

◀ Rising College Costs



Medicare Reform



Race in America



Gay Marriage



Air Pollution



Media Ownership



Democracy in the
Arab World



AND MORE...



ISSUES FOR DEBATE IN AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY

SELECTIONS FROM THE CQ RESEARCHER



Issues for Debate in American Public Policy

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Annotated Contents

The 16 *CQ Researcher* reports reprinted in this book have been reproduced essentially as they appeared when first published. In the few cases in which important new developments have since occurred, updates are provided in the overviews highlighting the principal issues examined.

EDUCATION

Rising College Costs

Tuition and fees at public colleges soared a record 14 percent in 2003, continuing a quarter-century trend of higher-education costs rising faster than inflation. The average total cost of attending a private school jumped to \$26,854 annually—far beyond the means of most American families. The size of federal grants to students has not kept pace with rising prices, and state appropriations to colleges have not adjusted to burgeoning enrollments. Colleges have asked for increased government spending on higher education, but Republican congressional leaders are instead considering penalizing schools that raise prices, arguing that the schools are wasting money. To cope with the financial crunch, more and more colleges are turning to innovative uses of technology to reduce costs.

Combating Plagiarism

In 2003, 48 University of Virginia students quit or were expelled for plagiarism. *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair plagiarized or fabricated parts of more than three-dozen articles. Best-selling historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose were accused of

stealing from other writers. Journalists and educators consider plagiarism a growing problem. Many believe that the Internet is partly to blame because it makes copying published material so easy. Studies show that 90 percent of college students know plagiarism is wrong, but educators say many do it anyway because they do not think they will get caught or because in today's ethical climate they consider plagiarism trivial compared to well-publicized instances of political and corporate dishonesty. Other educators note that high-school students do not understand or have never been taught about copyright regulations and how to properly cite sources.

HEALTH CARE

Medicare Reform

Medicare—the federal health-insurance program for the elderly and disabled—was established in 1965, and in 2003 lawmakers considered and passed the most significant changes to the program's history. The proposed reforms will allow Medicare's 41 million beneficiaries to obtain prescription-drug coverage through private health-insurance plans and private insurers to play an expanded role in delivering health services to seniors. Republicans and Democrats were far apart on the issue: Republicans wanted to inject market competition into the Medicare system, asserting that it was the only way to control rising program costs. Democrats, however, wanted to protect Medicare's core fee-for-service program and its principle of equal benefits for all. On December 8, 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act, the negotiation of which stands out as one of the most significant health-policy debates in years.

Drug Company Ethics

Questions about the business practices of the pharmaceutical industry are growing along with the sector's unprecedented profits. Critics contend that drugmakers put profit margins before human needs and in the process sometimes jeopardize public safety. Consumer advocates and federal regulators complain of skyrocketing drug prices, misleading ads and cutthroat litigation. They also accuse the industry of buying influence in Washington to keep legislators, regulators and low-

priced competitors at bay. The drug companies insist that such criticism is overblown, arguing that strong competition in the industry is evidenced by the billions of dollars companies spend each year developing new products as well as the meteoric rise in generic drugs. The national spotlight on drugmakers intensified as lawmakers debated Medicare reform in 2003.

SOCIAL POLICY

Affirmative Action

Should colleges consider race in admissions? A showdown over the use of race in college admissions ended with the U.S. Supreme Court issuing split decisions on the matter. The rulings involved suits brought by white applicants to the University of Michigan's undergraduate college and law school who had been rejected for admission and then challenged university policies that gave an advantage to minority applicants. The university argued that the policies were needed to ensure racial and ethnic diversity on campus. The Court upheld the law school's admissions policy, which considered each applicant individually, but ruled against the undergraduate school's, which it held operated too much like a racial quota system. Officials at Michigan and other elite universities felt that the rulings would result in only minor changes in admissions policies, but Justice Sandra Day O'Connor expressed the belief that minority preferences will be obsolete in 25 years.

