

HILDRETH LECTURE

National Public Policy Education Conference
Salt Lake City, Utah
B. L. Flinchbaugh, Ph.D.
Professor, Kansas State University
September 22, 2003

It is indeed a privilege and an honor to be invited to deliver what I anticipate will be the first annual James R. Hildreth Lecture. Although I always argued that one should never call anything the first annual just in case it fails and there isn't a second one.

I have attended every NPPEC since 1969 in Indiana and since I'm retiring from Extension in June of 2004, this is likely to be my last one. I intend to stay active by continuing to teach the undergraduate policy course at Kansas State University and do some speaking across the country. So, this lecture can be viewed as a swan song or just wind from an "ole" professor depending on your attitude.

As I look back on 34 years as an active public policy specialist, I find that three statesmen and practitioners of the "art" of public policy education had the most influence on me: J. Carroll Bottum (my major professor at Purdue University), J.B. "Heavy" Kohlmeyer (an informal advisor at Purdue University), and James R. Hildreth, the long time head of Farm Foundation for whom this lecture series is named.

Hildreth and Farm Foundation clearly have had the most influence on the "art" of public policy education of any individual or institution in the country. Farm Foundation has been the catalyst and provided millions of

dollars of seed money for thousands of public policy education projects since its founding in 1933. Without the Foundation, I doubt if there would be a profession of policy educators. Certainly, there wouldn't be policy educators throughout the land-grant system who practice the "art" of non-advocacy policy education were it not for the influence of the Foundation. Given the investment of Farm Foundation in policy education, when they ask for our support, we have an obligation to respond.

Notice I use the word "art" continuously. It isn't a science, therefore it takes a unique set of skills to be a practitioner or educator in the policy arena. What sets policy specialists apart from other educators is not their interest in policy issues, but their respect for the "art" of policy education.

I remember every day a quote from each of the three gentlemen I just mentioned. Hildreth was fond of saying that education, especially on policy issues, was moving from "cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty." Bottum would constantly remind his students and the farmers of Indiana that in a democracy "everyone is welcome to his or her own set of values, but not his or her own set of facts." Kohlmeyer loved to tell young folks just beginning in this art, "in order to teach a dog, you have to be smarter than the dog." Sage advice and

observation from giants of the profession. These giants, among others, were the pioneers. My generation built on and advanced their work. Now it's up to you to take the "art" of policy education into the 21st century. It's at a crossroad. The number of practitioners is declining. It won't be easy. Are you up to the challenge?

Successful practitioners of the art of policy education rely on the alternative/consequences approach. Bottum and Kohlmeyer were pioneers in using this approach as they educated farmers on agricultural policy, and taxpayers and public officials on financing state and local government. There is a story that I assume has been embellished over the years, as all true stories are, about how they learned their lesson the hard way. In the thirties, as the depression on the farm worsened, President Hoover established a Federal Farm Board to solve the problem. Bottum and Kohlmeyer were invited to discuss Hoover's Board before The Chicago Farmers. They informed the Club that Hoover's approach was basically too little and too late. Headline in the Chicago Tribune: "Purdue Professors Blast Hoover's Board." The Extension Director at Purdue, at the time, was a close advisor to President Hoover. These two young professors met the train early the next morning in Lafayette,

Indiana, and bought all the *Chicago Tribunes* that had arrived hoping that the boss wouldn't see the newspaper. They vowed right then and there that there had to be a better way. For the next 40 years, they used the alternative/consequences approach. This approach has been embellished and supplemented with additional tools through the work of Farm Foundation, but the core remains the same—education not advocacy or prescription.

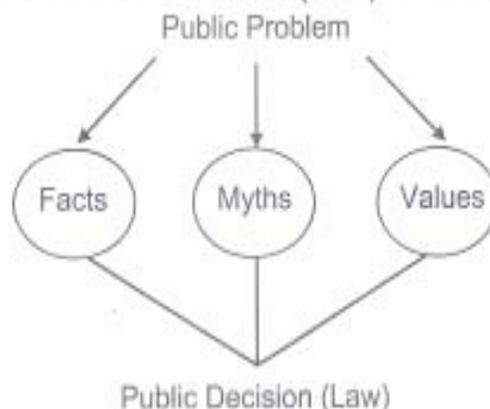
I always carry two overheads in my briefcase—(they have even been converted to Powerpoint though I rarely use this unreliable form of visuals)—that I consider the guts of practicing this "art": Fact, Myths and Values and Kings and Kingmakers. Both I developed from listening to the masters.

The purpose of policy education is to establish fact, destroy myth and, in the true Jeffersonian sense, respect the values of the citizenry. If the educator is going to witness the fruits of his or her labor, he or she must reach the minds of the decision-makers and, therefore, I have found the Kings-Kingmakers model the most useful. That's how the real world operates. The policy specialist must get out of the ivory tower and "break bread" with the movers and shakers.

Community Influence Triangle



How Public Decisions (laws) Are Made



The approach is relatively straight-forward. Define the problem, discuss the alternative solutions and their probable consequences backed by research and empirical observations, and then leave the decision to the body politic.

