservience; that he must remain the inferior of the stronger and more intelligent white man so long as he retains racial differentiation. Therefore, the effort to educate him has awakened in his mind ambitions and aspirations which, in the very nature of things, must go unrealized, and so, while gaining nothing whatever materially, he has lost all his old contentment, peace of mind and happiness. Indeed, it is a commonplace of observation in the United States that the educated and refined Negro is invariably a hopeless, melancholy, embittered and despairing man (Wills 1999:274-275).

Indeed, the times have changed significantly! Two United States Supreme Court decisions (*Sipuel v. University of Oklahoma* 1948; and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* 1950) forced desegregation of higher education in the state. In its landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declared "separate but equal" common schools unconstitutional. Quickly Governor Raymond Gary (1954-1958), who acted upon his strong belief that all were created equal, actively supported statewide desegregation threatening to withhold public funding for those who did not comply (Morgan 1991). Finally, the reforms initiated by Governor Henry Bellmon (1987-1991) helped establish a new foundation for public education through House Bill 1017 (1990). This bill promoted a significant decrease of class size, increase in teacher pay, and further consolidation of school districts to be funded in part by a tax increase of more than $300 million. These three examples essentially illustrate that public education reform in Oklahoma was driven, at least in part, by liberal motives. Both in the United States and in Oklahoma, however, the economic motive did not take a backseat in the twentieth century.

To the contrary, economic motives against public education dominated during the 1920s, the 1940s and 50s, and the 1980s and 90s.

3. SCHOLARS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND ECONOMY

> . . .perhaps, the richer the nation, the more apparent is this inability of its average inhabitant to survive unaided and alone (Heilbroner 1962:8).

A more visible short-term motive is the argument that education serves a healthy economy under the general assumption that the development of human capital through education lowers the cost (for on-the-job training) and enhances the quality of labor. At first glance this statement appears unproblematic, but there is serious disagreement about the focus of education (training for skills versus liberal education) and on the question of whether education should be privately or publicly funded and organized. I first examine four economic arguments against public funding of (higher) education and provide arguments in support of public funding for each.

Initially, economic arguments in favor of publicly funded education, especially higher education, rested upon the assumption that it would benefit society and democracy at large, for instance in the belief that public education would reduce crime (West 1994). Economists also believed that economic development proceeded in direct proportion to the level of educational achievement (Gabbard 2000). Economic arguments against public funding can be categorized into four different but related groups.

ARGUMENT GROUP ONE: EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY ARE NOT LINKED

This first group challenges the basic argument that education and the economy are directly linked. This was a strong belief, however, as illustrated by the following:

> In the first part of this century, we [i.e. The United States; CH) adopted the principle of mass-producing low-quality education to create a low-skilled workforce for mass-production industry. Building on this principle, our education and business systems became very tightly linked, evolving into a single system that brilliantly capitalized our advantages and enabled us to create the most powerful economy... (Marshall and Tucker 1992).

Together with the Second World War, this powerful link also is paraded as the major cause for the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Critics, though, point to the fact that many in the postwar workforce had never graduated from high school yet they created the economic prosperity of the 1950s. That this was made possible by a lack of serious global competition is not considered. Critics also denounce the claim that education provides greater opportunities for U.S. citizens and point out that many U.S. based corporations have relocated jobs to lesser developed countries with lower wages. Also, they argue, government heavily subsidized the development of high-tech and labor-saving technology, so that public funding creates rather than cures economic insecurity for people (Gabbard 2000).

I suggest, however, that business and industry need a different kind of labor force; one that is not only educated with particular job skills, but also with the attitudinal and behavioral skills that foster life-long learning and flexibility. Education is needed to provide *everyone* with the skills with which they can compete in the market place. I emphasize "everyone" because government has a moral obligation to support equality of opportunity (see also Argument Four).

ARGUMENT GROUP TWO: AMERICA'S COMPETITIVENESS JEOPARDIZED BY PUBLIC EDUCATION

America's economic productivity and dominant position in the global market has been threatened, so this second group of arguments runs, by declining educational test scores, standards, and discipline. Conservative critics of the educational reforms of the 1960s and 70s point out that these reforms resulted in the deterioration of American competitiveness in the global market. In the early 1980s conservatives cried for a better

fit between training in school and the needs of business and industry (Martin 1991). Many leaders in corporate America criticized the declining vocational utility of formal degrees, and urged higher education to be more applied and relevant to their needs (Lindenstein 1995). Indeed, it has been suggested that, in comparison to other countries such as Germany, Japan, Singapore, and Sweden ". . .the vast majority of American employers do not want more than eighth-grade level skills in the people they hire for their front-line work force" (Marshall and Tucker 1992:xviii). This last observation suggests, however, that the labor force has not changed as much since WWII as some have argued.

