2004 Annual Conference

"The Best of .... Creating Effective Public Policy"

Over 100 participants from the public, private and nonprofit sectors came together to deliberate on what makes for effective public policymaking at the 2d Annual Public Policy Center Conference which took place Friday, May 14th at the East West Center.

Co-chairs Les Ihara and Dolores Foley observed that "the public policy community gathered was the most diverse we've seen in a long time" and contributed to lively conversations and heightened interest in how policy making is conducted and in what practices lead to effective policy outcomes.

After a panel shared some of the "ingredients" that made for effective policymaking in two programs---needle exchange and prescription drugs--participants deliberated further on necessary ingredients for effective policy making. Over 25 "best practices" were added to the list of "starter ingredients" which included: Transparent, Inclusive, Context, Thorough Research, Deliberative, Planning Accountability, Leadership. Further refinement of these ideas will be determined at our follow-up meeting on July 26 at the State Capitol.

David Matthews, a national and international spokesperson for deliberative democracy, challenged us to "put the 'public' back into the public's business" in our conference's keynote address, "Six Practices of Democracy."

Maximum involvement and creativity in a marketplace atmosphere--open space technology--got conference participants engaged. They deliberated on "Hawaii's most pressing policies that we must act on NOW." Twelve "open space" groups addressed issues they were most passionate about and were willing to take responsibility for resolving. These were:

1. Job Development for Family Sufficiency
2. Overpopulation
3. Clean Elections
4. Affordable Housing
5. Youth Inclusion/Engagement
6. War in Iraq
7. Public School System Reform
8. Get Off Oil

9. Vision for Hawaii
10. Health Care Reform
11. Long Term Care and Financing
12. Citizen Participation and Influence on Public Policy.

Each group examined these issues and reported on their highest hopes, what's needed to achieve the vision, specified action plans, and next steps to get closer to the vision.
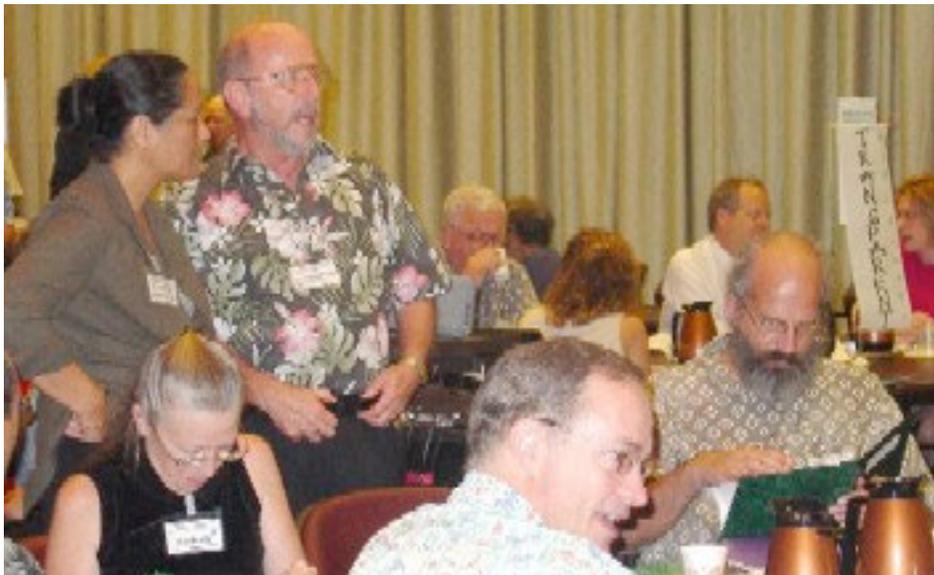
About the Keynote Speaker:

Dr. David Matthews, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Kettering Foundation, was the keynote speaker at the Second Annual Public Policy Conference and gave an address entitled, "The Six Practices of Democracy."   Dr. Matthews also addressed the 2004 UH Manoa graduating class at the 2004 Spring Commencement.

The Kettering Foundation is an institution rooted in the American tradition of inventive and practical research.   It is named after inventor Charles F. Kettering, holder of over 200 patents including the invention of the electric automobile self-starter. The central question behind the foundation's research is: "What does it take to make democracy work as it should?" Kettering researchers seek ways to make fundamental changes in how democratic politics are practiced.

Dr. Matthews graduated from the University of Alabama with an A.B. degree in history and classical Greek in 1958. He received a master's degree in education from the University in 1959 and his doctoral degree in history of American education from Columbia University in 1965.

In addition, he has received numerous awards including a citation as one of the Ten Most Outstanding Young Men in the nation (1969); the Nicholas Murray Butler Medal in Silver from Columbia University (1976); Educator of the Year from the Alabama Conference of Black Mayors (1977); and the "Brotherhood Award" from the National Conference of Christians and Jews (1979).   He is the recipient of 16 honorary degrees.

Six Democratic Practices

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Kettering Foundation research has a central focus: identifying the practices that enable

people to govern themselves. Faced with the challenge to clarify the implications of its findings,

the foundation staff has begun to emphasize the dynamic rather than the static character of "the

public."[1] Under the Constitution, the public replaced the monarchy as the sovereign, supreme

power in our political system. And sovereignty is characterized by actions: holding sway, ruling,

deciding, judging — all the functions that make up reigning. Seen from this perspective, "the

public" is far more than a group of key stakeholders, an aggregation of interest groups, or a body

of voters. It is certainly more than an audience merely "sitting" or a market to be enticed. One

way to put the distinction is to point out that the public is more like electricity than a light bulb.

