



FACTS & OPINIONS

On Public Interest Issues

Quotes

“When buying and selling are controlled by legislation, the first things to be bought and sold are legislators.”

-- P.J. O'Rourke (1947 –)
American political satirist
and writer.

“Surely, it is much easier to respect a man who has always had respect, than to respect a man who we know was last year no better than ourselves, and will be no better next year.”

-- Samuel Johnson
(1709–1784),
English author, critic,
and lexicographer

“Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance.”

-- Samuel Johnson

“The world is not yet exhausted, let me see something tomorrow which I never saw before.”

-- Samuel Johnson

The Excellence Gap

Our public schools are shortchanging their best students

by Sol Stern

If an out-of-control national debt weren't reason enough to worry about America's global competitiveness, here's another.

Virtually all education reformers recognize that America's ability to remain an economic superpower depends to a significant degree on the number and quality of engineers, scientists, and mathematicians graduating from our colleges and universities. Scientific innovation has generated as much as half of all U.S. economic growth over the past half-century. But the number of graduates in these fields has declined steadily for several decades.

A report by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation concludes that “bachelor's degrees in engineering granted to Americans peaked in 1985 and are now 23 percent below that level.” Further, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 6 percent of U.S. undergraduates currently major in engineering, compared with 12 percent in Europe and closer to

20 percent in Japan and South Korea. The U.S. scores near the bottom relative to major European countries, Canada, and Japan in the percentage of college graduates obtaining degrees in science, math, computer science, and engineering. It's likely no coincidence that the World Economic Forum now ranks the U.S. fifth among industrialized countries in global competitiveness, down from first place in 2008.

Additionally, America's best students — children we're counting on to become those engineers, scientists, and mathematicians — have had a drop-off in academic performance over the past decade. A recent Thomas B. Fordham Institute study finds that the country's highest-performing students in the early grades are losing some of that advantage as they move through elementary school and into high school.

Ironically, one reason for their slipping performance is almost certainly the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, the most significant federal

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Focus on Iowa Wesleyan College

The Spring 2012 semester at IWC began on January 9, with a full campus. The semester will end on May 3. Baccalaureate will be on Saturday, May 5, at 10:00 a.m., followed by Commencement at 1:30 p.m.

Religion Speaker on Campus

The Reverend Joy Carroll Wallis, inspiration for the British hit comedy series "The Vicar of Dibley," will be the featured speaker for the **2012 Manning Lectures in Religion** at IWC on February 9. Rev. Wallis will speak at the 11:00 a.m. all-school forum and lecture at 7:00p.m.

Joy Carroll grew up in the inner city of South London, England, where her father was an Anglican priest. In 1978, she spent a year working in Haiti with a relief mission, before returning home to train to be a teacher.

After earning a Bachelor of Education, she taught for three years, before training in the ministry in the Anglican Church of England. Joy was one of the first women to be ordained as a priest in England in 1994. Her ministry in inner-city parishes embraced the needs of the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, families, and the elderly.

Joy is a gifted preacher and

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communicator. In 1995, the BBC Everyman series made a documentary marking the first anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood. They profiled Joy's work in inner-city London and highlighted the new dimensions that women priests are bringing into the church.

Joy was also the advisor to British writer Richard Curtis, ("Notting Hill" and "Four Weddings and a Funeral") as well as the inspiration and role model for his hit situation comedy series "The Vicar of Dibley," starring Dawn French.

In October 1997, Joy married Jim Wallis. They have two sons. She currently lives in Washington, D.C. where she is licensed as a Priest in the Episcopal Church. There she runs the school PTA and is a Little League Baseball Commissioner!

She has written a book about her life and work as a priest in the Church of England: 'Beneath the Cassock. The Real life Vicar of Dibley,' published in 2002. The American edition is entitled 'The Woman Behind the Collar' and has a foreword from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Athletic Conference Change

On December 8, 2011 the St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SLIAC) announced that Iowa Wesleyan College was been approved for membership in the Conference.

Iowa Wesleyan was previously a member of the NAIA's Midwest Collegiate Conference and Mid-States Football Association. Athletic teams will begin competition in the SLIAC during the 2013-14 academic year.

The IWC Board of Trustees voted in October to apply for membership in the NCAA

Division III.

“As Chairman of the Presidents’ Council of the SLIAC, I am pleased to announce that Iowa Wesleyan College has applied for and been granted membership,” said Dr. Dennis C. Golden, President of Fontbonne University. “Iowa Wesleyan has demonstrated a commitment to the same values as our members. I believe that IWC will be a positive addition to the Conference and we welcome them to the SLIAC.”