The real issue with this type of argument, though, is not the quality of those who enter the labor market, but the division of labor between public education and employers. In many European countries and in Japan, the function of education, and certainly university education, is believed to be one of screening, selection, and general preparation of talented people, while real training and job skills are considered the responsibility of the employer (Lindenstein 1995). In the U.S., however, the private sector believes that job training is the responsibility of (public) education. This viewpoint has been advanced, for instance, in a 1985 report (*Investment in Our Children*) published by the Committee for Economic Development: education should improve, among other things, behavioral attitudes to work, and business should be active in schools, but should not be responsible for financing them (Martin 1991). Thus, one could easily reason that American business and industry has, since the early twentieth century, been highly successful in off-loading to (public) education the responsibility and thus the cost for relevant job-training. Somehow it does not seem quite right that business should complain about quality. After all, (public) education must serve a larger set of objectives and should combine liberal arts learning and leadership skills with education for workplace and professional practice (Lindenstein 1995). Obviously, the critique that education hardly prepares students for a job is leveled against the general nature of a one-size-fits all elementary, middle school, and high school education as well as to the majority of the social studies and humanities in higher education. Apparently only professional education, as offered in, for instance, vo-techs, but also by law schools, medical schools, engineering programs, and so forth, meets what private business wants. Once again, as I said above, industry-supplied training programs in formal education would

only address specialized areas, and would disregard the interdisciplinary education that allows students to develop the critical thinking skills and flexibility needed in the market place of the future.

ARGUMENT GROUP THREE: PUBLIC EDUCATION IS DOMINATED BY SECTIONAL RATHER THAN GENERAL INTERESTS

A third group of economic arguments contends that the public sector fails to provide adequate education because educational policy is dominated by sectional interests, because education is monopolized by the public sector, and because public education leads to bureaucratization.

This argument, first, attacks the assumption of some externality advocates (i.e. that *public* education has beneficial external effects) that in a democracy the preferences of an undifferentiated electorate are respected. However, the critics say, the electorate is not undifferentiated. Rather it is segmented into a variety of special interest groups. These can be called the "supply interests" and they, rather than the general public, dominate education policy. These interest groups include members of the organized teaching profession, of the education bureaucracies, elected public officeholders, and politically articulate student groups. This asymmetry between the political power of the general public and the special interests is illustrated by the fact that the latter have successfully persuaded government to avoid vouchers (West 1994 and 1995). Indeed, the education lobby in Oklahoma is consistently perceived as very strong and influential (Morgan et al. 1991). Interest group pressure, however, is only one of the reasons why the public sector allegedly fails in the eyes of its critics.

These critics also argue that the increase of federal funding since the 1970s gave public education a virtual monopoly in (higher) education. Private schools cannot compete because of higher tuition and fewer subsidies available to students. Hence, public schools crowd out the private schools. An additional problem is that public funding is directly linked to enrollments, and so university administrators divert resources away from instruction and toward enrollments. The results: larger classes, lower admission standards, and less class room preparation by instructors (West 1995). While critics may point to a lack of empirical data supporting

the link between education and decrease of crime, or the link between education and the economy, I would like to point out that there is no evidence of larger classes, lower admission standards, and less classroom preparation. Obviously, I can only speak for Oklahoma, but from elementary up to higher education the trend since the early 1990s has been to decrease classroom size, to increase (for higher education) admission standards (as, for instance, OU has done in the past several years), and to rigorously evaluate class-room performance. As for the disadvantaged private schools, I can only say that these are generally much better endowed than public universities. To suggest that they cannot compete with public universities is a gross distortion of the truth. Their large endowments not only serve to pay higher salaries to faculty, but are also used to support promising, including economically disadvantaged, students.

A final reason why public universities are presumed to fail is because, like any other bureaucracy, they are most interested in expanding their own budgets and enhancing the welfare of administrators and others on the supply side (West 1995). This argument is reminiscent of the theories about self-aggrandizing bureaucracies and budget maximization advanced by Anthony Downs (1967) and William Niskanen (1971 and 1973). That, thus far, scholars have been unable to support this theory with empirical evidence is apparently lost on the critics of public education. Furthermore, do I really have to point out that public education cannot grow upon special supply side demands as long as it depends on the general supply of funds extracted from the taxed citizen?