As the sovereign in a self-governing country, the public is defined by doing the things that a ruler

must do — primarily making decisions and then acting accordingly. Carrying on these activities

or defining practices makes individuals into public citizens; doing them forms the public.

The basis on which people interact is telling. Shoppers at a mall aren't very connected at all.

Each person or family acts independently. The public, in the sense we mean it, isn't at the mall.

On the other hand, people who come out on Saturday with rakes and shovels because they

decided to clean up a neighborhood eyesore are at least the public in an embryonic form. The

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[1] Cole Campbell advocated making this distinction in the Kettering staff meetings.

objective of their interaction with one another is to promote their collective weal more than their individual well-being.

The public as our sovereign exists in the exercise of its sovereign powers. Consider the implications of this view of the public for engagement. What has to be engaged is not so much a body of people (parents, business leaders, voters) as the interactions among citizens that are required for them to rule themselves. You might also call these interactions the "civic practices" that make up public work.

Public Making

If we can't depend entirely on civic saints who are selflessly committed to the common good and have to rely on ordinary mortals, what transforms a collection of ordinary folk into public citizens? The key may be in the way communities go about the everyday business of living together: identifying problems, deciding what to do about them, making commitments of our time and resources, acting, and then evaluating what has been accomplished. In order for these activities to become public, communities don't have to do anything outside the ordinary — they just have to do the ordinary in a different way. If these routine activities are open to people so that they are engaged by the practices, then the public begins to take shape. The capacity of citizens to deal with their problems increases, public work gets done and, in the process, public relationships form. Yet in order for people to be engaged by the practices, more has to happen than announcing they are available to anyone who wants to participate. Here is what helps put the public back into the public's business.

1. Naming Problems in Terms of What Is Most Valuable to Citizens

In the first place, people won't engage in public work unless they see what is deeply important to them reflected in the way problems are described. The name a problem is given must connect with people's deepest concerns. In other words, people have to see that community problems are described in ways that reflect their experiences. At the optimum, citizens have to name their problems in their own terms. Officeholders and professionals (not surprisingly) name problems in terms that mirror their experiences and favored solutions. For example, law enforcement officers may describe drug abuse as the consequence of illegal substances coming into the country. Social service professionals may describe the same problem as the result of inadequate counseling. Problems are also named by ideologues who realize that if they can dictate the label a problem is given, then they will gain a powerful political advantage. Whatever the cause, the net effect is that citizens may not see their concerns reflected in the way problems are described, so they back away. Professional solutions may leave little for them to do, and partisan battles threaten to draw them into conflicts that they consider counterproductive.

Naming problems isn't an uncommon activity; problems are given names by someone every day in every community. Typically, no one thinks much about it. The mayor says the town council has to deal with "x." The newspaper reports that the community is threatened by "y." But if this seemingly innocuous act is recognized as politically potent and the naming is open to the citizenry, then the results can be quite revealing. Ask people what they think is most important to the well-being of their community, and you may get a sense of their deeper motivations. Scholars have discovered that these collective imperatives, such as the need to be treated fairly or to be safe from danger, are like the basic personal needs or motivations that Abraham Maslow found

common to all human beings.[2] For instance, Kettering observed a community a few years ago that was suffering from corruption in high places and egregious crimes on the streets. When citizens asked themselves what they valued most, virtually all said that, more than anything, they wanted to live in a place that made them proud. Their response revealed an intangible imperative rarely mentioned in planning documents or lists of goals. Yet, that sentiment was so powerful and pervasive that to ignore it would have been a tragic omission.

Naming a problem in public terms is not the same as describing it in everyday language. It is identifying the things that people consider most essential to their collective future — the ends for which they live and the means necessary for achieving those ends. Being secure from danger and being treated fairly are among the most common of these collective motives.

Naming problems both in public terms and in public enables people to see problems in ways that reflect not only their own concerns but also the concerns of others. That builds a sense of appreciation for the connections between interests, and it is the first step in citizens taking responsibility for what happens to them as a community. Naming problems in public terms can set off a chain reaction. Recognizing the political implications of what people are already concerned about demonstrates that they are already in politics. They don't have to be aroused, enlisted, or empowered to be in politics. The political world is not some far-off planet inhabited by elected officials and pundits. And giving a problem a name that reflects the way families and communities experience it prompts people to think of things they can do to combat the threat.

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[2] Milton Rokeach and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, "Stability and Change in American Value Priorities, 1968-1981," *American Psychologist* 44 (May 1989): 775-784.

2. Framing Issues to Promote Choice Work

After a problem is named in public terms, it is possible to frame it for community considera-

tion in a manner that doesn't encourage the polarization that often prevents progress and shuts

out the majority of citizens.[3] People know that sensitive issues spark emotions, and they want

opportunities to talk about them frankly, yet without acrimony. They like opportunities to learn

from one another, even from those with different views. Conversations that draw high marks are

those where people can express strong views without others contesting their right to believe as

they do. Meetings where participants feel that "we all listened to everybody else's opinion" are

those that prompt people to say "we all got something out of it."[4]

Such an environment is more likely to be present in a community if issues have been put

into frameworks that enable people to see multiple options for action that follow from their con-

cerns. An issue framed around only two opposing alternatives invites two opposing arguments.

But whoever said that there are only two sides to every question? There are likely to be several

valid ways to solve most problems. The framework used in presenting an issue should make that

clear.