“We are pleased to welcome Iowa Wesleyan College as the 10th member of the SLIAC. Our administrators are thoroughly impressed by the knowledge of, and commitment to, Division III demonstrated by President Simmons and Vice President Buchanan, and their genuine belief that the NCAA and Division are the appropriate place for the Tiger athletic programs,” SLIAC Commissioner William J. Wolper said.

“The institution is a great fit for our Conference, academically, athletically and philosophically. They align greatly with our current members, and we are confident they will be great partners as we continue to enhance the collegiate experience of our student-athletes.”

The move came as a result of a recommendation of the IWC Board’s Enrollment Management and Athletics Task Force. That group has focused on developing recommendations to help build student enrollment through recruitment and retention strategies.

President Dr. Jay Simmons said, “As an NCAA D-III school, our scholarship focus would shift to give us greater equity in scholarship support for athletes and non-athletes as all of the College’s institutional aid would be based on academic merit, fine arts performance, and need.”

Facts & Opinions **Question of the Quarter:**

What will be the major accomplishment of the 2012 Iowa Legislative session?

Share your thoughts on this issue with us on our Website at <http://www.LimitedGovernment.org/FOJan2012.html> or e-mail to Public.Interest.Institute@LimitedGovernment.org.

We may publish some of your ideas in the next issue of *Facts & Opinions* in April 2012 and on our Website at: www.LimitedGovernment.org.

What's New at Public Interest Institute?

If summer was busy, fall and winter have been even busier at the Public Interest Institute.

The major event is the creation and implementation of a new Website by IT Specialist Jennifer Crull. The address is the same, <http://www.LimitedGovernment.org>, but the look is new and exciting. It includes the ability to search the site by both topic and author, as well as date and publication.

The lead quotation on the Website is by George Washington, “A government is like fire, a handy servant, but a dangerous master!” This is truer today than it was over 235 years ago! Check out the new site! Be sure to “Friend” us on your Facebook page, and follow us on Twitter at #PIIatLimitedGov.

In December Brief #18-34 *The Benefits of Broadband: Connecting Iowa to the 21st Century Economy* was written by PII Chief Operating Officer Dr. Don Racheter.

#18-35, *Changing the Energy/Environment Discussion* was by guest author Marita Noon, Executive Director of Energy Makes America Great, Inc.

#18-36, *Replace the Job-Killing Corporate Tax with a Border-Adjusted Consumption Tax* was by another guest author, Tom Pauken, Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission.

POLICY STUDY #12-1, *Iowa’s Privileged Class: Time for a Change!* by Deborah D. Thornton, on the issues and concerns surrounding the financial status of IPERS, was published in January 2012.

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Ronald Reagan's Moral Courage

by Andrew Roberts

The defining feature of Ronald Reagan was his moral courage. It takes tremendous moral courage to resist the overwhelming tide of received opinion and so-called expert wisdom and to say and do exactly the opposite.

It could not have been pleasant for Reagan to be denounced as an ignorant cowboy, an extremist, a warmonger, a fascist, or worse. Yet Reagan responded to those brickbats with the cheery resolve that characterized not only the man, but his entire career. He proceeded during his two terms as President to prove his critics completely wrong.

During Reagan's presidency, America enjoyed its longest period of sustained economic growth in the 20th century. In the realm of foreign policy, the Reagan Doctrine led to the defeat of the worst totalitarian scourge to blight the globe since the defeat of the Nazis in World War II.

By the time he left office, the faith of Americans in the greatness of their country had been restored. Reagan's was a great American success story. He ended his days as the single most important American conservative figure of the last century. Not bad for an ignorant cowboy.

Reagan understood that the doctrines of Marxism and Leninism were fundamentally opposed to the deepest and best impulses of human nature.

Enforcing such doctrines would require vicious oppres-

sion, including propaganda, secret police, a corrupt judicial system, huge standing armies, children spying on their parents, the Berlin Wall, a gagged media, a shackled populace, a privileged nomenklatura, puppet trade unions, a subservient academy, and above all, what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn dubbed a "gulag archipelago" of concentration camps.

In sum, the entire apparatus that Reagan characterized so truthfully in a March 1983 speech as an "evil empire." Yet he was immediately accused — not just in Russia, but also here in the West — of being mad, bad, and dangerous. Today, thanks to his published correspondence, we know that he was anything but.

