

Prologue

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The spring issue of American Experiment opens with a symposium—featuring forty-one eclectic writers—on President George W. Bush’s campaign for an “ownership society.” Questions posed include, “Do you think most Americans truly seek the added responsibility—perhaps even the added personal risks—that a serious ownership society would entail?” And its obverse: “Or do you think that most Americans, deep down, are more acquiescent and comfortable than they’re prone to admit when it comes to the large sway of large bureaucracies (both public and private) in shaping how they plan for their retirement, how they oversee the health of their families, how they educate their children, etc.?”

“Talking Like Jeffersonians, Governed by Hamiltonians: Owning Up to President Bush’s ‘Ownership Society,’” is the ninth *AEQ* symposium in recent years, with others having addressed topics like school choice, national security, political civility, the 2004 elections, and making marriage more child centered. As formats for the journal go, it’s the most popular one we’ve been fortunate to find. My great thanks to all writers who have contributed this time around, from both Minnesota and around the country.

Up next is an essay by me, “Health Care Costs at the End of Life: How Realistic and Reverent are Prospects for Cutting Costs?” As I note at its start, I started working on this paper before the huge controversy surrounding Terri Schiavo’s life and death erupted earlier this year, as my original aim had been to emphasize important questions *other* than those begged by her sad demise. Needless to say, the paper does, in fact, now take her case into account, though its focus remains very much on the painfully difficult life and death issues faced by everyday people every day, and not on the rarer and even bizarre agonies (as with the Schiavo case) occasionally spotlighted in the news. This paper, moreover, reflects American Experiment’s increasing interest in helping find ways of constraining health care spending before it gulps down much more than its current one-seventh of the U.S. economy.

The next two pieces are based on two recent and strong American Experiment Forums.

The first has John H. Hinderaker and Scott W. Johnson holding forth on “The Sixty-first Minute: Blogging on the Eve of Dan Rather’s Retirement.” More than 250 people attended their presentation at a special Dinner Forum in March, which got rolling mere seconds after Mr. Rather had signed-off (on two big screens in the room) as long-time anchor of the “CBS Evening News.” More specifically, Scott and John discussed the role they and their “Blog of the Year”—Power Line—played in exposing the fraudulent “60 Minutes II” report last September on President Bush’s Air National Guard service.

The second piece derived from a Center Forum has Earl L. Grinols of Baylor University detailing why gambling is a poor way of raising governmental revenues in “Gambling Doesn’t Pay: It Costs.” He made his very well-received statistically based and morally grounded presentation in April. As I write, major questions surrounding gambling in Minnesota do not seem particularly close to being resolved up on the hill in St. Paul.

Next is a fascinating and consequential three-part package on early childhood education.

Many Minnesotans know that Art Rolnick, senior vice president and director of research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, has been writing and speaking extensively in recent years about what he sees as the significant human and financial returns to be won if society were to invest more generously in quality early childhood education programs. His paper (coauthored with his Federal Reserve Bank colleague Rob Grunewald), “A Proposal for Achieving High Returns on Early Childhood Development,” outlines that case. It was originally written for a Washington conference in December and we’re proud to reprint it here. It is part one of the aforementioned three-part package.

We’re also proud to include a paper by Darcy Olsen, “Assessing Proposals for Preschool and Kindergarten: Essential Information for Parents, Taxpayers and Policymakers,” that cites and expands on a large number of caveats about early childhood education programs that are usually downplayed if they are acknowledged at all. Ms. Olsen is the president and CEO of the Goldwater Institute in Arizona, which originally published her paper in February. This is part two of the three-headed package.

The third part is an exceptionally interesting, nearly hour-long conversation between Art and Darcy on this increasingly high-profile topic. It was conducted by conference call in April, with Cheri Yecke joining me as a moderator. Their dialogue is noteworthy both for the ways they agree and the reasons they disagree—with their agreements, most importantly, emerging more frequently than their disagreements.

This edition of *AEQ* closes, as usual, with “Checker’s Desk,” keen essays on American education by Chester E. Finn Jr. His topics this time around include charter schools, “budget pigs,” and teachers who can’t teach.

Also as usual, I very much welcome your thoughts, especially letters to the editor for the upcoming summer issue.

Until then, enjoy the sun, my friends. ■