Possible courses of action follow naturally from people's concerns. When Americans

describe a problem as they experience it, ask them what they think should be done about it. They

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[3] For example, when smog levels in Columbus, Ohio, began approaching EPA limits, a group of citizens framed the health issue for public deliberation. John Dedrick, "Public Engagement with Government Agencies," *Connections* 14 (July 2003): 27-29.

[4] These are not exact quotes, but rather an example of what happens when people deliberate together. This is described more fully in chapter 12 of David Mathews, *Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

will usually describe actions that resonate with the things they consider valuable.[5] For instance, when Americans talk about what has happened to family life, they are troubled by what appears to be a devaluation of the institution of marriage as reflected in the high divorce rate. They also single out a decline in parental responsibility. People react in horror and disbelief when they hear that a father or mother has killed his or her own child. And Americans, especially adults, worry about what is happening to children when they hear stories of juvenile violence. People seem to attach great importance to the institution of marriage, but they also value individual freedom, including the freedom to leave a marriage. Americans certainly have strong feelings about parental responsibility. And they believe in protecting children.

Now imagine that a community is faced with an increase in juvenile violence, child abuse, births to unwed teenagers, and a high divorce rate. Citizens don't have the resources to respond to every problem and set out to develop a strategy that will give priority to the interventions that are most likely to be effective. What should they do? They are more likely to make a sound decision if they have a framework for deciding on a strategy that considers all of the possible actions that follow from people's concerns. Some want the strategy to focus on strengthening marriage on the grounds that it is a key institution. Churches and marriage counselors could be enlisted. Perhaps the legislature should be asked to run no-fault divorce. Others argue that the source of the problem isn't marriage, in general, but a loss of parental responsibility. When the discussion turns to this option, the actions people consider range from courses on parenting skills to jail sentences for parents who fail to supervise their youngsters. Still others in the community say that they want to save the children "now!" and not wait on parents to change or the divorce

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[5] These findings come from Kettering Foundation research done to produce policy briefing books for citizens in the National Issues Forums. What is learned from the initial research and the analysis of forum results is reported

rate to drop. As people think of what might be done with and for young people, another cluster of possible actions emerge, from tougher discipline to more social services and sports programs to channel youthful energies.

This framework may or may not be just right. But we are trying to show how possible action flows from the concerns people draw on when they frame issues. The right framework will be both inclusive and explicit; it will put everything on the table that is at issue. Above all, each option for action will be presented fairly. So, for instance, the option to address the problem of family life through marriage laws will get equal billing with approaching the problem by protecting children. That kind of "fair trial" opens the door to public participation.[6]

Of course, when confronted with three or four possible courses of action, there are tradeoffs to be made, consequences to consider. Collective decision making is hard work; you might call it "choice work." Making choices inevitably involves conflict, not over what is most valuable in the abstract, but over what is most valuable in specific situations. Inevitably, tensions arise because citizens have no way of being sure which of their many concerns should guide them in making a specific decision. These conflicts occur, not only among different people, but also within each person. Take another issue, health care, for example. Everyone wants the best care possible, and they also want the most affordable care. Those are basic political motivations. The choice is a tough one, however, because the better the technical care, the less affordable it is likely to be. Any proposal dealing with the cost of health care runs directly into this predicament. When citizens face such issues squarely, they can't escape the pull and tug of the things they

regularly in studies of the effects of public deliberation.

hold most dear. They have to "work through" these conflicts. Doing that work together helps

transform a room full of individuals into an engaged public.[7]

3. Deliberating Openly

What are the most effective ways to go about making such decisions? General discussion

won't do the job; it may be educational, but it doesn't lead to decisions. Debates? They are better

for elections than for problem solving, where collective action is more important than one side

winning out over another. Community decision making proceeds best when people use that

ancient form of discourse known as deliberation. And deliberation opens the decision to citizens

who would become a public. To deliberate is to weigh the possible consequences of various

approaches to a problem against all that we consider truly valuable.[8] Deliberation increases the

likelihood that a decision will be sound by helping us determine whether we are willing to accept

the consequences of the actions we are considering. Although we can't be certain we have made

the right decision until we act, deliberation forces us to anticipate costs and benefits, to ask how

high a price we would be willing to pay in order to get what we want. This kind of collective

decision making is more likely to result in shared and reflective public judgment — as opposed

to first impressions and hasty conclusions.[9]

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[6] For an example of such a framework, see *The Troubled American Family: Which Way Out of the Storm?* an issue book for community decision making in the National Issues Forums series. These books are published by the Kettering Foundation.

[7] Daniel Yankelovich discusses the concept of "working through" problems in chapter 17 of his book *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981).

[8] Isocrates, "Antidosis," in *Isocrates*, trans. George Norlin, vol. 2 (1929; reprint, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000), pp. 179-365 and Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. W. D. Ross (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 935-1126.

[9] Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

Working through Hard Choices: Difficult decisions about how to act are made in stages, never all at once. We usually begin by blaming the difficulties on others before working through the emotions provoked by having to face unpleasant consequences.[10] Working through an issue takes a long time, goes on in many different settings, and moves in fits and starts. Conversations may begin as friendly backyard exchanges long before they become seriously deliberative. Typically, we start talking about personal concerns and then try to find out whether anyone else shares our worries. For example, a public-forming exchange can begin over fences with neighbors talking to neighbors about drug paraphernalia they find alongside the streets.[11] Informal conversations may turn into a more structured dialogue in clubs and civic associations. Later, a town meeting may be held on the issue. Months, even years, of deliberation may pass before people determine whether and how to act.