Allow me to digress for a moment. I mentioned Jefferson. Why? Because I really believe if practitioners of the “art” are going to be successful, they must be a Jeffersonian at heart rather than a Hamiltonian. Remember these two revolutionary giants. They both professed love of the people. Hamilton loved them so much he wanted to be the father figure choosing what was right for the people. Jefferson said, no, we will educate them and then they will be equipped to do what is right for themselves. Policy education is Jeffersonian objective analysis. To impose ones values on others as an educator exhibits Hamiltonian arrogance and elitism.

I learned this lesson first hand early in my career. There was a school bond issue on the ballot in Manhattan, Kan., shortly after I had completed a series of meetings on school finance across the state. The janitor in my building on campus had three kids in the school system. We talked at length each day about the consequences of voting for it and against it as he came by to empty my waste can. By coincidence, we found ourselves on election day in adjacent voting booths. The janitor and the school finance “expert” each had one vote. As we departed, he looked me straight in the eye and said, “Professor, how did you vote?” I was somewhat taken aback, but I informed him that I had voted for it. He wiped his brow, breathed a sigh of relief and announced, “You voted right.” That’s Jeffersonian.

Critics of this approach, and frankly my critics, argue that objective analysis is impossible and this approach is fraudulent. They argue I should put my values on the

table for everybody to see. I agree pure objectivity is impossible. We all are products of our environment and upbringing. My experience, however, has taught me that because it is widely known that I work at being objective, my mistakes are tolerated and I continue to have my work used in the policy arena. Frankly, the alternative/consequences approach is viewed as “about right.”

Some personal “war stories” will illustrate my point. Many of my colleagues ask me how do you survive telling farmers what they don’t want to hear? They know I respect their values and their profession, do my homework, examine the alternatives and consequences as objectively as possible and never tell them what is best for them.

For years, I sat between two Kansas Congressmen who were on the House Agricultural Committee. Each year, we would do a series of “Pat and Dan Shows” or “Dan and Pat Shows”, depending on whose district we were in. I moderated the events and never took a partisan position. Consequently, when Roberts became the Republican Chairman of the Committee and Glickman became the Secretary of Agriculture in the Clinton Administration, I had the respect of both influential gentlemen and was given the opportunity to play a unique role. I helped Chairman Roberts develop Freedom to Farm and have defended it. How can an educator do that? First, President Clinton signed it on Secretary Glickman’s advice. At that point in time, it was bi-partisan. I can defend it objectively as an economist on the grounds that it accomplished its purpose. Its purpose is based on values and therefore, I have no “tools” to support or oppose that purpose.

I was appointed to Chair the Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture, a bi-partisan Commission to examine the role of government in 21st century production agriculture. The Commission concluded that

government should provide a safety net under farm income with minimal market distortion - clearly a value judgement. I've objectively argued that the 2002 Farm Bill is a step backwards given the recommendation of the Commission. That's the key point. The value judgment of the Commission can be quarreled with in the body politic, but given the Commission's conclusion, objective analysis exhibits that the 2002 Farm Bill is a step backwards from the 1996 Farm Bill. Many would observe I'm walking a fine line. I agree, but that's necessary to maintain professional integrity while serving as a technician and an educator within the political arena.

A final war story to illustrate my points. Mark Edelman (who was my graduate student at the time) and I were commissioned by the Kansas Legislature to study the impact of use-value appraisal of farmland county-by-county and school district-by-school district. Our report, "Yes or No on Use-Value Appraisal of Farmland in Kansas", was released at a press conference.

The subject was controversial and would be voted on as a constitutional amendment at the next election. Newspapers ran the impact maps. A few days after the press conference, the data began to be questioned by a few county commissioners in western Kansas. They were right. There was a glitch in the computer program. We corrected it and had another press conference. We began with the sentence, "Computers never make mistakes, but human beings are fallible." Newspapers ran the new maps. *The Wichita Eagle* applauded us for our integrity and objectivity.

We had the privilege of observing the debate in the Kansas House and heard the proponents and the opponents use our study to argue their different positions. That November it passed and the Constitution was amended. Late that night, an Associ-

ated Press reporter called and asked me for a statement. In doing so, he implied that surely now I would state my position. I responded: "The people have spoken."

The last three decades have been very rewarding as a policy educator. I've been in the arena. Damn it's been fun, and I hope made a difference in the true Jeffersonian sense. It's time to turn it over to the next generation.

I have just read Ken Ackerman's book, *Dark Horse - The Surprise Election and Political Murder of President James A. Garfield*. It's fascinating. I wonder if the outcome would have been different if Farm Foundation and land grant universities had been engaged in policy education back then.

In 1880, 80% of the eligible voters voted. In 2000, only 40% voted. There is great opportunity for policy education in the 21st Century, but you must get off your duff and get with it. It's not enough to talk among yourselves at this conference once a year. You must convince the "powers to be" in your land grant university that public policy education is a vital part of the land grant mission. You must prepare the next generation. The commercial world is taking over many of the traditional programs at our universities in Research and Extension, but they can't provide objective information and education on public policy issues. Only you can do that. Good luck!