

CHAPTER 17

SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

Narrative Lecture Outline

Social welfare policy covers a broad swath of issues from public education to food stamps. Many people seem to think that “welfare programs” only benefit the poor and are “handouts.” This is simply not true. There are many welfare programs that are targeted toward the middle class (think of the mortgage interest deduction for one), for all groups of people (unemployment could hit any of us at any time), toward a specific age group (the elderly and Social Security and education for the young). However, even though many of these programs are targeted to a group or segment of the population, they often benefit us all.

Who benefits from food stamps? Is it simply the people receiving the food stamps? No. They are primary beneficiaries, of course, but think a little more deeply—who else benefits? Farmers get higher prices for their crops, grocery stores make more profits and hire more help, food processors have increased business, trucking companies haul the food to stores, and so on and so on. The same is true of most other benefit programs. Not only do their benefits help people, but they are actually more far reaching than one might initially think. Education is another program that benefits society as a whole. Think for a moment, what would this country look like if no one had an education? Even if you do not have children, education is a benefit. How does it benefit everyone?

There are compelling moral and national security arguments as well. For example, did you know that the school lunch program was started because young men drafted for the Korean War were often deemed unfit for service because they were poorly nourished? The government initiated school lunches to protect national security—to ensure that all young men would be fit to serve in the armed forces in time of war. Morally speaking, most of us give to charities of some kind. Ideologically, we debate whether the public or private arena does a better job of taking care of the less fortunate, but few argue that we, as a rich society, should do something.

I hope that today you come away with several basic ideas about social welfare policies: 1) the types of policies the U.S. has; 2) a deeper understanding of why we have these policies and who truly benefits from them; and 3) some idea of the moral and other types of reasons that we have such programs.

The Policy-Making Process

Public policy is the way that government deals with problems and concerns. They are laws or regulations that are authoritative and binding. It is important to remember that policy is a process, not a point in time. Policy begins with an idea, moves through a number of stages, becomes a law by passing Congress and the president, then the bureaucracy implement and interpret it, sometimes the courts get a shot at that as well...and all the while policy is shifting. Laws are amended, executive orders are issued, the bureaucracy chooses to enforce or not, and so on.

The best example to which we can all relate is the speed limit, which is set by law. But are you going to be stopped? Let's say the law says 55 mph. If you are traveling down Interstate 15 in Nevada, miles from nowhere, is a state policeman going to ticket you for going 65? Probably not. If you are going down the same road inside the Las Vegas city limits, are you going to get a ticket? Probably. Police use administrative discretion to determine whether to stop you. Sometimes there is a decision rule—in "x state" we will only stop speeders if the driver is going 5 or more mph over the speed limit. In other places, there may be zero tolerance. The rules depend upon a lot of factors such as manpower, danger to people (hence more strict enforcement in the city), common sense, road conditions, and many more.

We are going to discuss one of many models of the process by which policy is shaped. Because this is a model, it is a simplified version of reality. It is useful to think of policy making in this way, but usually it is much more complicated than this model would lead us to believe. So, please keep that in mind.

Theories of Public Policy

There are a number of theoretical approaches to the study of public policy. According to elite theories, the few or the elite make all the decisions in society, or at least the important ones. The mass of people respond to these policies but don't have much input. They say this unequal distribution of power is normal and inevitable. This doesn't, however, imply that public opinion has no impact on the process and elites do not necessarily oppress the masses.

A second group of theorists is the pluralist school of thought. Under pluralism there are simply too many interests for any one interest to dominate. They would say that the elite theorists are just plain wrong.

Interest group theories, often grouped in with the pluralists but recognizing the priority of one particular set of groups, posit that interest groups are the key actor in the policy process. Government simply mediates among the interest groups.

In addition, bureaucratic theorists contend that all institutions are part of, or controlled by, a large and ever-growing bureaucracy, which operates on its own imperatives, such as standard operating procedures and the quest for institutional survival. Complexity empowers bureaucrats, since others can't see all that goes on within a given policy area and few can understand and navigate the Byzantine world of government documents. So, power passes from the elected to the unelected—the bureaucrats, who, in this theory, are the policy makers.