Gay Marriage

Gay-rights advocates are intensifying efforts to gain legal recognition for same-sex unions, but the campaign is facing strong opposition from social conservatives. Supporters of same-sex marriage argue that gay and lesbian couples need and deserve the same symbolic and practical benefits for their relationships as are enjoyed by heterosexuals. Opponents hold that recognizing same-sex unions will hurt traditional families at a time when marriage is already suffering from a high divorce rate and other social trends. These opposing groups also disagree sharply on the effects of raising children in gay households. In February 2004, the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld its November 2003 ruling by confirming that only the full rights of marriage—as opposed to civil unions—are consistent with the state constitution. Meanwhile, President George W. Bush continued to

seek a constitutional amendment and other measures through federal law to define marriage solely as the union of a man and a woman.

Race in America

Many people believe that the end of legal discrimination gave blacks the same chance of success as other Americans, and by any measure, African-Americans' social, economic and political standing has vastly improved since the civil rights upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet by the same measures—income, accumulation of wealth, life expectancy, education and so on—blacks lag far behind whites. Many African-Americans (and not a few whites) hold that discrimination, whether resulting from institutional practice or deliberate prejudice, prevents them from attaining jobs and homes equal to those enjoyed by whites. The 2003 Supreme Court decision upholding affirmative action in education heartened many blacks, but racially tinged incidents, such as those in Cincinnati, Benton Harbor, Michigan and Tulsa, Texas, serve as reminders of the still unfolding, troubled history of race in American society.

Abortion Debates

The battle lines in the abortion issue remain clearly drawn more than 30 years after the Supreme Court's controversial *Roe v. Wade* decision established a constitutional right to the procedure. Anti-abortion groups continue to urge Congress and state legislatures to regulate abortion practices, while abortion-rights supporters counter that the measures undercut women's reproductive freedom. At the urging of President George W. Bush, Congress passed a ban on a late-term procedure that opponents call "partial-birth" abortion. The Supreme Court struck it down, holding that it violates *Roe v. Wade*. Legislative fights, however, continue unabated in the states, where more than 300 anti-abortion laws have been enacted since 1995. Meanwhile, both sides are girding for a fight should Bush have the opportunity to make an appointment to the Supreme Court.

ENVIRONMENT

SUV Debate

Sport-utility vehicles have become icons of American consumption in the past decade, changing the look of

the nation's highways. Few consumer products have attracted such adulation as well as scorn. Fans of the trucklike passenger vehicles love their spacious interiors, rugged appearance and high-off-the-ground seating. Critics see them as gas-guzzling, turnover-prone behemoths that spew pollutants and endanger the occupants of smaller cars. Like minivans, SUVs are categorized by the government as light trucks, which are held to less stringent fuel-efficiency and safety standards than cars. The Bush administration has ordered automakers to increase light-truck mileage efficiency by 1.5 miles per gallon—to 22.2 miles per gallon—during the 2005–2007 model years, but environmentalists say that is not enough.

Air Pollution Conflict

Environmentalists are outraged over Bush administration policies that they say weaken the landmark Clean Air Act. President George W. Bush's proposed "Clear Skies" initiative would allow industries to buy pollution credits from cleaner plants as an alternative to installing equipment to reduce emissions. The administration also has relaxed a long-standing rule requiring older power plants to install modern pollution-control technology when they modernize. Plant operators say the changes will make it easier to reduce harmful emissions. Environmentalists contend that they will merely reverse improvements in air quality hard won over the past three decades. Meanwhile, several smog-ridden states threatened to sue the Environmental Protection Agency following an announcement in November 2003 that it was dropping more than 50 investigations into violations of anti-pollution rules.

CIVIL LIBERTIES, CIVIL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Civil Liberties Debates

The administration of George W. Bush has faced strong criticism from the left and the right for its legal tactics concerning civil liberties in its war on terrorism. Critics charge the administration with infringing on constitutional rights by holding two U.S. citizens as "enemy combatants" without access to lawyers. Hundreds of foreigners captured in Afghanistan are also being held at the Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba for trial before military

tribunals. Some members of Congress are rethinking provisions of the USA Patriot Act, the sweeping law passed after the September 11 attacks that expanded the government's search-and-surveillance powers in terrorism cases. Attorney General John Ashcroft has vigorously defended the law as an essential counterterrorism tool. So far, courts have generally upheld the administration's actions, but several legal challenges were pending in 2004, including three before the Supreme Court.

