

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

Winter 2002

www.publicagenda.org

THE INSIDE SOURCE FOR PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Special Online Edition on Terrorism and Public Opinion

Since the horrific Sept. 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, Public Agenda Online has provided a Special Edition on **Terrorism and Public Opinion** (www.publicagenda.org). The regularly updated resource offers a unique overview, fact files and analyses of survey results from respected polling organizations.

Profound Sorrow and Anger

“Specific findings need to be seen in context, especially as polling results reflect sorrow, anger and the public’s effort to grasp unfamiliar issues,” cautions Jean Johnson, director of programs, Public Agenda. “Policymakers should be careful about taking every survey result literally, particularly those involving proposals people may not have thought about carefully.”

Critical Decisions in Context

The Web resource synthesizes the latest polls on terrorism, support for military action, security measures, initiatives that might affect civil liberties,



Kent Porter/© The Press Democrat, Santa Rosa, CA

Children wave flags at a safety and preparedness fair. Public Agenda’s online resource puts the nation’s anguish and resolve over terrorism into context for policymakers, journalists, citizens and students.

and attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims. It explores what the polls may mean, putting American reactions and policy options into context for legislators, policymakers and the general public.

It provides key facts on related issues; expert interviews with Public Agenda’s own chairman Daniel Yankelovich and boardmember Bobby R. Inman,

continued on page 2

The Public and the Constitution

Project with National Constitution Center Receives a \$465,000 Knight Foundation Grant

Research and education project to probe and invigorate public understanding of U.S. Constitution

Public Agenda and the Philadelphia-based National Constitution Center are launching a major research and education project aimed at improving the public’s understanding of the Constitution and the role it plays in their lives today.

The project, which is being funded with a \$465,000 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation grant, will enhance the Constitution Center’s efforts to foster civic participation by Americans of all ages.

Public Agenda will conduct a national study of the public’s views about constitutional issues and work with the Constitution Center to develop outreach activities.

The center was established by Congress to increase public awareness and understanding of the Constitution. The research and education project is being launched as construction begins on an Independence Mall home for the center, which will house a

continued on page 3

IN MEMORIAM



Cyrus Vance was a great American in the tradition of George Marshall and John McCloy. You had only to conjure up the recollection of him in his years of service to realize that Tom Brokaw’s title, “The Greatest Generation,” is no hype. I never knew anyone who so totally dedicated his whole being to the public good. And yet, over and above his public persona, the private side of him touched all who knew him. Not only his immediate family but an incredibly large circle of friends and associates loved him for himself. His death leaves a gaping hole in our lives.

Statement from Daniel Yankelovich, Chairman of the Board of Public Agenda, January 14, 2002

Politics & Bureaucracy, Not Lack of Funding, Are Chief Irritants, Say Superintendents, Principals

Study on School Leadership Supported by Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds

A recent Public Agenda survey finds school superintendents and principals nationwide believe that good leadership can turn around even the most troubled schools, but that politics and bureaucracy too often stand in the way.

Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk about School Leadership—based on surveys of 853 public school superintendents and 909 public school principals—was financed by the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds, which has spearheaded a movement to elevate quality education leadership as a core element of education reform.

continued on page 4

Program Development Fund Receives \$100,000 Gift from Ruth and Frank Stanton Fund

Broadcast News Pioneer Joins Effort

The Program Development Fund has received a \$100,000 gift through the generosity of Frank Stanton. Dr. Stanton, Public Agenda board member emeritus and former CBS president, is a television pioneer who cares deeply about broadcast news and First Amendment issues. Along with colleagues like Walter Cronkite, he is admired by journalists everywhere for being a principled, brilliant innovator.

We are extremely grateful for the sustained support that he and our many friends and admirers have shown and thank everyone who has contributed to the Fund as we seek to reach our \$5 million goal. The fund has received contributions totaling \$3.69 million.

No gift is too small, and we ask for your assistance in helping Public Agenda maintain its vigorous and independent voice in policymaking. A pledge of any amount, \$15, \$50, \$150, will help. We appreciate your continued support.*

* Please call 212-686-6610 for more information or send your check, made payable to Public Agenda, to 6 East 39th Street, New York, NY, 10016.

Terrorism... continued from page 1

Admiral, U.S. Navy (retired); and links to organizations featuring information on terrorism, aviation safety, emergency management, international relations, Afghanistan, Islam and Arab Americans.