Creating Practical Wisdom: One way to understand public judgment is to think of it as the "practical wisdom" a citizenry needs to govern itself.[12] What the public needs to know in order to act wisely, however — and the way a citizenry goes about knowing — are different from what professionals know and the way they go about knowing.[13] Expert knowledge is about what *is*; practical wisdom is about what *should* be. Such wisdom results from the exercise of the human faculty for judgment — for distinguishing among competing courses of action. It is impossible

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[10] Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*.

[11] The Harwood Group, *Meaningful Chaos: How People Form Relationships with Public Concerns* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1993), pp. 11–12.

[12] Isocrates describes practical wisdom in a story about a general on trial for misconduct in his "Antidosis."

[13] For more on the relationship between expert and public knowledge, see Robert A. Beauregard, "The Public Negotiation of Knowledge," *Higher Education Exchange* (1998): 16-20 and William B. Lacy, "Democratizing Science in an Era of Expert and Private Knowledge," *Higher Education Exchange* (2001): 52-60. Also see David Mathews, "Listening to the Public: A New Agenda for Higher Education?" *Higher Education for the Public Good: Emerging Voices from a National Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, forthcoming in 2004).

for engagement campaigns to provide this kind of information because practical wisdom is

socially constructed from the exchange of experiences that goes on during deliberation.

Changing Perceptions of the Problems and Others: Making choices together is the

prerequisite to acting together, and the objective of deliberation is to inform that action. Yet

communities don't have to come to full agreement in order to act in a coherent fashion. Public

deliberation rarely ends in consensus, yet it usually provides a common sense of direction. That

is, deliberation is not a form of conflict resolution per se, but it is a way of identifying the things

people will and won't do to solve a problem. Public deliberations can be powerful politically. As

with other types of public work, people tend to take more responsibility for decisions they have

participated in making than for those that have been made by others. Whether arrived at by

design or by default, choices shape the fate of a community in a way that nothing else does. A

community is the product of its choices, and if they are made openly and together, it is possible

to narrow the gap between what people see happening and what they think *should* be happening.

Deliberation affects action, in many instances, by changing or broadening the definition of

the problem at hand.[14] Take the economic development, for example, which is typically seen as a

matter of attracting new industries. Cities with this objective may initially name their problem as

a need for jobs. But later, after much deliberation, some come to see their situation in a different

light. They decide that they really have to work on creating prosperity, not simply adding jobs

(which may or may not bring prosperity). This redefinition of the issue has led some cities to

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[14] For a more complete account of the effects of public deliberation, see John Doble Research Associates, *The Story of NIF: The Effects of Deliberation* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1996), Steve Farkas and Will Friedman, with Ali Bers, *The Public's Capacity for Deliberation* (New York: Public Agenda for Kettering Foundation, 1996), and John Gastil, Gina Adam, and Hank Jenkins-Smith, *A Builder's Guide to Public Deliberation: An Executive Summary of "Understanding Public Deliberation"* (Albuquerque: Institute for Public Policy, University of New Mexico, for Kettering Foundation, 1995).

develop broad strategies for creating "entrepreneurial economies." And the redefinition has implicated potential actors other than industrial recruiters.

Public deliberation also has the power to change people's perceptions of those with whom they disagree. Even though a person doesn't accept someone's position on an issue, he or she may come to appreciate the other party's position. Modification of these two key perceptions — of one another and of the problem — unlocks the sense of possibility that is the driving force behind change. People don't require a guarantee that what they do will be successful. They will join in civic action if they understand clearly how a problem affects what they care about, if they see that there is something they may be able to do about it, and if they discover that there are others willing to work with them.[15]

4. Getting Commitments

No community moves directly from decisions to actions. If agencies like the health department have to implement a decision, they have to spend months in planning. But an agency has the advantages of legal authority, equipment, and personnel that can be directed to the task at hand. The democratic public, by contrast, can't command. It has to generate the political will that would cause free and independent actors to step forward, marshal their resources, and commit them. These resources are different from agency or institutional resources. Citizens don't usually have the access to funds that institutions do or technical expertise, but they have other unique capabilities.

Mutual Promises, the Forces that Bind: Why does a whole neighborhood turn on its lights to defy drug dealers? Battling street crime is not just time consuming; it is dangerous. Why do

people show up to patrol crime-ridden streets when there is no financial inducement or legal obligation? People aren't coerced into cooperating.

Public work is fueled by a force that governments and institutions often find in short supply — the simple but powerful force of the promises people make to one another, their covenants. Covenants are the basis for community associations; they are the glue that holds them together and makes them work. In John McKnight's words, "The structure of institutions is a design established to create control of people. *The structure of associations is the result of people acting through consent*."[16] We would be ill advised to forget about legal contracts, rules, regulations, and laws. Society can't rely totally on voluntary consent but neither can it dismiss this time-honored way of banding together.

It isn't uncommon for deliberations to be followed by mutual promises either in a deliberative forum or subsequent meetings. People do what they pledge to do because others expect them to do what they say. These very informal agreements constitute voluntary covenants in which one party pledges to another, "We will do thus and so, if you will do thus and so." Although covenants may sound medieval or romantic, they work. They are not without their own kind of leverage. As one community leader said about his association's meetings, "If you don't show up, somebody will say something to you about it."