A Model of the Policy-making Process

Problem Recognition and Definition

The first stage of the policy-making process is the recognition of a problem and its definition. Not all problems are, or should be, the purview of government. However, these lines change all the time. In 1920, the federal government thought it should have no role in income security, the alleviation of poverty, and health care. By 1934, that idea had radically changed. Simply because something is not a relevant problem today does not mean that it will never be a problem that could be addressed by public policy.

For the purposes of this model, a problem must be something that the government can remedy, fix, ameliorate, or affect. A government cannot prevent a flood or

earthquake (at least not totally), but it can address the damage from a flood or earthquake and establish policies about building in flood and earthquake-prone areas.

Enter politics. Not everyone will agree that there is a problem or on the definition of that problem, let alone how to address it. Here is where some very interesting political struggles occur. Individuals, political parties, interest groups, members of Congress, members of various executive agencies, and many more discuss, argue and debate the “problem” in a variety of venues, from Sunday morning talk shows to town hall meetings to administrative hearings to congressional testimony and beyond. Probably the KEY struggle is the struggle to define the problem. The book highlights this with the example of transportation for the disabled. If the problem were defined as access to transportation, then there were several acceptable solutions. Special access van service, for example. If, however, the problem is defined as a civil right, then the only acceptable solution is full access to all public transport. The difference is huge, particularly in terms of cost. Neither solution is cheap, but outfitting every bus, train, plane, taxi, trolley, and so on for disabled use is a huge and expensive undertaking. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates just that.

It is also important to remember that public policies can also cause problems. For example, many people think that gun control is a solution to gun violence, while others see gun control itself as a problem.

Agenda Setting

Once a problem is defined, it needs to be put on the agenda for consideration. There are two basic kinds of agenda:

- systemic agenda: a discussion agenda of all issues that are seen as meriting public attention
- governmental or institutional agenda: only problems to which legislators or public officials feel obliged to devote serious time and attention

Getting on the Congressional Agenda

For our purposes, the agenda that everyone wants to be on is that of Congress. There are many ways to get on the congressional agenda. First, the president sets agenda priorities in the State of the Union address, the budget, and special messages throughout his administration. In this way, the president presents Congress with a legislative program for its consideration. Of course, the president does not always win and Congress does not always respond to his agenda items in the way he might wish. Second, interest groups and lobbyists help to shape the congressional agenda through their efforts. Third, events may dictate an agenda item, such as flooding in the Midwest, mine explosions, nuclear accidents or earthquakes. The news media may force an item onto the agenda, such as genocide in Sudan or child abuse. However, the media are usually more important in developing and sustaining interest in a problem than in identifying those issues. Private citizens may bring issues to the attention of Congress, as John Walsh did when his son was abducted (now the host of *America's Most Wanted*). Some legislators are elected on the basis of issues they want to strive to get on agenda, such as gun control, environmental issues, poverty relief, tax reform, a balanced budget, and many more. And lastly, political changes may contribute to agenda setting. LBJ and Reagan both won elections that changed the political face of the country. LBJ brought in a Democratic

majority for programs designed to eliminate poverty. Reagan's conservative revolution changed the popular notion that government was a force for good. After Reagan, the conventional wisdom became that government was bad and not to be trusted.

It is important to remember that Congress has limited time and attention. Many worthy agenda items are always competing at any one time. So it is crucially important to skillfully guide issues onto the agenda if you want congressional action.

Policy Formulation

Policy formulation is the crafting of appropriate and acceptable courses of action to ameliorate or resolve a public problem. Basically, a wide variety of political actors try to come up with suggestions about how to approach a problem. The possible solutions may be similar to those tried in the past or entirely new and creative. In the formulation of policy, all groups must consider what is politically and technically feasible, as well as optimal solutions.

Policy Adoption

Policy adoption is the making of a law or laws that give the policy legal force. Remember how a bill becomes a law? The process of policy adoption is a complicated and messy one that virtually assures compromise on a variety of fronts, in order to achieve success. In addition, laws often are written in very vague ways to ensure that they offend no one and will pass. Negotiation, bargaining, and compromise are the hallmarks of any legislation. Often, policy promoters decide that it would be technically or politically impossible to get the ideal policy passed, and so, they try for a smaller part. Much legislation is incremental in this way. And still many bills die.

Budgeting

In order to be carried out, a policy must have a budget. Whether a policy is well or poorly funded has a significant effect on its scope, impact, and effectiveness. Sometimes, policies are not funded or so underfunded that they cannot function.