Content Resonates Broadly

This special edition has been featured on MSNBC.com, National Journal.com and also as a "Hot Site" by USA Today.com and a "Web Winner" on the Philadelphia Inquirer.com.

In an MSNBC.com op-ed, Public Agenda executive editor Scott Bittle examines public opinion on flying since Sept. 11 and notes the "difference between what people worry about and what they actually do."

In her National Journal.com interview, Ms. Johnson underscores the intrinsic value of opinion research and says it is a way "the public can talk to its leaders and a very important part of our national discussion."

Smaller High Schools Appealing, but Other Education Reforms Seem More Pressing, Say Parents, Teachers

Few virtues seen in large high schools

As many experts recommend smaller high schools as a way to improve education, large majorities of parents (80%) and high school teachers (85%) say smaller high schools are better at spotting troubled students, and more than half say they are more likely to have strong parental involvement, according to a recent Public Agenda survey.

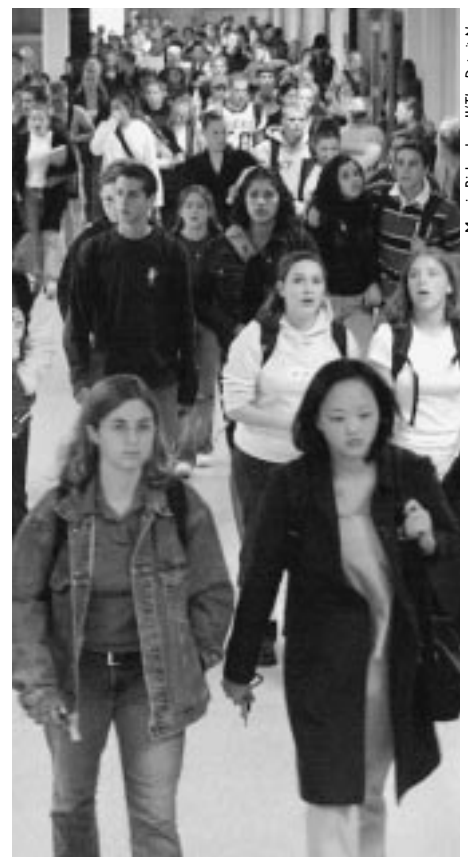
But researchers also noted that just a third of parents say they have given a lot of thought to the idea of reducing school size, and many teachers and parents currently see other reforms as more pressing. Seventy percent of teachers, for example, say small class size is more important to student achievement than small school size.

Says Steve Farkas, director of research, Public Agenda, "People in leadership circles have been talking about reducing school size for years, but for parents especially, this is basically a new idea for improving schools. They actually haven't given it that much thought."

Public Agenda's surveys of 801 parents with children currently in high school and 920 public high school teachers were funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. They are the first phase of a larger study that will incorporate the views of high school students and compare them to those of parents and teachers from both larger and smaller high schools on a range of academic and social issues. The full study is scheduled for release early in 2002. For a detailed press release and additional material, visit www.publicagenda.org.

"Smaller Schools" Makes Big Impact

Major articles in the *Washington Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Education Week*, *American Teacher* and United Press International covered the release of part one of the survey. Jean Johnson, director of programs, also wrote articles on the survey for *Phi Delta Kappan's* January issue and *Educational Leadership's* February issue.

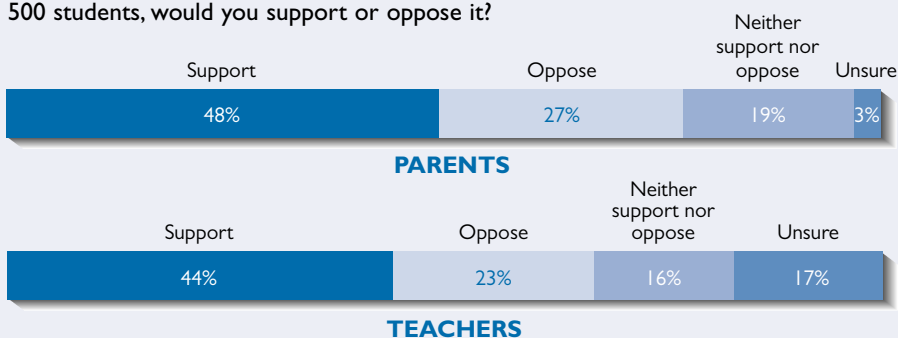


Students flood hallway at Michigan high school.