Reagan was very widely read and a thoughtful man, but it suited his purposes to be underestimated by his opponents. The cultural condescension of those experts and intellectuals who denounced his evil empire speech as unacceptably simplistic — even simple-minded — worked to Reagan's advantage. Although history was to prove him right in every particular about the true nature of the U.S.S.R., none of his critics have ever admitted as much.

What helped to make Reagan great was that he couldn't care less what his critics thought of him. He knew the image of the swaggering cowboy was very far removed from reality, but if his opponents chose to be mesmerized by it,

all the better for him.

It was he, not they, who in 1987 would stand at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and demand: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" The Left's strategy of détente had been tried for 40 years, and it had led to ever wider Communist incursions, especially during the 1970s, into territories across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The Reagan Doctrine marked a turn away from the doctrine of containment. Reagan bravely declared that communism's march would not merely be checked but reversed. Non-Communist governments would be supported actively, and Communist governments would be undermined and if possible overthrown.

Reagan did not act in the name of American imperialism, as his opponents alleged, but rather in the name of human dignity. As he fought the Communists, he received more and more support from the American people.

The Kremlin soon recognized that in Reagan it had a powerful and committed foe on its hands, one who took seriously JFK's words in his Inaugural Address, that the United States "shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, and oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."

Believing in American exceptionalism, Reagan deployed an extensive political, economic, military, and psychological

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arsenal to confront the Soviet Union. And he did so mostly through proxies: Except for the Caribbean island of Grenada, where American citizens were in danger, he did not commit American troops to the battle.

The overly cautious, nerve-racked, and humiliated America of 1979 and 1980 — when 52 American diplomats were taken hostage in Tehran for 444 days and were paraded, hooded and blindfolded, in the streets — gave way to a virile and self-confident America.

It was no accident that, on the very day of Reagan's inauguration, the Iranian regime released the hostages rather than face the fury of the incoming President.

In the words of Margaret Thatcher, Reagan helped the world break free of a monstrous creed. He understood that, in addition to being morally bankrupt — as it had been since the Bolshevik Revolution — the Soviet system was also financially bankrupt. Five-year plans had not delivered, because human beings simply will not work hard for an all-powerful state that will not pay them fairly for their labor.

In the 1980s, Americans felt confident enough in their country's future to spend, produce, and consume in a way they hadn't under Jimmy Carter and don't today.

Reagan genuinely believed that it was "Morning in America." His confidence in the country and its abilities spread to the American people and to the markets. Strong, confident leadership is infectious.

There can be a virtuous cycle in economics, just as

there can be a vicious one. Reagan's Economic Recovery Act and his Tax Reform Act were the twin pillars of America's renaissance in the 1980s. He reduced the highest marginal tax rate to 28 percent and simplified the tax code. He deregulated industry, tightened the money supply, and reduced the growth of public expenditure.

By 1983, America had completely recovered economically, and by 1988, inflation, which had been at 12.5 percent under Carter, was down to 4.4 percent. Unemployment came down to 5.5 percent as 18 million new jobs were created.

Beneath Reagan's folksy charm and anecdotes was a steely will and a determination to re-establish the moral superiority of democracy over totalitarianism, of the individual over the state, of freedom of speech over censorship, of faith over government-mandated atheism, and of free enterprise over the command economy.

As the leader of the free world, he saw it as his responsibility to defend, extend, and above all proselytize for democracy and human dignity.

Reagan understood leadership in a way that is sadly lacking in the West today. "To grasp and hold a vision," he said in 1994, "that is the very essence of successful leadership. Not only on the movie set where I learned it, but every-

where."

Indeed, in some ways the world is an even more perilous place than it was in Reagan's day. President Ahmadinejad of Iran is building a nuclear bomb while publicly calling for Israel to be wiped off the map. We know from the experience of 9/11 that Al Qaeda would not hesitate to explode a nuclear device in America.

When looking at the dangers facing civilization today, there is this one vital difference from 30 years ago: I can see no leaders of the stamp of Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher presently on hand to infuse us with that iron purpose and that sense of optimism.

Indeed, some of our present-day leaders only seem to make matters worse. Reagan wrote in his 1994 farewell message to the American people: "When the Lord calls me home, I will leave with the greatest love for this country of ours and eternal optimism for its future. I know that for America, there will always be a bright dawn ahead."

Though characteristically upbeat, it will only remain true so long as America continues to produce leaders with the moral courage and the leadership abilities of Ronald Reagan.