5. Acting Publicly in Dealing with Wicked Problems

Many times, the shared problem that challenges a community is an especially wicked problem, one that won't go away. The public or community at large has to respond because no

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[15] The Harwood Group, *Meaningful Chaos*, pp. 11-14, 31-34.

[16] John McKnight, "Regenerating Community," *Kettering Review* (fall 1989): 48.

one institution, group of leaders, or segment of the population can handle the problem alone.

When there are opportunities for people to analyze the nature of the issues a community faces,

people can usually recognize those that require a response from "the whole village."

Wicked problems are those that take advantage of a diminished sense of community and

then further loosen the ties that bind people. Conventional remedies don't work on these

problems. Following business as usual is like treating cancers with the plaster casts more suitable

for broken bones. Unlike fractures, our most serious community problems result from multiple

factors, more human than technical.

Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber call problems "wicked" when:

- the diagnosis or definition is unclear,

- the location or cause is uncertain, and

- any effective action to deal with them requires narrowing the gap between what is and
  what ought to be — in the face of disagreement about the latter.[17]

Wicked problems are neither discrete nor easily defined. They are as tricky as they are

aggressive and vicious. Each is a symptom of another, in a never-ending chain. While bridges are

built and diseases eradicated, wicked problems persist. The problem conventionally called "the

achievement gap" may be an example. Success in dealing with such problems can't be

determined in the same way as the reliability of an engineered structure or the curative power of

a laboratory-developed drug.

Despite the distinctive characteristics of the problems that never disappear, most strategies

for addressing them call for the same kind of planning, goal setting, and measurement of out-

comes used to address other problems. Yet, when problems are wicked, a shared understanding of the approximate nature of what people are facing is more important than a technical solution. In fact, dealing effectively with a wicked problem may depend on *not* reaching a fixed decision about a solution early on. The ability of citizens to exercise good judgment and to experiment in the face of uncertainty becomes more important than the often deceptive certainty of experts.

When the public or community as a whole acts, deliberations implicate a variety of actors who have to respond and, hopefully, make commitments to use the resources they can marshal. An illustration: a community initially names young people milling around a downtown transportation hub after school as a "loitering problem." (The kids call it "hanging out.") After some deliberation, what appears to be loitering proves to be but one symptom of a more serious, indeed, wicked problem — a breakdown in social and family structure that leaves too many youngsters without adult support and direction. Youth organizations, neighborhood associations, schools, churches, and businesses make mutual promises to respond. Their ways of acting aren't the same as those of agencies or institutions. Public acting doesn't begin at one point and end at another. It is an organic, ever-repeating collection of efforts, richly diverse and involving many people. Neighbors work together to restore a park where children can play. Depending on their resources, different groups take on different tasks — some clean up trash; others plant trees or build benches. The interactions are horizontal — shoulder-to-shoulder, citizen-to-citizen. Public acting isn't the product of an administrative plan, nor is it spontaneous or magical. It follows a sense of direction that emerges from public deliberation.

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[17] The classic reference on "wicked" problems is Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 155-169.

Institutional acting, in contrast, is uniform, linear, and usually coordinated by one central agency. (The fire department lays out rules for exiting a building safely. It sends an inspector around from time to time to supervise a fire drill.) The interactions are vertical — from officials down to citizens or, in some cases, from citizens up to officials.

Public acting isn't a substitute for carefully planned actions by governmental or nongovernmental organizations, although it has certain qualities that other forms of action lack. Economists would say that its transaction costs are lower. Even though public acting requires a degree of coordination (everyone can't show up at the park to mow grass and pick up trash), it isn't administratively regulated. When people have overlapping purposes, their diverse efforts tend to mesh, complementing and reinforcing one another.

Cities and towns where there is little public acting and where everything that is done has to be highly organized and planned in detail can miss the initiative and inventiveness that allow them to be optimally effective. What's more, institutional action often fails to produce results when it isn't reinforced by public action. Consider the way a good neighborhood watch program helps a police department do its job. Fred Smith, who retired three years ago from the machine-tool shop, devotes Monday afternoons to checking the street from his front porch (until it is time for Monday-night football). Once everyone is home from work, the Joneses and the Turners walk together after supper for company, to exercise and, not incidentally, to establish a presence on the block.

Because official interactions are vertical while public interactions run the other way, they can support each other. When the two are woven together, as with threads, the result is the strong

"whole cloth" of community action. If it were not for the threads crossing one another in the fabric of our clothes, our elbows would come through our shirtsleeves.

6. Turning Evaluation into Civic Learning

The last practice that contributes to putting the "public" in the public's business occurs (or fails to occur) when a community has tried to solve a problem and wants to know if what was done is effective.

Acting and assessing the results are another everyday phenomena. If a governing body or a civic organization does something, then the press declares the results to be beneficial, harmful, or inconsequential. Individuals talk about what happened in one-on-one conversations over coffee or the water cooler. The public, however, may not be involved and won't be unless there are opportunities for collective or civic learning — the shared and systematic examination of what happened and whether it was consistent with the things that citizens wanted to accomplish.

Typically, community leaders attempt to measure success by using fixed, quantitative standards and relying on outside, "objective" determinations of a project's worth. Knowing what truly happened is essential, yet conventional evaluations can shut the door on the public. The evaluators take over. Citizens don't have a chance to learn as they are capable of doing. Participants in naming problems in public terms, framing issues, deliberating, and acting collectively can describe what they learned in the process. While information from outside the community can be helpful, the people involved can determine for themselves what they would and wouldn't do again.