Morris Richardson III/The Detroit News

How Would You React?

If your district planned to break up your high school into smaller schools of less than 500 students, would you support or oppose it?

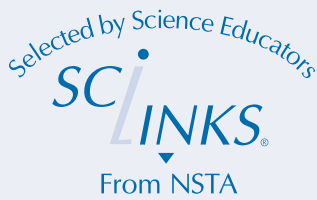


Percentages in tables may not equal 100% due to rounding or missing answer categories.

SOURCE: Public Agenda 2001.

Public Agenda Newsmakers

Web Hit: Lasker - PA "Medical Research" Guide



The new Lasker Foundation - Public Agenda online guide to medical research issues has been much in the news and the talk of the 'Net. It was mentioned in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Bioethics.net*, *Science* magazine, the *Lancet* and *Science News*; cited in email alerts at the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and linked to by the National Science Teachers Association's NSTA *SciLinks* database (logo pictured), which is accessed by over 70,000 science teachers and students.

The new Lasker Foundation - Public Agenda online guide to medical research issues has been much in the news and the talk of the 'Net. It was mentioned in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Bioethics.net*, *Science* magazine, the *Lancet* and *Science News*; cited in email alerts at the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and linked to by the National Science Teachers Association's NSTA *SciLinks* database (logo pictured), which is accessed by over 70,000 science teachers and students.

Grants

- The Carnegie Corporation of New York has awarded a grant to Public Agenda to survey foreign-born U.S. residents about American democracy and their participation in it.



Naturalization ceremony.

- State Farm Insurance Companies is sponsoring an extensive study of parental concerns about raising responsible, respectful kids today.

The Boston Globe
via www.Merlin-Nat.com



Father reads to daughter and friend.

The Family Friendly Programming Forum created by major American companies concerned about TV imagery, role models, themes and language to which young people are exposed, is also lending support to this project.

In Brief

- Deborah Wadsworth authored the lead article—on Americans, standards and testing—in the September 2001 edition of *Public Perspective*.
- Tony Wagner, Harvard University professor and former Public Agenda staff member, is the author of the recently published *Making the Grade: Reinventing America's Schools*.
- Public Agenda worked with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) to create materials for community forums in 10 locations across New York state. Our staff also moderated the meetings, which enabled citizens to think about how best to implement school funding reforms.



Kudos from N.A.E.P.

Roy Truby, executive director, National Assessment Governing Board, wrote recently to thank Public Agenda for its "extremely significant" research on attitudes about education standards and testing. "The polling data you have ... [form] a very important backdrop to the work of the Governing Board as we develop policy and standards for the National Assessment of Educational Progress [N.A.E.P]."

New Face at Public Agenda



Alice M. Rivlin Joins PA Board

Dr. Rivlin currently is a Senior Fellow in economic studies at the Brookings

Institution and the Henry Cohen Professor of Urban Management and Policy at New York's New School University. During the Clinton administration, she served as vice chair of the Federal Reserve Board and director of the White House Office of Management and Budget. A recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowship, Dr. Rivlin has taught at Harvard and George Mason Universities and served on boards of numerous corporations. She is a prolific author and holds a Ph.D. in economics from Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

Constitution...

[continued from page 1](#)

museum devoted to the Constitution. It is scheduled to open on July 4, 2003.

Americans' Knowledge of Constitution Falls Short

"Surveys have repeatedly shown Americans' knowledge of various constitutional guarantees falls short, but research also suggests that citizens understand and cherish the fundamental values it upholds," says Deborah Wadsworth, president, Public Agenda. "Public Agenda's partnership with the National Constitution Center is a real opportunity to create materials and activities to enrich the public's—particularly students'—understanding of this cornerstone of our democracy."

The public opinion study will document Americans' current attitudes and knowledge about the Constitution; diagnose current perceptions, misperceptions and possible obstacles to civic participation; and identify educational directions to enhance citizenship. The research is scheduled for release early in the fall in celebration of the 215th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution.

The study is especially timely as school leaders face increased pressure to raise academic standards and some education experts are predicting a shortage of top school administrators over the next few years.