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is how policies are carried out. Most policies are implemented by administrative agencies. They may use a number of techniques to implement policies including:

- authoritative techniques—rules and standards are enforced through sanctions such as fines, jail time, revocation of funding, etc.
- incentive techniques—policies are enforced and encouraged through positive sanctions such as tax deductions to encourage charitable giving, subsidies for farmers, and so on
- capacity techniques—provide people with information, education, training, or resources that will enable them to undertake desired activities such as job training, reliable interest rate information, truth in advertising rules, etc.
- hortatory techniques—try to enforce policy by appealing to people's best instincts; slogans like "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute," "Only YOU can prevent forest fires," and so on

The ability of an agency to adequately administer public policies has a lot to do with whether they can use the appropriate technique, adequacy of funding, political support, and the will and skill of agency personnel.

Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation is a way of determining whether a policy is working and whether it is being adequately administered. Some evaluation is based on anecdotal evidence (stories from a few people that make their way to the ears of an evaluator), some on political considerations (if it's popular, it must be good), and some evaluation is built on good, solid facts and thorough analysis.

Evaluation is undertaken by many players, often each with different political or other goals. The demise of a program is rare though, and usually, troubled programs are modified or amended or allowed to limp along.

The Origins of Social Welfare Policy

Most social welfare programs are creatures of the twentieth century. In the early years of the republic, people didn't want or need much government assistance, except for public schools and veteran's benefits—both of which came about gradually and accelerated after the Civil War. Local governments occasionally gave aid. One relied on family, church, neighbors and charities when things got rough.

This attitude began to change in the nineteenth century. Political power—the right to vote, begat a desire for economic power—the right to earn a good wage or price, and the right to be treated well. Farmers and labor began to organize to assert their interests. Farmers were threatened by wildly fluctuating prices for the commodities they produced and workers felt exploited. They worked long hours for little pay and in hazardous conditions. A severe depression in the 1890s led to protests and demands for government assistance by some. But it was not yet a broad-based movement. The overwhelming attitude about poverty was that poor people were lazy. The gap between rich and poor grew. Then the Great Depression of the 1930s hit and hard-working people, lots of them, were thrown out of work. This debunked the idea that only the lazy were unemployed and spurred the government into action. Hard work alone wasn't enough in times of economic crisis. A consensus was created that the government needed to intervene.

Income Security

In 1934, only twenty-eight states had assistance programs for the elderly and many of them were closed due to lack of funds in the Depression. The ten states that had functioning programs paid pensions of less than \$10 per month (ranging from 69 cents to \$4.50). The Great Depression and massive unemployment meant that many people were destitute, and the elderly were particularly hard hit because their families and private charities no longer had the ability to help them. There were also no unemployment insurance programs or other programs for the needy.

The Roosevelt administration began to design programs to help the needy and established the Committee on Economic Security to make recommendations. Most of the CES proposals were later endorsed by the president and enacted by Congress in 1935, as the Social Security Act.

The Social Security Act made the government the major contributor to income security. Three programs were created out of this act: 1) old age insurance (what we now call Social Security); 2) public assistance for the needy, aged, blind, and families with dependent children (the disabled were added later); and 3) unemployment insurance. There have been modifications since that time, but the basic programs remain intact.

National health insurance was considered at the same time. However, strong opposition from the American Medical Association managed to defeat its passage.

Health Care

The first national health care program was founded in 1798 to aid disabled and ill seamen. Local governments had established public health departments in the early nineteenth century, and state health departments became common in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many were aimed at public sanitation, clean water, and disease prevention. The government prescribed the pasteurization of milk and promoted immunization programs to protect the public health. The first Surgeon General was appointed in 1871 to watch over the public health and lead the Public Health Service (now a branch of Health and Human Services). Beginning in 1891-92, the Public Health Service examined immigrants coming to the U.S. at Ellis Island and other entry points to ensure that no one brought a communicable disease into the country. So there has been a long history of government involvement in health care issues.

In late 1945, Harry S. Truman again put national health insurance on the policy agenda. Initial public reaction was quite positive—58 percent approved of the idea. The AMA was still opposed, as were drug companies, private insurance companies, and conservatives. The opposition managed to invoke the specter of Communism and equated health insurance with “socialized medicine.” Given that the “Red Scare” was sweeping the country, the proposal died.