The most useful studies of civic learning are longitudinal, such as the 20-year study of Tupelo, Mississippi, by Vaughn Grisham.[18] His research suggests communities that learn are like ideal students who read everything assigned and then go to the library to find out more. Learning communities look carefully at what works elsewhere yet never copy from others; they adapt, believing that "imitation is limitation."

One of Kettering's most useful insights has been that learning doesn't necessarily have to be put on hold until the end of a project; it can go on continuously. In a sense, civic learning is simply naming, framing, and deliberating in reverse. Citizens can ask what was valuable in each of these practices, how what they did affected the things they cared about, and what their options are for future action. This presupposes that both the goals of civic efforts, as well as the effects, are open for reconsideration.

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[18] Vaughn Grisham Jr., *Tupelo: The Evolution of a Community* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 1999).

Professional Life as Public Life
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I am honored to be invited to speak at your graduation. Commencement is one of the great moments in the life of a university — a time when the faculty can see the tangible results of work that is largely intangible. It is also a great moment in your life; graduation marks the completion of a journey many of you probably thought, at one time or another, would never end. I congratulate all of you!

As you heard in the introduction, I am from Alabama. Fans from The University of Alabama have traveled to the University of Hawaii twice recently for athletic contests. Frankly, they had a better time on their first trip than the one this past December. The hospitality you have shown me, my wife, and my colleagues from the Kettering Foundation has had all of the warmth and graciousness the Alabama travelers talked about when they returned — with none of the bruises from the football field.

As I began thinking about what I'd say to you, my mind wandered back to my own graduation from Columbia University many years ago. I recall a campus of gray stone buildings and stained bronze statuary crowded in by New York City, certainly a different sight than this Garden of Eden. With a wife and two young daughters, the need to take a paying job was far more compelling than staying for graduation. Yet what seemed a prudent decision at the time proved to be a mistake. So I'm glad that you are not doing the same thing. For years after my diploma arrived in the mail, I had a recurring nightmare that I didn't actually finish my work. In those dreams, I would frantically go over and over what I had done in graduate school, trying to reassure myself that I had, in fact, finished the courses, passed my oral exams, and turned in the

last page of my dissertation. You won't have to dream that dream. This is real, and you are wide awake.

The nightmares aside, I also regret skipping the graduation ceremonies because it would have given me an opportunity to reflect on all the people who had helped me get to the end of a doctoral program. None of us reaches this moment alone. There are many to thank: the teachers who both encouraged and challenged us along the way (even the members of your doctoral committee); parents and spouses who were a source of never-failing support; colleagues in graduate school who shared the same trials and tribulations (fellow sufferers) — all of them stand with us at this ceremony.

I remember one of my fellow students, Pat Graham, who hesitated to stop for a cup of coffee because she feared falling behind in her work. Yet she and her husband would watch our children so we could go to the plays that offered students half-price tickets for dress rehearsals. The Grahams, Mathewses, and our colleagues ate tons of tuna casserole at dinners where everyone had to bring their own dishes because no one had a full table setting. Then we went back to our apartments to read one more article or type one more paper. Still, in spite of days that seemed to have far less than 24 hours, we somehow found the time to become lifelong friends. I hope you have had similar blessings. Those experiences left me with a strong sense of how much I owed my fellow students — and how little I liked tuna casserole.

All of these kindnesses leave us indebted to others, and I want to use the time you have given me to reflect on these debts. Some debts are personal; they are to family and friends. You have acknowledged them today with sincere thanks and warm embraces. Other debts are professional and civic. The knowledge you take away from your classes and the skills you have

acquired are the product of many generations of scholarship. The learned professions you enter

have evolved out of the interactions of social imperatives with intellectual enterprises. "No man

is an island," and none of the subjects in your curriculum developed in isolation. Changing

conditions in civil society have been reflected in the changes in the academy. If that weren't so,

our colleges and universities would still be confined to the subjects in the medieval quadrivium

and trivium, now so obscure that few remember what they were. Even the traditions of academic

independence and disinterested inquiry are expressions of decidedly political interests,

specifically the interest in freedom itself. You are now being licensed to pursue the learned

professions, and I am suggesting that because of this history, you have civic debts, which may

not be as obvious as the ones you have to banks and the federal government, yet are as

collectable.

I suspect that when I just said that you are entering the "learned professions," the words may

have sounded unfamiliar, perhaps rather old-fashioned. I know that when I graduated, I didn't

think of myself as becoming a quote "professional." I was a historian, and proud of it, just as you

are proud of being a physician, a lawyer, or a sociologist. Today, becoming a professional

doesn't carry with it any sense of special obligations outside the field you are entering. One

reason is that most everyone is a professional of some sort these days; we have professional

plumbers, electricians, and barbers. I think it is great. The widespread use of the word

"professional" is democracy's way of dealing with anything that smacks of privilege, of ranking

one citizen above another. But we have lost something when the "learned professions" lost their

distinctiveness, and I want to recall that history.

There was a time in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when becoming a

professional meant taking on a special responsibility — an obligation to serve the larger public

interest and not merely seek personal profit or status within a professional field. Ministers, lawyers, and other professionals were responsible for serving the common good and so counterbalance political pressure from tradesmen, farmers, and artisans who were thought incapable of rising above their personal or economic self-interests. People in the learned professions, so it was assumed, wouldn't be as concerned with riches, and they certainly wouldn't form their own special interest groups and hire lobbyists to represent them in Washington. They would be above such things. There might be workingmen's associations (in fact, by the eighteenth century, there were) but surely no American Bar Association, no American Medical Association.