“As we go forward with our LEADERS Count initiative to strengthen the ability of school leaders to improve student achievement, it is absolutely essential that the voices of superintendents and principals themselves are heard and counted,” says Mary Lee Fitzgerald, director of education programs, Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds. “Superintendents and principals feel they can make an enormous difference in student learning if certain conditions can improve in their day-to-day working lives. This requires an honest, comprehensive review of the larger climate that affects their performance, from state policy to district practice, in order to do just that.”

A Desire to Eliminate Tenure

There is overwhelming agreement (superintendents 79%; principals 69%) that finding a talented principal is the first step in turning around a troubled school, according to the study. But large majorities of superintendents and principals say they need more autonomy to reward good teachers and fire ineffective ones.

What’s more, over half of superintendents (54%) say they have to work around the school system to get things done. Over half of principals (57%) say that in their own district even good administrators are “so overwhelmed” by day-to-day management that their ability “to provide vision and leadership is stymied.”

“In many ways, superintendents and principals seem to be chafing at the bit,” says Deborah Wadsworth, president, Public Agenda. “They are convinced that strong leadership can transform

schools, but politics and bureaucracy just eat away at them.”

So Many Mandates, So Little Money

The survey also covers leaders’ views on a variety of problems facing the schools—academic standards, accountability and professional development—and it offers some new insights on the perennial problems of funding. Although most superintendents say mandates for federal and state programs are increasing “without getting the resources necessary to fulfill them,” few superintendents and principals (18% and 13%, respectively) say that a lack of funding overall is such a critical problem that only minimal progress can be made.

In spite of all the demands, 73% of superintendents and 66% of principals say they would choose the same line of work if they were just starting out. “Even though the demands are often

Growing Buzz on Educational Leaders’ Views

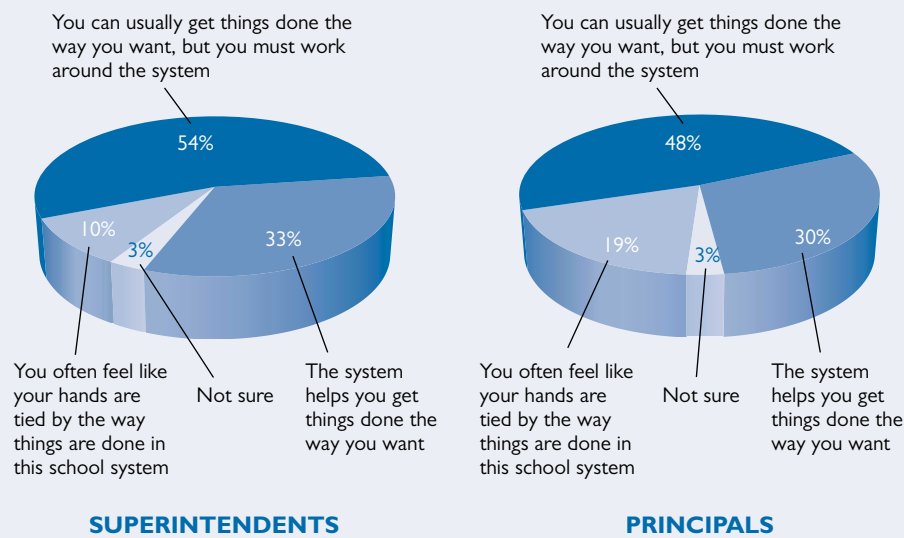
At an Education Writers Association meeting last fall, Steve Farkas, director of research, spoke to dozens of reporters about the survey. Deborah Wadsworth’s guest column on it appears in the January *School Administrator*. And Alan Lecker, senior Public Agenda editor, has an article in *American School Board Journal’s* February issue. The study was also featured in the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *Education Week*, Gannett, United Press International and several other media outlets nationwide.

overwhelming, I enjoy my job,” said one superintendent. “I know we make a difference.”

Copies of Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game can be ordered from Public Agenda for \$10, plus \$2 shipping and handling. Bulk-order discounts are available. For more information about LEADERS Count, contact Jessica Schwartz, Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds, 212-251-9711 or jschwartz@wallacefunds.org.

Having to Work Around the System

Which of these best describes your typical experience when trying to get things done the way you want them to be done:



SOURCE: Public Agenda *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game* 2001.