The idea did not die. In 1958, Democrats in Congress proposed health care for the elderly and by 1964 got it passed. The program became known as Medicare. At the committee stage of the process, the chair of the Ways and Means Committee added provisions to cover the poor (Medicaid), and the bill passed. We’ll come back to these programs in a bit.

Other federal programs also work on public health issues: the Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Cancer Institute, and the Department of Health and Human Services to name just a few. Medical research funding has been, and remains, quite popular. Congress often increases presidential budget requests for such appropriations. But in 1993, a Clinton administration proposal to enact national health insurance failed with the same basic opponents as the attempt by Truman in 1945.

Public Education

While public education has mainly been a state power (remember federalism?), the national government has been involved in public education since the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1785.

More recently, the GI Bill transformed public education in America. Prior to WWII, few people went to college. But the GI Bill allowed millions of WWII veterans to go to college by providing funds. Pell grants help poor students pay for college. Federally guaranteed student loans and other programs also help a larger number of people than ever before, to afford higher education.

At the elementary and secondary school levels, the national government has been involved in the national standards movement and many of the new testing requirements as well. While federal funding for education is less than 10 percent of education spending, federal interest and intervention in the schools seems to be increasing. Under President George W. Bush, the “No Child Left Behind Act” was passed. This law is very controversial and gives the federal government unprecedented control over public education. It also increases the number of tests students are required to take.

Social Welfare Policies Today

Now that we know a little about how policy is made, let’s turn again to social welfare policies. In particular, we are going to talk about three areas of social welfare policy: income security, health care, and public education.

Income Security Programs

Income security programs are supposed to protect people against loss of income due to retirement, disability, unemployment, or death of the family breadwinner. Thanks to these programs, cases of total deprivation are now rare, but many people still cannot afford a decent standard of living for themselves or their families. Even with these programs in place, many families struggle to survive and never manage to dig their way out of poverty.

The official poverty line for a family of four in 2006 was \$19,307 a year. That is about \$9.28 an hour if working full time. Income security programs are intended to help people below, at, or near this poverty level.

There are two kinds of income security program: non-means-based and means-tested programs. Non-means-based programs provide cash assistance to any qualified beneficiary. Social Security is this type of program. Means-tested programs require that beneficiaries first meet certain tests, such as falling below a certain income level. Food stamps are such a program.

Social Insurance: Non-means-Based Programs

Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance

Provides benefits to retired workers, survivors of covered workers (spouse, children), and the permanently disabled. This is usually referred to as Social Security. It is not a pension program, but a system in which current workers pay taxes that support current retirees. A payroll tax of 7.65 percent on the first \$94,200 of wages or salaries is paid by the employee and matched by the employer. This amount is paid into the Social Security

Trust Fund. Social Security is considered a regressive tax because the burden hits the poorer groups hardest. People making over \$94,200 do not pay tax on amounts they earn above this figure. Nor is Social Security tax paid on nonwage, nonsalary income such as dividends.

Social Security is the primary source of income for many retired people. In 2006, the average Social Security benefit was \$1,002 and the maximum benefit was \$2,053 per month. This is enough to keep many elderly people out of poverty, but it's not a lot of money. It was never intended to be viewed as a pension and was not supposed to be the primary source of income for most people. Social Security was originally envisioned as supplemental retirement income! But this is not how it is viewed today and this view is changing. Congress recently removed the limit on how much a retired person could make in income. Now there is no limit on earnings for those over 65 who receive Social Security.

People live longer lives now than 50 years ago and the number of retirees is growing, while the number of working people is shrinking. These demographics mean that Social Security is in trouble. More than 40 million people, including 3 million permanently disabled people, receive benefits, making Social Security the largest entitlement program offered by the federal government. What to do about it continues to be a huge political hot potato.

Unemployment Insurance—Financed by an employer-paid payroll tax, unemployment insurance pays benefits to covered workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own; for example, those laid off during a recession. It does not cover those who have been fired or quit or who are willing and able to work, but refuse to do so. The program is run by the states and benefits and eligibility vary dramatically. In 2004, the weekly benefit ranged from \$210 in Alabama to \$508 in Massachusetts. Nationwide, only half of the people counted as unemployed receive benefits.