What can I say? History seldom turns out as expected. For reasons — often good reasons, which are too numerous to cite here — professionals today feel they must organize for their collective well-being. Their associations acknowledge the need to be socially responsible, and each believes it serves the public interest by upholding the highest standards for its members. No argument there. What is missing in the modern concept of the responsibilities of professionals, however, is the notion that they have civic obligations. These obligations once compelled professionals to go outside their fields into the larger public arena in order to advance what James Madison called the "enduring interests" of a democracy. These responsibilities went beyond voting, paying taxes, and observing laws. They could not be met by individual acts of personal service, commendable as coaching Little League and fundraising for a local museum are. Civic debts are paid through joining with other citizens in making the collective decisions needed to create a public voice that is more coherent than the cacophony of interest groups.

Hold that thought about a "public voice." In just a few minutes, I'll give you an example of an effort to create such a voice here in your state.

First, I want to explain why responsibility for the "enduring interests" or the good of the community as a whole is so important today. If this year's presidential campaign is like all the others, every candidate will denounce the undue influence of special interests and promise to stamp them out. I say "undue" because most people recognize that organizing groups around the self-interests of their members is legitimate in a democracy. Most of us belong to several. But what troubles Americans (and prompts candidates for political office to speak out) is the widespread perception that the balance between particular interests and the interest of all has been lost. Special interests have the upper hand. Despite any number of groups that purport to speak for the public, citizens don't hear their own voice in the political rhetoric.

As a result, Americans feel pushed out of the political system. And they think they know who pushed them. People are aware that citizens sometimes fail to do their civic duty, but they feel barriers to their participation are being erected by a powerful political class of lobbyists, campaign managers, and incumbent politicians — all of whom appear beholden to special interests. As this perception grew in the 1970s, confidence in government plummeted and has remained low ever since, despite some more positive feelings just after 9/11.

People's frustrations seem focused more on politics than government per se, although the two are related. The perception that the political system is overly influenced by special interests is one of the principal reasons for a lack of confidence in government. As recently as 2003, a *Newsweek* survey found that 70 percent of Americans believe that interest groups and partisanship still dominate politics.

Maybe these perceptions are unfair to the good people who serve in elected and appointed offices. When I was working in Washington, I found far more dedicated, well-intentioned

officeholders than rascals. And on second thought, most Americans become less inclined to blame individuals than the system itself. I met one local official who said, in all seriousness, that he wouldn't stay in Washington longer than four days because he was afraid there was something in the air that would cause him to think he knew what was best for the country. Many would say much the same thing about the capital of their own state.

Perhaps I've digressed a little from the issue I want to raise in this address — the civic responsibilities of the learned professions. I'm trying to make the point that the question of who attends to the best interest of all — a responsibility the learned professions once took to heart — is now at the center of Americans' concerns about their political system. Americans love their country, and people around the world know it. Russian citizens recently said that while they had some concerns about the U.S., they admired our deep sense of patriotism. But that same patriotism means that Americans are always going to insist, sooner or later, that the country live up to its democratic ideals.

So what can you, as a new generation of learned professionals, do to promote the larger public good? While that isn't your responsibility alone, what can you do in your professional life beyond meeting the highest standards in your field? It is a difficult challenge, partly because scarcely anyone talks about it anymore.

Expectations that those in the learned professions would play a particular civic role as champions of the common interest waned throughout the twentieth century as a result of several forces. For instance, professional organizations began to place a greater emphasis on internal matters along with "instrumental and technical achievements." Civic missions became increasingly vague, degenerating into platitudes about "serving civilization." Interestingly, this

study found the same trends in higher education, which now seems caught between pressure to be well-managed businesses and their historic role as educational institutions with civic mandates. Look into the origins of land grant universities, if that history interests you. No one tells people entering the learned professions what a friend of mine was told when he became head of a U.S. company that was beginning to do business in Eastern Europe and Russia: "Over here, Phil, you must remember that you have civic duties as well as responsibilities to the company."

Another factor that has made the professions less civic is the increased reliance on expert knowledge, especially scientific knowledge. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm glad that my physician has the latest research. I want to know when a new drug performs better than an old one (even though I may be shocked by the price). I hope the bridge I drive over uses the best materials and takes advantage of the latest technology. Let me say it for the record: "I love expert knowledge."

As you've gone through graduate school, you've been instructed on the difference between what is excellent and what isn't. In my case, I was constantly reminded of what good historical research demands. Today, young professionals graduate recognizing that their principal obligation is to provide the very best service possible whether they are accountants, teachers, or surgeons. That is as it should be. The problem comes when professionals take that same certainty into the political arena, where expert knowledge is useful though not sufficient. In a democracy, the public has to decide what is in the best interest of all and what *should* be done to serve that interest.

Certain questions only have one answer: "At what point, under normal conditions, will this cable break?" Other questions, particularly political questions, can be answered in several ways. And in a democracy, there is no authority that can tell us which answer is best. "Should we build a new highway so that travel will be easier, or should we preserve the environment and not pave over the entire island?" Reasonable people will differ because they place different priorities on things we all hold dear. Questions that can be answered in more than one way can only be addressed by exercising sound collective judgment. Sound judgments are those in which our actions are consistent with what we decide is most valuable. And there are no experts on what is most valuable to our community, state, or country. We have to work out our answers in ongoing deliberations among citizens and in legislative bodies. That doesn't mean that professionals have no role in democratic decision making other than as citizens. But it does mean that narrowly defined professionalism is too narrow.