Public Engagement

Community Involvement 101: Videos, Guide Show How to Jump-Start Community Dialogue



Whether your community needs to have thoughtful, productive discussions on academic standards or student diversity, Public Agenda has created

packages of video and print materials to jump-start public engagement. The materials grow out of our 25 years of experience

guiding local town meetings in communities nationwide. Our *Discussion Starters* include a recently released video on boosting academic achievement at low-performing schools.

The Community Conversations Organizer’s Guide is an effective how-to manual that can help ignite meaningful dialogue across diverse groups. Packed with tools (sample invitations, questionnaires) and tips, it addresses concerns such as: how to line up sponsors, select a topic, involve a cross-section of citizens, select moderators and include the media.

All videos in the *Discussion Starters* packages are VHS format, approximately 10 minutes long and \$40 each (includes accompanying moderator’s guide). Some materials are available in Spanish. *The Organizer’s Guide* is 100+ pages and \$100.

To learn more about Public Agenda’s public engagement work, visit www.publicagenda.org, or contact Alex Trilling at (212) 686-6610 or atrilling@publicagenda.org. To order materials, call (212) 686-6610 or e-mail gwilliams@publicagenda.org.

Public Agenda Launches Online Guide to Gay Rights Debate

Gill Foundation supports nonpartisan guide on adoption, marriage and benefits rights, discrimination, gays in the military and other concerns

More than half of Americans say gay partners should receive benefits like inheritance rights, health insurance and Social Security. But when the word “marriage” is included in questions about gay couples, the results take a different tone: 53% say gay partners should not be entitled to the same benefits as married couples, and 57% of Americans say they oppose gay marriage.

Analysis of public attitudes, background and more can be found in Public Agenda’s comprehensive online guide to gay rights issues launching in early 2002. Support for the creation of the new guide at www.publicagenda.org was provided by the Colorado-based Gill Foundation, an organization that seeks to secure equal opportunity for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.



PUBLIC AGENDA ONLINE



Reliable Research on Controversial Issues

“Public opinion on gay rights, like public opinion on many other controversial issues, can be easily misinterpreted and misreported,” says Jean Johnson, director of programs, Public Agenda. “Public Agenda Online will gather the most reliable research, place it in context and make it readily available to all of those with an interest in this topic.”

The new guide provides current, balanced data, survey results, extensive resource lists, and news on issues such as sodomy law repeal efforts, gay health matters and related concerns.

In the Pipeline

Spring 2002 Survey Topics

■ Does the public worry that **courtesy** is in decline? What’s most bothersome—profanity, road rage, cell phones—and why? What role do the media, families and schools play? Do people think Sept. 11 has made a difference?

Sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts

■ Are teachers, parents, students, employers and college professors satisfied that academic standards are being raised? Do they support the way standardized tests are being used in their public schools? The fifth annual **Reality Check** continues to track the progress of standards reform. It will be published in *Education Week* in late February.

Sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts with additional support from the GE Fund

■ As national policymakers and educators take a close look at **special education**, how well do parents feel their special-needs children and the community as a whole are being served?

Sponsored by The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Our Leadership

Board Member **Judith Davidson Moyers**

In this issue, Public Agenda focuses on board member Judith Davidson Moyers, president of Public Affairs Television, Inc. (PAT), an independent television production company formed with her husband of 47 years, journalist Bill Moyers.

A keen drive to make things better has sparked Mrs. Moyers’ career of exceptional public service and broadcasting milestones.

“Public Agenda is the beneficiary of Judith’s extraordinary insights and experience,” says Deborah Wadsworth. “She is a wise and trusted adviser and advocate of Public Agenda on many fronts.”

Born in Dallas, Judith Davidson Moyers is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, where she met her future husband. Together they have been committed to using television as a venue for public enlightenment and in 1986 established PAT.

PAT has produced thought-provoking programs for the Public Broadcasting Service ever since, accumulating more than 300 hours of pathbreaking series and specials, which have won every major broadcast journalism award including 30 Emmys and three DuPonts.

Mrs. Moyers was executive producer of such PAT documentaries as:

- *Earth on Edge*
- *Trade Secrets*
- *On Our Own Terms* (on preparing for the end of life)
- *Moyers on Addiction: Close to Home*
- *Free Speech for Sale*
- *The Arab World*
- *Washington’s Other Scandal.*

Beginning in late January, the Moyers will launch a 50-week series, *NOW with Bill Moyers*, broadcast by PBS Friday nights in primetime.