ARGUMENT GROUP FOUR: PUBLIC COST OF EDUCATION IS NOT MATCHED BY DEMONSTRATED BENEFIT

Another problem that critics discuss, the fourth group of arguments, is that public funding has resulted in the attraction of less qualified students (Sommer 1995). Given the strength of the idea that responsibility for social equity rests with government, so it is argued, public funding fosters a dumbing-down of education because its institutions attract less qualified people. Why? Because in its zeal to provide equal opportunity for all, and especially for lower income groups, public education pursues emancipatory rather than instructional objectives. The entry of under-

qualified students results in "dead weight" and thus leads to tax loss (West 1995). In other words, the cost of public education is not matched by its social and individual benefit. Furthermore, public education fails, because of ". . .the fact that most higher education students are middle class and would receive higher education anyway, even in the absence of government intervention" while poorer families get the worst K-12 education anyway (West 1995:164-165).

Obviously there is some truth to this group of arguments. Public education policy has long tried to increase the accessibility of education for lower income groups and, indeed, young students from disadvantaged and/or poorer families have some catching up to do, for instance, in the command of language which is the major vehicle for the transmission of knowledge. Government has been helpful, but should the fact that it does not "pay off" in the shorter term be a reason for government to abandon public education? Who else would take the responsibility for educating all? I agree with Martin who argued that, while conservatives hammer upon the anvil of excellence, they really talk about a new managerial and technocratic elite whose existence will further reinforce inequalities (Martin 1991). It is sad but true that K-12 education throughout the U.S.A. is not as well provided for in poorer and more rural communities. Oklahoma is no different, and the gap between finances available per student in the richer versus the poorer districts is large (Morgan 1991). Whether it is too large, can only be decided in a democracy by politics and not by rational and "objective" cost-benefit analysis (Neiman 2000). Arguments supporting public education concern the U.S.A. as well as the world at large. In his 1995 chapter, West merely presented the same argument as 30 years before in his book-length study (here the third edition of 1994 is referenced), and confidently ignored empirical studies, published in response to his study, that have shown how in both developed and lesser developed countries the social and private benefits of formal education at all levels are positive. Formal education is a source of economic growth and individual improvement (Blaug 1970). Some scholars have even changed their minds. In the early 1970s Spring advocated that public schools ought to be abolished because only then the freedom of thought, required for the exercise of democratic power, could be developed (Spring 1972). Recently, though, he distanced himself from that conviction and argued that the abolishment of public education would leave a large part of the world (including

parts of the U.S.A.) in a state of abject poverty and open to exploitation by private corporations. Furthermore, he now strongly believes that education should include programs in human rights and in the exercise of democratic power, and that an education focused too much on the job market reduces citizens to consumers at best and to a mere commodity at worst (Spring 1998).

This last observation leads me to the conclusion of this section. In the above I have outlined four groups of economic arguments against public education. While presenting different emphases and viewpoints, they ultimately are founded on the assumption that labor is a measurable commodity and thus, by extension, ". . .education is only valuable to the extent that it services an economic imperative" (Gabbard 2000:xi). In the economized world view embraced by Gabbard "people have value only to the extent that they are useful and necessary to the market and the future goals of its directors. Those without such value are simply expendable" (2000:xxiii). I will not dispute the validity of the economic argument against public education for solid public policy can only be made when conflicting viewpoints are taken into consideration. I do, however, strongly object to grounding public education policy on economic arguments only. The issue that public education not only serves the market but also civilization will be further addressed in Section Six.

4. OKLAHOMA: BETWEEN IMAGE AND FACT INTO THE FUTURE

Ever since the 1930s Oklahoma has suffered the image of being a poor state that people want to leave. The vivid image of a Dust Bowl presented by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* has stuck. Since then, much has changed, and for the better. However, there is still much work to do. In this section I present some facts about Oklahoma's economy, education, government, and society. Some of these are cause for concern, others imply that there is hope for the future.

Traditionally, Oklahoma's economy depended on agriculture and oil. In the past two decades the economy has become more diversified. However, the attraction of new business and efforts to keep business from relocating remain a challenge. What bodes well for Oklahoma's future as a state attractive to business is its comparatively low state and

local tax levels and its low cost of living. Also, unemployment is relatively low. Economic indicators for Oklahoma are good. The cost of living is at 91.3 percent of the national average. Unemployment in December 2000 was at 2.7 percent, while the national average was 4 percent. Per capita personal income increased in the 1994-1999 period with more than $4,000 to on average of $22,953 although the gap with the national average has widened.