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Andrew Roberts received his Ph.D. at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He wrote A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900, Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West, 1941-1945, and The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War.

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education-reform legislation of the past half-century.

NCLB became law thanks to a rare bipartisan consensus that U.S. public schools were failing to turn out high school graduates who could flourish in a technology-based economy. Democrats and Republicans need to reunite and recognize that federal support for elite education — above all, in math and science — is essential for advancing America’s economic success.

No Child Left Behind was propelled by a moral imperative best expressed by President George W. Bush’s call to overcome the “soft bigotry of low expectations.”

The new law’s “civil rights” component shaped some of its features, including holding school districts accountable for their success in narrowing racial achievement gaps. Before NCLB, the federal government had sought to achieve some degree of educational equity through the Title I compensatory funding program. This yielded meager results, however, and suffered from lack of accountability. With NCLB, the federal government took a new, interventionist approach to education reform, requiring states and school districts to meet certain goals and mandates in return for Title I funds. The states henceforth had to conduct annual tests in reading and math for all children in grades three through eight, with the results — broken down by race, sex, and socioeconomic status — made public.

Unfortunately, NCLB also left the door wide open to the corruption of educational standards. The law demanded that all American students be “proficient” in reading and math by 2014 and imposed increasingly

onerous sanctions on districts and schools that failed to make adequate progress toward that goal — but then let each state set its own proficiency standard. To look good to the feds and the public, education authorities unsurprisingly lowered standards and found other ways to game the tests.

But NCLB’s accountability system led to another distortion, this one harming top students.

Because the law emphasized mere “proficiency,” rewarding schools for getting their students to achieve that fairly low standard, teachers and administrators had an incentive to boost the test scores of their lowest-performing students but no incentive to improve instruction for their brightest.

Robert Pondiscio, communications director for the Core Knowledge Foundation and a former New York City Teaching Fellow, describes how the process worked at his South Bronx elementary school. “Eighty percent of the kids in my fifth-grade class were scoring at the two lowest levels on the state reading and math tests,” he recalls.

“Early in my teaching career, an assistant principal told me that the kids in my class already scoring a 3 or 4 ‘are not your problem.’ In other words, my goal should be to move the kids scoring at the lower levels up a few points on the scale.... My job was to get more kids over the lowest two hurdles, because that’s how the school was rewarded for good performance in the city’s accountability system.”

As a result, Pondiscio says, the few gifted minority students in his class didn’t receive any extra attention — attention that could have given them a better chance to pass the rigorous test for admission to one of the city’s elite specialized science

and math high schools. That’s especially sad when you learn that the percentage of black students passing the admissions test for top-ranked Stuyvesant High School has dropped steadily over the past decade. Last year, it fell below 1 percent.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, California educator Susan Goodkin similarly showed how NCLB’s requirements were undermining high achievement in her state. “Teachers must contend with constant pressure to focus their attention simply on bringing all students to proficiency on grade-level standards,” Goodkin wrote. “The highest ‘grade’ a child can receive indicates only that he or she ‘meets/exceeds the standard.’”

The unmistakable message to teachers — and to students — is that it makes no difference whether a child barely meets the proficiency standard or far exceeds it. Not surprisingly, with the entire curriculum geared to ensuring that every last child reaches grade-level proficiency, there is precious little attention paid to the many children who master the standards early in the year and are ready to move on to more challenging work.”

And so, in the No Child Left Behind era, America’s elite students have often found themselves left behind — or at least taken for granted. “Let’s be honest about the trade-offs,” said Fordham Institute vice president Michael Petrilli, commenting on the institute’s study. “We’ve been making good progress for kids at the bottom and for poor and minority kids — that’s important. It just can’t be the only thing that we do.”

Though I was among the education writers who enthusiastically supported No Child

Left Behind, I should have realized that by focusing almost exclusively on the educationally disadvantaged, yet ignoring the country's future scientists, mathematicians, and engineers, NCLB — despite its framers' best intentions — would damage America's competitiveness. As noble as combating "the soft bigotry of low expectations" is, America's global standing and economic well-being are more likely to be improved by nurturing a culture of academic excellence and creating programs that support elite education in math and the sciences.

NCLB could easily have included reforms to benefit academically gifted students — for example, using financial incentives to encourage states and school districts to expand programs for gifted kids in the early grades and to create more merit-based science and mathematics high schools. The idea of strengthening elite education never entered the NCLB conversation, however; the civil rights agenda pushed everything else off the table.