Social Insurance: Means-Tested Programs

Supplementary Security Income—SSI began as a grant to help the needy aged or blind. To be eligible, one must have very few possessions (in other words, be truly poor and have no real assets). In 2006, monthly payments were \$603 for an individual and \$904 for a married couple. The federal government pays most of the bill, but many states supplement the federal benefits.

Family and Child Support—In 1950, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls were quite limited because there were few unmarried mothers in the 1930s (or at least few who were willing to admit it or accept the federal dole!), and most were considered to be widowed (again, a dubious claim). But regardless, since 1960, the number of unmarried mothers has exploded due to unwed mothers, a growing divorce rate, and the migration of the poor to cities where they are more likely to need and apply for federal benefits.

Since at least 1980, this program has generated a lot of controversy and is the program most people refer to when they say “welfare” in a negative way. Critics claim AFDC encourages poor women to have more children and engage in promiscuity, as well

as creating a permanent underclass of dependent citizens on welfare. In reality, few “welfare queens” exist. The average woman on AFDC is on the program for less than a year, is white, and has one child!

There have been numerous attempts to reform AFDC in many ways, including through adding education and training programs. Most recently, the 1996 Welfare Reform Act abolished AFDC as a program providing cash benefits. It was reworked as block grants with a number of stipulations: 1) mothers of children over five must work within two years of receiving benefits; 2) unmarried mothers under eighteen must live with an adult and attend school to be eligible; 3) a five year life time limit for aid was established; 4) mothers must provide information about the child’s father to be eligible; 5) food stamps and SSI are cut off for illegal immigrants; 6) cash welfare benefits and food stamps are no longer given to convicted drug felons; and 7) food stamps are limited to three months for persons 18-50 who are not raising children or working. The results of these dramatic changes are only just beginning to be felt.

Earned Income Tax Credit Program (EITC)

This program was designed to help the working poor and provides an average tax credit of \$1,470 to almost 19 million workers and their families. This program was designed to help encourage people to move from welfare to employment. It would also help redress the regressive nature of the Social Security tax.

Food Stamp Program

Originally, food stamps were an effort to increase the domestic market for farm commodities. The average participant received \$93 worth of stamps a month in 2005, and, to qualify, had to be a family of four earning less than \$1,571 net per month. Other food-based programs include nutritional assistance for women, infants, and children (WIC), school breakfast and lunch programs, and emergency food assistance programs.

The Effectiveness of Income Security Programs

Many income security programs are called entitlement programs because Congress sets eligibility criteria (age, income level, employment status...), and those who meet the criteria are legally “entitled” to receive benefits. Spending for entitlement programs is mandatory. Funds must be provided unless the laws creating the programs are changed. This makes it very difficult to control spending for entitlements.

Income security programs have not cured poverty. They are basically alleviative and not curative. They make life a little easier but don’t solve anything.

Health Care

The government has been involved with health care since the early republic. In 2006, the U.S. government spent \$68.9 billion on health, more than any other country. Yet, the United States ranks 37th in quality of health care. Billions of dollars are spent on research, doctors, institutes, and the public health. Much of the money goes to two programs: Medicare and Medicaid.

Medicare—covers people who receive Social Security benefits. Medicare Part A covers all Americans automatically at age 65 and covers hospitalization, some skilled nursing

care, and home health services. Individuals pay about \$700 in medical bills before Part A kicks in. Medicare is financed by a payroll tax of 1.45 percent paid by employers and employees on total wages and salaries.

Part B is optional and covers physicians' services, outpatient and diagnostics, X-rays, and other items not covered in Part A. Excluded are eyeglasses, prescription drugs, hearing aids, and dentures.

Part D is the new prescription drug benefit mentioned in the opening vignette of the chapter. For those who participate, there is a monthly premium of \$35, an annual deductible of \$250, and the plan pays 75 percent of covered medicines. If your annual drug costs exceed \$5,100, the program can pay 95 percent. There are, however, odd gaps in coverage. Democrats charge that the primary beneficiaries of this plan are the drug companies. The government, under this law, is expressly prohibited from negotiating lower drug prices for Medicare drugs. It is also a hugely expensive benefit.

As people live longer, Medicare has become more costly. The elderly need more medical services and medical care costs are rising. Attempts to control costs have not been very effective, and the lobby in favor of these entitlements is quite strong (remember, older people are far more likely to vote than younger people).