With respect to education, Oklahoma does not compare well to many other states. In a recent survey by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Oklahoma's report card leaves much to be desired. In terms of preparation, the state scores very well in reading and writing, but very low in 8th grade enrollments in algebra. Also, a small number of high school students take upper-level math and science classes, and 11th and 12th graders do not score well on Advanced Placement testing. The overall grade for preparation was a D+. The state scores only slightly better for participation (of high school students going to college, and of young adults and working-age adults in college) (C), completion (the number of full-time college students that earn a BA in five years) (C-), and benefits (low number of college graduates, low numbers in high-level literacy) (C-). The state scores much better on affordability (share of family income required to attend the two- and four-year colleges) (B-) (National Center 2001). Another concern is the fact that teacher's salaries are low in comparison within the region. The challenge is to train good teachers, which Oklahoma does, and then retain them. On the plus side, test scores in the state have substantially increased in the past decade, per capita funding for education at large has increased (Governing 2001) and successful efforts have been made at making salaries more competitive. I should also mention current efforts to improve the availability of computer networks in elementary and secondary schools made possible with grants from the Pew Charitable Trust and the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation, matched with state funding.

The performance of Oklahoma's government is also rated as below the national average. In a large-scale study conducted by *Governing* magazine and The Maxwell School at Syracuse University, Oklahoma received a C on its report card for 1999 and 2001. The state's performance in terms of financial management, though, dropped between 1999-2001 from B- to C+ basically for lack of long-term planning. On the other hand, the grade for information technology improved from C-

to B- because of the installation of a network system that connects Oklahoma's state agencies to one another (GPP 1999 and 2001).

As a society Oklahoma's culture is defined by its strong ties to the land, to religion and a strong appreciation for individualism. Also, the state is clearly divided between sparsely populated rural areas and the high-density population in the urban corridor stretching from Tulsa to Oklahoma City, Norman, and Lawton. All this is reflected in its political culture that is characterized by support for limited government intervention, a toleration of political corruption, and ambivalence about the role of public sector bureaucracies (Morgan et al. 1991). Oklahoma government faces two major challenges. The first is to help decrease Oklahoma's high teenage pregnancy rates (37 out of 1,000 females in Oklahoma, while 32 is the national average). Also, Oklahoma spends large amounts of money on its prison system. Incarceration rates in the state during the 1978-1998 period have increased more sharply than in the U.S. at large. Oklahoma ranks third among the states, and first for the number of imprisoned women. The U.S.A., in fact, leads the world in locking up people. Given the needs for better health care, education and infrastructure, Oklahoma could and should become a leader among the states in transferring financial resources away from incarceration. This requires that its citizenry and its political representatives emphasize prevention and rehabilitation over retribution and punishment, especially for relatively minor and first-time offenses (e.g., drug abuse, stealing) for which people are now put in prison. A policy of rehabilitation creates hope instead of bitterness; we should not alienate those people from society who stand a good chance of again becoming productive neighbors and citizens.

5. SOME COMPARATIVE NOTES: THE QUALITY OF CIVILIZATION THROUGH BIPARTISANSHIP

> Consensus democracies demonstrate [. . .] kinder and gentler qualities in the following ways: they are more likely to be welfare states; they have a better record with regard to the protection of the environment; they put fewer people in prison and are less likely to use the death penalty. . . (Lijphart 1999:275).

Americans are rightfully proud of their system of government that provides the checks and balances preventing any one public body or individual from dominating public policy. A system initially designed as a bulwark against despots, American democracy became majoritarian which means that the political party (and its representatives) winning the election control the legislature, the executive, and (through appointments) the judiciary. A mistaken belief about majoritarian governments is that they is better at governing for they do not have to negotiate continuously between parties, as is the case in the so-called consensus democracies of continental Europe. In a recent study by the internationally renowned political scientist Arend Lijphart (UC, San Diego) the claim that majoritarian governments are better at governing was proven wrong. In his empirical study, backed by many statistically analyzed data, he finds that consensus democracies are better in terms of political equality, better with regard to female representation, enjoy higher levels of voting during elections, and manage to establish a better fit between the electorate's preferences and government policy (Lijphart 1999).