In addition to her broadcasting accomplishments, Mrs. Moyers has served as a trustee of the State University of New York, Hazelden Foundation, U.S. Commissioner to UNESCO, and on the White

House Commission on Children. She has served on the boards of the Ogden Corporation, Paine Webber Family of Mutual Funds, and Capital Management and Research Corporation, among others.

“I am so pleased to be involved with Public Agenda,” says Mrs. Moyers, “Public Agenda provides unique insight and information to the public and nonpartisan context for journalists and other investigators.”

Public Agenda is the beneficiary of Judith’s extraordinary insights and experiences. She is a wise and trusted advisor and advocate of Public Agenda on many fronts.

Deborah Wadsworth
president, Public Agenda

Karen Fucito/Daily Record (Morris County, NJ), 10/17/97



Mrs. Moyers’ Public Affairs Television team won its second Peabody Award for the apartheid documentary Facing the Truth, cited as “remarkable . . . television of true distinction.”

Reflections from the President

by **Deborah Wadsworth**, president, **Public Agenda**

It's hard to believe that the attack on The World Trade Center occurred almost half a year ago.

In the immediate days and weeks thereafter, the life of the nation was transformed, bringing together liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, the religious and the agnostic—in ways which we'd not seen before.



Bill Lulow

Pre-Sept. 11, there had been much hand-wringing over the absence of civility in everyday life. Many decried our failure to behave as public rather than private citizens. And then, out of the mountainous debris of the doomed towers, we appeared to rediscover our innate humanity and a new respect for each other and for our public institutions.

In the past month or so, there's been considerable speculation about whether Americans' newly found sense of unity will prove to be as ephemeral as the grief expressed after the deadly attack in Oklahoma or any number of the natural calamities that periodically afflict our planet.

Robert Putnam, a public policy professor at Harvard University, whose work "Bowling Alone" documents the decline of civic engagement among Americans, believes that "the immediate effect of the attacks has been to reverse what has been a 30-40 year decline in most measures of connectedness or community."

But, he says, that's always true after every crisis, and the questions for us to ask now are, "How long does this last?" and "What can we do to make this last?"

Public Agenda's own social analyst, Daniel Yankelovich—who has tracked American values for over 50 years—believes that the September events have the potential to fundamentally transform America. Dan believes Americans will cling eagerly to new feelings of unity because, he says, long before Sept. 11, many were weary of their isolated, self-focused lives and longed to find meaning beyond themselves and their materialism.

Public Agenda was in the field with a national study of Americans' attitudes about civility and manners, probing their concern that these matters were receiving insufficient attention in our society. Needless to say, we paused in our research temporarily, and have only recently picked up where we left off.

Our analysis will be forthcoming later this spring, offering some early insights about the public's take on Dan's hypothesis that the country "will see a lot less bitter, angry, partisan politics . . . less advocacy and more dialogue . . . more civility in public life."

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to raise the level of public discussion about critical policy choices facing the nation.

OFFICERS

Daniel Yankelovich, Chairman
Deborah Wadsworth, President
Sidney Harman, Chairman, Executive Committee

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Richard Danzig, Former Secretary of the Navy
Alice S. Huang, California Institute of Technology
Bobby R. Inman, Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
David Mathews, Kettering Foundation
Ann McLaughlin Korologos, The Aspen Institute
Lloyd Morrisett, Former President, The Markle Foundation
Judith Davidson Moyers, Public Affairs Television
Peter G. Peterson, The Blackstone Group
Lois Dickson Rice, The Brookings Institution
Alice M. Rivlin, The Brookings Institution

CO-FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN (1976-1999)

Cyrus R. Vance

© 2002 Public Agenda

MEMBERS EMERITI

Maurice Lazarus, Former Chairman, Executive Committee
Frank Stanton, Former President, CBS Inc.

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENTS

Steve Farkas
Jean Johnson
Kathie Johnson

VICE PRESIDENT

Ann Duffett

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Michael A. Darden

PUBLIC AGENDA

6 East 39th Street
New York, New York 10016
Phone: (212) 686-6610
Fax: (212) 889-3461
E-mail: info@publicagenda.org
Web site: www.publicagenda.org



PUBLIC AGENDA
6 East 39th Street
New York, New York 10016

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Glenview, IL
Permit No. 94