Medicaid—Medicaid provides medical insurance to the poor including hospitalization, physicians' services, prescription drugs, and long-term nursing care (unlike Medicare) to all who qualify as needy under AFDC and SSI.

Medicaid is jointly financed by states and the national government. The national government pays from 50-79 percent of Medicaid costs based on average per capita income (meaning poor states get more federal monies).

Public Education

Historically, state and local governments funded public education; however, the national government has always been involved. In 2003, \$400 billion was spent on public education (elementary through high school), of this 48.7 percent came from states, 42.8 percent from local governments, and 8.5 percent from the national government.

Federal Aid to Education

The national government's participation in public education began in 1787 with the passage of the Northwest Ordinance that set aside one section of land in each township in the Northwest Territories to support education (today, the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin). WWII gave us the GI Bill and the baby boom that overfilled classrooms across the country. Many schools had to operate in shifts to accommodate all the students. Federal aid became a necessary part of the solution to many people.

Beginning in the 1960s and accelerating thereafter, students with learning disabilities and special needs moved onto the national policy agenda. The federal government mandated programs for these students, but often did not provide funding. This included seriously disabled students who, by law, were not entitled to "free appropriate education" through the public schools: an expensive proposition. In the past, such students had been excluded from public school and enrolled in special institutions. The federal government provides about 1/5th the cost of educating each disabled student.

By 1988, schools were once again in trouble. This time, the demand was to set higher standards and ensure students were truly getting educated. Goals 2000 was enacted by Congress in 1994 and called for national standards, but compliance was voluntary for the states. According to Goals 2000, all high school graduates should know how to use a calculator, use an atlas or map, understand heredity, and a number of other measures of how much the students know.

In 2002, George W. Bush made federal standards mandatory in the No Child Left Behind Act. All school districts are required to show that all students meet certain standards. Schools must use proficiency tests to determine if students meet standards. Critics of the program argue that it fosters teaching to the test instead of the student, that multiple choice testing is not the ideal way to measure knowledge, that the program is underfunded and causing test manufacturers to get rich, while the public schools spend huge amounts on the tests instead of on education. Supporters claim that poorly performing schools need the accountability, that the parental choice options of the act benefit families, and that the law will enable the country to close the achievement gap between poor and rich students.

Inequality in Spending Among School Districts

Schools were traditionally financed by property taxes. This usually meant that rich neighborhoods with expensive houses got great schools and poor neighborhoods with rundown properties received bad or poorly equipped schools. This funding system has been challenged in the courts and is losing. The inequalities have been ruled unconstitutional in a number of states, including Texas and Michigan, who now pool state monies to pay for schools together with pooled property taxes and spend them equitably throughout the state.

Voucher Plans and Charter Schools

Some believe that competition and the free market can solve the problems of public schools and have championed voucher plans and charter schools. Free choice of schools would force poorly performing schools to reform or close their doors as parents and students choose higher-quality institutions.

Minority parents, trapped in poorly performing schools, have been among the strongest supporters of vouchers. The Republican Party supports vouchers and charter schools. The Democrats tend to be more wary. Teachers' unions and the NAACP have stated their opposition as well.

Opponents of vouchers and charter schools argue that they undermine public education—particularly since most schemes allow vouchers to be used for private schools. Some also say that since charter schools can more easily choose whom they enroll, it is easier for them to excel than for truly public schools that must accept all students. These are just a few of the arguments on each side. It is a truly complicated and interesting debate that deserves more attention, particularly since we now are getting data about how the programs are working in Michigan, Washington, D.C., Minnesota, and other states.

Conclusion

In general, social welfare policies are difficult and complex and are made more so by the general lack of knowledge and misinformation so common among Americans. The issues here are also complicated by ideology. We often tend to see the world through our ideological blinders, but particularly when talking about social policies, we need to get beyond that and really think about the issues and why we believe the way we do, using accurate information and common sense. We have only scratched the surface here. The text offers a number of ways to find out more from many sources. Also, there are a number of informative Web sites and I encourage you to explore more.