A decade later, despite indications of academic decline among the country's top students, education policymakers still haven't expressed much interest in improving instruction for high achievers.

Look on the website of the U.S. Department of Education, and you'll find the usual impossibly optimistic boilerplate about bridging achievement gaps. "Under the Obama administration," says one report, "education has become an urgent priority. By 2020, we will close the achievement gap so that all students — regardless of race, income, or neighborhood — graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers."

Meanwhile, Congress eliminated \$7.5 million in funding

for the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Program earlier this year.

Regrettably, the states haven't done much better in helping gifted youngsters achieve their best.

Perhaps the best indicator of the states' neglect is that fewer than 100 science and math high schools currently exist across the country, and they enroll only 47,000 students. This is an absurdly low number, particularly when you consider the declining number of American students pursuing advanced science and engineering degrees.

Yes, there are lots of good comprehensive high schools, primarily in wealthy suburbs, that provide top science and math students with opportunities to excel, and to take college-level courses.

But graduates of dedicated science and math high schools are, on average, better prepared for advanced college-level academics and far more likely to pursue undergraduate and advanced degrees in "STEM studies."

Many states lack specialized math and science public high schools altogether. New York City, though, has eight, with admission to each determined entirely by the applicant's score on a competitive exam. These eight schools present a model that, were it replicated throughout the country, would almost certainly raise the level of instruction for the nation's elite students.

The three largest of the schools — Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech, with a total enrollment of about 10,000 students — have been around for a century. So has another, Hunter College High School, which begins in seventh grade.

Three new schools, each with about 400 students,

opened in 2001 on campuses of the City University of New York.

It is remarkable that these schools have been able to maintain their uncompromising meritocracy. In the 1970s, New York's quintessentially liberal mayor, John Lindsay, tried to get their admissions policy changed by claiming that the entrance test was "culturally biased." But parents at the schools pushed back and successfully petitioned the state Legislature to preserve the test as the sole basis for admission by writing it into New York's education law. Periodically since then, advocacy groups (including ACORN) have made similar charges that the admissions tests are biased and should be scrapped.

The specialized high schools, though, have turned out thousands of extraordinarily talented graduates. Bronx Science boasts seven Nobel laureates among its graduates and Stuyvesant four. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan is a Hunter graduate.

This success has come despite the schools' having to operate in less than ideal conditions. (I know this partly because both my sons attended Stuyvesant and my wife teaches in one of the new specialized high schools.) The 41-year-old state law that preserved the elite science and math schools as a meritocracy offered them

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no relief from the bureaucratic regulations and corrosive work rules that hamper every public school in the city. Among the worst regulations is the prohibition against hiring instructors who, though they may have advanced science or math degrees, lack a state teaching license.

The single pay schedule mandated by the union contract is another obstacle to success. Thanks to it, a gym teacher earns the same salary as a colleague with a mathematics Ph.D. teaching college-level calculus. In fact, the gym teacher may earn more.

A decade after passing NCLB Congress needs to correct one of the law's most damaging oversights. An amended NCLB could direct the federal Department of Education to offer financial incentives to states to boost the number of competitive, specialized high schools, but free of their bureaucratic and union constraints.

These specialized high schools, in fact, could be charter schools. Education reformers have viewed charters as a way to lift up the educationally disadvantaged. But charters could also play a role in improving instruction for the smartest students. Universities' engineering schools could create charter engineering high schools. Top students could take college-level engineering courses and obtain early admission to the university. IBM and Microsoft could sponsor charter schools for science and math.

America will gain if school reformers get over the idea that elite education is undemocratic or comes at the expense of the disadvantaged. Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, laid out an education blueprint that included a separate, dedicated instructional track for the most academically gifted. "The ultimate result of the whole scheme of education would be teaching all the

children of the state reading, writing, and common arithmetic," proclaimed the Founders' greatest democrat, "turning out ten annually of superior genius, well taught in Greek, Latin, geography, and the higher branches of arithmetic: turning out ten others annually, of still superior parts, who, to those branches of learning, shall have added such of the sciences as their genius shall have led them to."

The next iteration of No Child Left Behind should have a great deal more of this Jeffersonian belief that, though America's schools should educate all children well, they should also nurture academic excellence for the good of our democracy.

Reprinted with permission of the Manhattan Institute, Autumn 2011, Volume 21, No. 4. Sol Stern is a contributing editor of City Journal and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.