School Desegregation

In May 2004, the nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court's landmark decision declaring racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. It is widely held, however, that the promise of equal educational opportunity for all offered by the once-controversial ruling remains unfulfilled. Today, an increasing percentage of African-American and Latino students attend schools with mostly other minorities—a situation that critics blame on recent Supreme Court decisions easing judicial supervision of desegregation plans. Black and Latino students also lag far behind whites in academic achievement. School desegregation advocates call for stronger steps to break down racial and ethnic isolation and to upgrade schools that serve minority students. Critics of mandatory desegregation, however, think that more accountability, stricter academic standards and parental choice will do more to improve education for all students.

BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY

Media Ownership

Media companies are expanding rapidly, integrating broadcast television, cable, radio, newspapers, books, magazines and the Internet under their roofs. Five conglomerates control most prime-time television programming, and one company—Clear Channel—dominates radio. Yet, in the paradox of today's media landscape, consumers have more choices than ever, although critics say too many choices are low-brow offerings, like "reality" TV. Meanwhile, such newcomers as satellite radio and Web bloggers keep sprouting. As media companies push to grow even larger, a nationwide debate rages over whether there is enough diversity of content and ownership. In June 2003, the Federal Communications

Commission relaxed its media-ownership rules. Congress approved less sweeping changes in 2004.

Exporting Jobs

The U.S. economy is recovering, but employment continues to lag. Experts blame some of the joblessness on the job-exporting phenomenon known as offshoring. Well-trained, low-wage workers in India, China and other developing countries, along with the widespread availability of high-speed Internet connections, make exporting American jobs attractive. In addition, millions of foreign professionals have entered the U.S. workforce using temporary visas, while millions more undocumented foreign workers from Mexico and other parts of Latin America have found low-wage jobs in the United States thanks to lax immigration and border-control policies. Offshoring proponents claim that paying lower wages reduces the cost of goods and raises profits, ultimately enabling U.S. companies to create better-paying jobs for Americans. Critics counter that offshoring simply eliminates good jobs.

FOREIGN POLICY

Democracy in the Arab World

The monarchs and presidential strongmen who have governed Arab states since the mid-20th century have been reluctant to share power, allow free elections or permit popular dissent. Following the overthrow of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in April 2003, President George W. Bush vowed to establish a working democracy in Iraq and to promote free elections throughout the Middle East. Efforts at democratization face daunting obstacles, however, including the Arab world's limited experience with self-rule, the huge income gap between rich and poor and the increasing appeal of radical Islamist movements. Although some experts see encouraging signs in a few countries, prospects for democracy appear dim in many others, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two major U.S. allies.

Nuclear Proliferation and Terrorism

The recent discovery of a global black market in nuclear weapons and related technology has intensified concerns that so-called rogue nations and organizations like Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network might acquire

nuclear devices. A network run by the “father” of Pakistan’s atomic bomb, A. Q. Khan, sold nuclear-weapons materials to Iran and North Korea, which have refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Virtually all the other nations of the world are signatories. President George W. Bush responded to the revelations about Khan’s network with a plan to strengthen

international anti-proliferation efforts, including calling on the U.N. Security Council to require all states to criminalize proliferation of components that could be used to make weapons of mass destruction. While arms experts commended the president for focusing on proliferation, some thought that his proposals did not go far enough.



Preface

In this important and possibly pivotal era of American public policymaking, instructors can draw from countless controversial public policy issues to inspire classroom debate. Should the right to abortion be limited or overturned? Should same-sex unions be legally recognized? Do low-paid foreign workers hurt or help the economy? Only comprehensive and balanced examinations of such issues lead to constructive debates that weigh the intricate and at times convoluted dynamics of public policy. These kinds of exchanges engage students in class but also draw them into the public agenda that affects them beyond the classroom walls. By examining their thoughts on important issues, students begin to define their role as active participants in public policy.

The fifth edition of *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*, an up-to-the minute collection of 16 reports from *The CQ Researcher*, illustrates just how broadly contentious policy issues affect citizens and the government they elect. *The Researcher*, a weekly policy back-grounder that provides balanced coverage of meaningful issues on the public agenda, brings complicated topics down to earth by fully explaining difficult concepts in plain English. Each report chronicles and analyzes current and past legislative and judicial activities as well as possible future actions, whether at the local, state or federal level. *Issues for Debate* is designed to promote in-depth discussion, facilitate further research and help readers think critically and formulate their own positions on crucial issues.