Web Sites for Instructors

American Enterprise Institute is a conservative think tank that addresses a variety of issues. Their Web site offers information on their calendar of events, a variety of articles, and links.

www.aei.org

American Federation of Teachers offers their perspective on “No Child Left Behind.”

www.aft.org/topics/nclb/

The Brookings Institution is the oldest think tank in America and has the reputation of being fairly moderate. Their Web site offers policy briefings, articles, books, *The Brookings Review*, discussion groups, and links.

www.brook.edu

The Cato Institute is a Libertarian think tank promoting free market ideas. Their Web site offers a variety of articles and links.

www.cato.org

Children’s Defense Fund Web site has many articles and links of interest to advocates for issues affecting children and families. They offer a listserv and publications.

www.childrensdefense.org/

The Concord Coalition is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to eliminating federal budget deficits and ensuring Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are secure for all generations; founded by Paul Tsongas (D) and Warren Rudman (R). The Coalition Web site offers lots of information about the debt and deficit, as well as some social policy issues. They offer e-mail newsletters, grassroots initiatives, statistics, and more.

www.concordcoalition.org/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers information about public policies related to health and other issues under their purview.

www.hhs.gov

Joint Center for Poverty Research offers numerous working papers, policy briefs, research summaries, and so on through their Web site. They also sponsor conferences and events.

www.jcpr.org

National Public Radio offers their own assessments, as well as a look at both Bush and Kerry's opinions about the issues of the 2004 election, including "No Child Left Behind," Medicare prescription drug benefits, and more. They also offer links to other Web resources about these issues.

www.npr.org/politics/issues2004/

Northwestern University's Politics, Institutions, and Public Policy Program has information about social welfare issues and links to other sites including information about welfare states in comparative perspective.

www.northwestern.edu/ipr/research/welfarestates.html

Almanac of Policy Issues has a wide array of information about policy related issues and has numerous links to more information.

www.policyalmanac.org/social_welfare/index.shtml

The U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) Web site has information, rules, regulations, and policies of the federal government on Social Security both active and proposed. It offers information for citizens, scholars, and recipients. The Web site also offers historical perspectives on Social Security and its funding.

www.ssa.gov

The **U.S. Department of Education** offers extensive information about the Bush Administration policy "No Child Left Behind," as well as other Department of Education programs. Numerous statistics and facts are easily accessible from the homepage.

www.ed.gov

Web Activities for Classes

- 1) Debate the merits of "No Child Left Behind." Have students begin with the Bush administration views at the Department of Education Web site (www.ed.gov). They can then branch out to opposition Web sites such as www.aft.org/topics/nclb/.
- 2) Go to the Web site of the House of Representatives or call your local representative's office. Find out what social welfare laws are on the agenda for this session of Congress. Choose one and follow it over the course of the semester. Pay attention to partisan issues, which interest groups get involved and how, which members of Congress sponsor the bill, and how this bill fits the policy process you have learned about in this chapter.

- 3) Go to the library or the Internet and find out what the official poverty level is in this country and the demographics of poor people and folks who receive federal assistance (one possible source is Meredith Bagby's *The Actual State of the Nation*). In addition, do some additional research about the policies designed to help the poor. Discuss what the country is doing for the poor. Is it enough? Why, or why not?
- 4) There has been a debate recently about how appropriate the current poverty line is. Have students research the debate and find out how the U.S. comes to this number and how other countries compute the statistic. Discuss the ramifications of different outcomes if the poverty level were refigured.

General Class Activities and Discussion Assignments

- 1) In the last five years, many of the responsibilities for social welfare policies have been delegated to the states. Have students choose three states and find out what they are doing regarding social welfare. Are the states different or similar in their approach? Why?
- 2) Assign the following: Interview your grandparents or older people in your neighborhood about the impact of the GI Bill on their lives and education. Find out whether their parents ever went to college and whether they think they would have been able to attend without the GI Bill. You may also want to ask them about what they learned in high school and college, including asking them if they still have their old textbooks. Use that information to evaluate the current state of education in the country. Do they have different ideas than you do? Why do you think that might be?
- 3) Hold a class discussion about policies designed to increase income security.

Possible Simulations

- 1) Assign groups of students to represent the following points of view: U.S. Department of Education, Texas Department of Education, Florida Department of Education, Minnesota Department of Education, Save the Children, the NEA, and the PTA. Have them research the points of view and stage a debate about the role of the national government in education, the need for bilingual education, and/or the use of testing as a tool of assessment in the schools.

Additional Sources

Brookings Papers on Education Policy, www.brookings.edu/gs/brown/bpep/2001.htm

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