Lijphart hypothesized that the "kinder and gentler qualities" of consensus democracies become manifest in more generous policies for, for instance, social welfare and criminal justice. I will briefly discuss each of these two and will add a third, tax policy. To what degree do welfare policies, with regard to unemployment, disability, illness, and old age, permit people to maintain a decent living standard independent of pure market forces? In reference to an earlier landmark study, Lijphart showed that the United States scores the lowest on welfare policies among eighteen OECD countries and social expenditure was second to lowest (after Japan) with 15 percent of the gross domestic product (Esping-Andersen 1990; Lijphart 1999). Consensus democracies are also less punitive than their majoritarian counterparts. It should shock Americans that its figure of 560 prisoners per 100,000 people is almost four times higher than that of the next most punitive country (New Zealand with 131 prisoners per 100,000) (Lijphart 1999). It is no less then tragic that America stands out in this respect, especially when it is relatively simple to correct this.

A third area of concern, and one that is not discussed by Lijphart, is taxation policy as an indicator of the quality of democracy. While in general state and local taxes in Oklahoma are fairly low in comparison

to many other states, we should examine who carries the greatest burden. Morgan mentions how economists have ". . .long recognized that the principal sources of state revenue—sales and excise taxes particularly—are regressive in their impact" (Morgan 1991:158). In Oklahoma both these indirect taxes in 1987 took six times as much from poor families as from the rich. Poor families spend 7.6 percent of their income on taxes (sixth highest in the nation) and taxes on food products took some 20 times more as a percentage from the poor than from the rich. It has been suggested that some or even all of these food taxes should be abolished and the lost revenue made up for by taxes upon luxury products. Throughout the 1980s (Morgan 1991) and the 1990s Oklahoma legislators and citizens have supported tax increases that reflect longer-term concerns. This is a good sign. We must remain alert, though, especially in a time that the executive in federal government pursues across-the-board cuts in income taxes. By tradition, these are more despised than indirect taxes yet they are also less regressive in their impact upon lower income families. In his concern for the tax cut proposed by president Bush, and since successfully implemented, Morgan wrote:

> This is not the American dream, where the affluent become ever more wealthy and the average working stiff struggles to make ends meet. Growing disparities between rich and poor erode the social fabric of democratic societies (Morgan 2001).

The keywords in this observation are "the American dream" and the "social fabric." In reference to the idealism that motivated the Founding Fathers and that attracted millions of immigrants to the United States, the American dream must be one for all citizens. Indeed, the social fabric of society erodes when we allow a distinction between first- and second-class citizens, when we allow further growth of the gap between the rich and the poor. It is not government's business to abolish economic inequalities, which is the communist ideal (and, as we know, never achieved). Instead, the objective that government policies should pursue is to guarantee a minimum standard-of-living for those who cannot or can no longer care for themselves, including the physically and mentally handicapped, the elderly, the orphans, teenage mothers and single-parent families, and the unemployed to the extent that the latter can not help becoming unemployed and clearly show a willingness

to work. The objective of government in a democratic society is to enhance civility and the quality of civilization.

I do believe in the American system of government. The structure designed by the Founding Fathers has served well and has so far proved flexible enough to address challenges as they emerged. However, would it be possible to improve government performance in such areas as outlined above without overhauling the structure of government? I believe it is possible, and all it requires is a bipartisan commitment. In their efforts to arrive at an ". . .authoritative allocation of values. . ." politicians should not only decide along party lines and on the basis of their electoral support but also be guided by what society at large needs and desires. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with the winner-takes-all system, but if it results in one-sided policy making and the disenfranchisement of the (usually large) minority, government risks losing its legitimacy. Government should not only govern for the winning majority, but for the general public. To secure that, elected officials not only have the responsibility to be true to their election campaign promises but should, once in office, also consider sensible viewpoints from the opposition.

6. A COMPREHENSIVE VISION FOR OKLAHOMA'S EDUCATION AND ECONOMY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

> When I pay taxes, I buy civilization (Chief Justice Holmes, as quoted in Gaus, 1947:19).

The remark by Chief Justice Holmes is one that, unfortunately, is more timely today than in his own time. Too often, citizens, industrialists, and politicians focus on the shorter-term benefit of taxation for themselves rather than the longer-term investment in society. A civilization needs constant nurturing and to be civilized requires that, from time to time, we are able to transcend our—however understandable and justified —self-interest and contribute with our time and money to the well-being of the collective. Education lies at the heart of our civilization, and is indeed an important foundation for its future. In addition to family and church, it is the most important institution for the socialization of young people into society. Education serves at least two different constituencies.