This collection is divided into seven areas of public policy concern. The pieces were chosen to expose students to a diversity of issues, ranging, for example, from civil rights to foreign policy. We

are gratified to know that *Issues for Debate* is appealing to audiences inside and outside of education. Teachers are using it as a supplement in introductory public policy and American government courses, and active citizens, journalists and business and government leaders are turning to it to better understand key issues, actors and policy positions.

THE CQ RESEARCHER

The *CQ Researcher* was founded in 1923 as *Editorial Researcher Reports* and was sold primarily to newspapers as a research tool. The magazine was renamed and redesigned in 1991 as *The CQ Researcher*. While it is still used by hundreds of newspapers, some of which reprint all or part of each issue, high school, college and public libraries are now the *Researcher's* main subscribers, making students, not journalists, its primary audience.

The *Researcher's* staff writers—all highly experienced journalists—sometimes compare the experience of writing a *Researcher* report to drafting a college term paper. Indeed, there are many similarities: Each report is as long as many term papers—about 11,000 words—and is written by one person without any significant outside help. One of the key differences is that the writers interview leading experts and government officials for each issue. The *Researcher* won the American Bar Association's coveted Silver Gavel award for magazines in 2002 for a series of nine reports on civil liberties and other legal issues.

Like students, staff writers begin the creative process by choosing a topic. Working with the *Researcher's* editors, the writer identifies a subject that has public policy implications and for which there is significant controversy. After a topic is selected, the writer embarks on a week or two of intense research. Articles are clipped, books ordered and information gathered from a variety of sources, including interest groups, universities and the government. Once the writer is well informed about the subject, he or she begins interviewing academics, officials, lobbyists and people working in the field. Each report usually requires a minimum of ten to fifteen interviews, although some issues covering especially complicated subjects call for more. After much reading and interviewing, the writer develops a detailed outline. Only then does the writing begin.

CHAPTER FORMAT

Each issue of the *Researcher*, and therefore each selection in this book, is structured in the same way. Each begins with an overview, which briefly touches on the areas that will be explored in greater detail in the rest of the chapter. The next section, "Issue Questions," chronicles important and current debates on the topic under discussion. It is structured around a number of key questions, such as "Is democracy taking root in the Arab world?" "Should Congress give the government additional powers in anti-terrorism cases?" This section is the core of each chapter: The questions raised are often controversial and usually the subject of much debate among those who work in and think about the field. Hence, the answers presented are never conclusive but detail the range of opinion on the topic.

Following "Issue Questions" is the "Background" section, which provides a history of the issue being examined. This look back includes important legislative measures, executive actions and court decisions that illustrate how current policy has evolved. Next, the section "Current Situation" examines contemporary policy issues, legislation under consideration and legal action being taken. Each selection concludes with "Outlook," a section that addresses possible actions and outcomes for the next five to ten years, such as new regulations, court rulings and initiatives from Capitol Hill and the White House.

Each report contains additional features that augment the main text: two or three sidebars that examine issues related to the topic, a pro versus con debate by two experts, a chronology of key dates and events, and an annotated bibliography detailing major sources used by the writer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank many people for helping to make this collection a reality. Tom Colin, managing editor of *The CQ Researcher*, gave us his enthusiastic support and cooperation as we developed this fifth edition. He and his talented staff of editors and writers have amassed a first-class library of *Researcher* reports, and we are fortunate to have access to that rich cache. We also thankfully acknowledge the advice and feedback from current readers and are gratified by their success with the book.

Some readers of this collection may be learning about the *Researcher* for the first time. We expect that many readers will want regular access to this excellent weekly research tool. Anyone interested in subscription information or a no-obligation free trial of the *Researcher* can contact CQ Press at www.cqpress.com or 1-866-4CQ-Press (1-866-427-7737, toll-free).

We hope that you will be pleased by the fifth edition of *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*. We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future editions. Please direct comments to Charisse Kiino, CQ Press, 1255 22nd Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20037, or ckiino@cqpress.com.

—The Editors of CQ Press



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