My colleagues and I came to Hawaii because there appears to be a different type of professionalism developing here — call it civic professionalism. It has to do with providing some of the ingredients for sound decision making. Still, what is happening here is promising, not only for Hawaii but also for the country as a whole.

The experiment going on in Hawaii involves members of your state legislature, sometimes known as "those politicians," and professionals who are on faculty of this institution. Last year, one of your legislators, Les Ihara, wrote an article for the Kettering Foundation about opening a parallel track of citizen deliberations on an issue that was also on legislative agendas — campaign reform. The idea was to compare the way citizens weighed the major options for reform with what legislators thought should be done to eliminate abuse. Citizens participating in the forum in Hawaii probably belonged to various interest groups, yet they didn't come to the

meeting as advocates for those groups. And the participants didn't approach the deliberations from a partisan point of view. These were forums where any and every citizen was considered a stakeholder.

Like other Americans, the citizens in Hawaii in the meeting were worried that money was corrupting politics, particularly elections, yet they weren't sure which remedies would work. Forum participants considered three options. One was to rely more on public financing, another was to impose more stringent regulations on lobbyists, and a third called for greater publicity on all types of contributors but no regulations.

What the forum accomplished had less to do with the way citizens weighed the options and more to do with increasing politicians' appreciation for people's common sense and giving them a better understanding of how the public goes about thinking. Senator Ihara reported when representatives saw citizens grappling with difficult issues in a thoughtful and responsible fashion, they felt they could be more candid in their own remarks. For participants in the public deliberations, the payoffs were a better understanding of the complexities of the issue and, most of all, insights into what their fellow citizens thought.

One forum can't do much, and no one claims this one did. I am sure that those observing the meeting heard some misinformation and opinions that were less than carefully reasoned. But what they did *not* hear was a citizenry incapable of self-government. That's significant. Compare the perception of the public that came from watching the forum with this textbook description of the American citizenry. I quote:

> If the survival of the American system depended upon an active, informed, and enlightened citizenry, then democracy in America would have disappeared long ago; for the masses of America are apathetic and ill-informed about politics and public policy, and they have a

> surprisingly weak commitment to democratic values . . . fortunately for these values and
> for American democracy, the American masses do not lead, they follow.

That is *not* an accurate description of the public that took shape in the first and subsequent

forums.

The Hawaii experiment continued when the president of your senate proposed a study of

gambling. That opened the door for another forum to see how citizens weighed some of the same

options that representatives were considering. These parallel public/legislative tracks being

created in Hawaii, although still on a small scale, have drawn attention from other state

legislatures as well as the National Conference of State Legislatures. The public forums aren't

intended to replace legislative decision making as a new form of direct democracy. Instead, they

are intended to encourage more deliberation in legislative assemblies, which are supposed to be

models of deliberation — yet often aren't. The forums also provide some hint of a public voice

because citizens have to struggle with which policy choices best serve the interests of all.

More recently, the University of Hawaii faculty and students developed a local version of an

issue book on a subject of both state and national concern — the health care system. Faculty

members analyzed the public thinking that went on in these forums. And their findings were

reported in the Washington meeting with members of Congress and the national media, which I

just mentioned. New issue books covering both state and national policies are on the drawing

boards. The results of the deliberations they stimulate will give greater clarity to the public voice.

The professionals on the faculty who have been involved in this project haven't told people

what to think or how to think. But they have used their expertise to create opportunities for

residents of Hawaii to think as citizens. And what the faculty learned has fed a new line of

scholarly research.

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I'll conclude by pointing out the obvious. You'll leave here and put out your shingle in a law firm, medical practice, or some other institution, provided you are not going on to more advanced study. You'll be in classrooms and businesses and laboratories. Office routines will take a good many of your waking hours — and occasionally invade your sleep. You'll have an apartment or home nearby with neighbors and perhaps a family. You'll acquire more and more true, civic interests. You'll think about the quality of schools and safety in the neighborhood. You'll worry about the war in Iraq and the rising cost of health care. You will have a public, not just a professional, life.

I'm suggesting that the way you go about your work as a professional can have implications for what happens in your public life. The faculty here who have used their scholarly skills to fashion better ways for citizens of Hawaii to speak in a public voice have added a civic dimension to their professionalism. There is much more to be done in other professions. I can't tell you exactly how to make your professional life more public, but I want to raise the issue before you leave this graduation ceremony.

I recall a conversation I had with a historian who studied the Revolutionary period in America. He told me about a veteran of the War of Independence, who when asked about the effect his service had on him, replied simply, "It gave me a sense of being part of the sovereignty of my country." That struck me as a powerful insight. During this period, most people regarded themselves as British subjects. If they had any notion of citizenship, it was most likely as a citizen of a state: Massachusetts, Virginia, or one of the other 13 colonies that had become states. The veteran also probably had an identity as a farmer or merchant or artisan. Or maybe he was a

member of one of the learned professionals. After the Revolution, he didn't lose any of those particular identities nor the interest that went with them. But he acquired a new identity, which he shared in common with thousands of others. He was an American citizen. I hope that in your professional life, as well as your personal life, you too will come to experience being part of the sovereignty of your country.