First, education prepares young people for life, in terms of general education, behavioral skills and attitudes, and also provides specific and useful knowledge. When it can be guaranteed that educational institutions offer a broad curriculum, it does not really matter whether they are organized in a public or private sector context. This guarantee is met as far as higher education is concerned. In terms of research and teaching, private universities are no better or no worse than public universities. This guarantee is also met in elementary education and high school education, since public and private schools alike have to offer a basic curriculum, and beyond that can choose what to offer. The guarantee is not necessarily met in vo-tech institutions. Those organized on a private basis may tailor their curriculum more to employer needs and thus limit the general development of its matriculants. In light of remarks made in Section Three, I believe we should develop a clear division of labor between education and employers. It is the task of education to prepare youth for life's challenges through interdisciplinary education; it is the task of employers to provide real training and job skills. Industry should not deny that responsibility and saddle the taxpayer with public funding for specific private sector job skills.

Second, education should provide opportunities for members of the workforce to further educate themselves. Indeed, second-chance education has become an enormously important and popular endeavor. However, we need to keep in mind that,

> Here more than anywhere else, those who do not have and are not on their way to getting a baccalaureate degree—more than 70 percent of the population—are held in low regard, have little claim on the nation's goods and services, and are in no position to make the contribution at work of which they are capable (Marshall and Tucker 1992).

A society can only have so many college graduates. It is vital to counter the trend that the lesser educated become second-class citizens, both in the eyes of the educated as well as in their own eyes. As Americans we must remember that we are all equal before the law. Obviously, we are not equal in terms of capabilities, and government policy is not meant to eradicate inequalities between people. However, we should strive for a society where all are appreciated for the

contribution they can make, and where all have the chance to advance their intellectual and manual skills.

In my view, education plays an important role in the development and maintenance of a civilized society. Critics of public education implicitly or explicitly argue that it is just another example of "big government" crowding out private effort. We should, however, consider those who are most affected by this anti-government sentiment so characteristic of Americans:

> The real victims are the millions of poor or shelterless or medically indigent who have been told, over the years, that they must lack care or life support in the name of their own freedom. Better for them to starve than to be enslaved by "big government." That is the real cost of our anti-government values (Wills 1999:21).

Given the importance of education for individual and society, I support publicly funded education. A good education is in the interest of all taxpayers. Where critics say that there is no proof that education actually contributes to the solution of social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, crime, drugs, disintegration of families, teenage pregnancy, and so forth, they fail to provide proof that the education in a private setting will actually contribute more or better to society. Of course, they can always say that thus far private education cannot, because public education holds a virtual monopoly. However, I agree with Bok that there is little that education can do to *directly* solve social problems and related misfortunes (Bok 1990). The importance of education, in a private or a public setting, lies in what it can *indirectly* do for society: help in the development of a strong sense of personal responsibility, a sense of community, and a sense of citizenship. In other words, in developing a loyalty to those people (family, friends, neighbors, colleagues) and institutions (in business, industry, and government; but also in churches, sports clubs, professional associations, etc.) that together compose and create the society in which we live. We can only expect, though, loyalty from the individual citizen if each recognizes that government is loyal to them. This requires a pro-active education policy and takes courage, especially in an age where, to quote another Bellmon lecturer:

> Using the power of government to redistribute income from one class of persons to another in an open manner no longer seems politically feasible in the United States (Meier 2001:21).

In a footnote to this remark, Meier explains that "Redistribution is still possible through subsidies and tax credits; see the 1997 balanced budget legislation. What appears to be unacceptable is redistributing income from haves to have nots" (Meier 2001:35). In addition, I would like to remark that elected and appointed officeholders have a responsibility to serve the general public, even if some of its measures are less popular in the eyes of parts of the electorate.

Education policy will fail to meet these objectives (developing personal responsibility, sense of community and citizenship, and so forth) if not matched with policies aimed at, for instance, reducing teenage pregnancies and jail time, and increasing Oklahoma's attraction to and accessibility for business and industry (through, for instance, tax breaks and infrastructural investments). Perhaps it is an abstract vision, but for Oklahoma to become a better and more caring society, we need to pursue policies in a variety of areas. If isolated, any policy is doomed to failure. This article is not the right place to present a detailed plan for Oklahoma's future, although some of its elements have been suggested throughout the text. The most important message is that, if anything, a plan for Oklahoma's future must be comprehensive and developed in a bipartisan setting. Perhaps a special commission to develop such a plan would be the best investment into our own future, and education is a foundational element for any such plan.

Note: This article is an expanded version of the third annual Henry Bellmon Lecture in Public Policy, delivered by the author on February 22, 2001 at the University of Oklahoma, under the title: The Link Between Education and Economic Development.

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