



A Report on the

National Issues Convention

and

The *By The People* Project

and

The National Issues Forum Entitled

*Americans' Role in the World*

by

The Center for Community Leadership Development and Public Policy  
at Montgomery College

Submitted By

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February 4, 2003

## **Introduction**

Beginning January 10, 2003, MacNeil/Lehrer Productions Co. along with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting began a sixteen-month project entitled *By The People* to capture the voices of citizens in the United States (US) through the deliberation of *Americans' Role In the World*, a foreign policy directions forum. The project's goal is to facilitate dialogue on international affairs and US foreign policy choices. The program started with the National Issues Convention (NIC) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 11<sup>th</sup> and the January 12<sup>th</sup> videotaping and broadcast of the *By The People* television program produced from the NIC.

The NIC constituted bringing together in Philadelphia 344 citizens who were a statistical representation of voting age citizens in the US selected in a sample by the Survey Research Center of the University of California – Berkley. They were randomly divided into 24 small groups to deliberate the issue forum *Americans' Role in the World*. The Survey Research Center of the University of California at Berkeley had the responsibility of administering the pre and post-forum questionnaires to the participants. The deliberative poll questionnaires were created by the Center for Deliberative Polling at the University of Texas – Austin.

## **Preparation: January 10, 2003**

The forum moderators arrived in Philadelphia on January 9<sup>th</sup> to begin preparing for the events of the upcoming weekend. Friday, January 10<sup>th</sup> was spent with moderators preparing for the forum. The moderators' planning meeting was held at the Hyatt Hotel in Society Hill on the Delaware River. Dr. Robert Kingston of the Kettering Foundation welcomed the moderators and then introduced Mr. Dan Werner, president of MacNeil/Lehrer Productions. Mr. Werner offered a welcome and gave a brief explanation of the *By The People* project. Afterwards, Mr. Jim Fishkin, Mr. Bob Luskin and Ms. Noelle McAfee of the Center for Deliberative Polling addressed the group of assembled moderators. Mr. Fishkin, Director of the Center, explained how deliberative polling worked and how this particular poll was conducted. The representatives of The Survey Research Center at the University of California-Berkeley explained the pre-forum questionnaire process and the requirements for conducting the post-forum questionnaire following the NIC.

The challenges and difficulties of bringing this representative group together were explained. In the moderators' preparation meeting, techniques were shared that were thought could help address the diversity of the participants. Also, three moderators from the last NIC, in 1996, talked and provided insights based upon their previous experiences in this type of forum. For moderators the day ended with Bob Kingston and John Doble of Doble Research Associates, Inc.<sup>1</sup>, provided a dissection of the issues book and its framework.

Finally, forum participants began arriving on Friday, January 10<sup>th</sup>.

### **National Issues Convention: January 11, 2003**

The NIC was convened and the 344 participants were divided into 24 small groups for deliberation. The groups were convened in the Hyatt Hotel and the Sheraton Hotel-Society Hill. These hotels are located within walking distance of one another making it possible, during 15 minute breaks, for participants to move from one hotel to the other for the two plenary sessions held on that day.

The NIC was not a conventional forum as conducted by National Issues Forums where a forum lasts three to four hours. Instead, this forum was conducted over the course of the entire day. That morning the first two, of four, approaches were deliberated. Afterwards, the small groups reconvened in plenary session. In the first plenary, the participants were addressed by and able to ask questions of a group of panelists who are expert on the subject<sup>2</sup>. The last two approaches were

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<sup>1</sup> Doble Research Associates, Inc. is a principal contractor for the Kettering Foundation's research component.

<sup>2</sup> The panelists for the first plenary were:

Kevin Martin, executive director of Peace Action

Robert Hunter, former ambassador to NATO

Ann-Marie Slaughter, dean of Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University

Lawrence Korb, senior fellow and director of national security studies at the Council on foreign relations

Peter Brookes of the Heritage Foundation Asian Studies Center Director for National Security Affairs

deliberated that afternoon, followed by another plenary with another set of authorities on the topic<sup>3</sup>.

### **Working through the Approaches: Overview**

The small group participants in the group Professor Starr moderated were diverse socio-economically, occupationally, politically but not ethnically and gender-wise. The group was composed of all whites with the exception of two black people and all but two were female.

None had ever heard of, less more, participated in a National Issues Forum and were unaware of the process of deliberative dialogue. The overwhelming majority of the participants had read the issue book before we began our deliberation. By the time we were deliberating the second approach all had begun to understand the process and became comfortable with it. Nonetheless, they struggled with all four approaches and were not comfortable with any one in its entirety.

### Excerpts from the Personal Stake

- Relatives were draft age.
- Loss of human life.
- Fear of more terrorism.
- If we act unilaterally, we could become the world's bad guys.

### Approach One: *International Order: Using Our Power to Secure the Peace*

This approach was troubling to most participants because of the expense involved and the objection to the United States being the “world’s policeman”. Most perceived Iraq as a threat but opposed the United States acting unilaterally without allies and/or the United Nations support. They did not object to war with Iraq if there was evidence of weapons of mass destruction and with support from others. Also, there were reservations regarding the costs of this approach and whether the US can really afford it.

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<sup>3</sup> The panelists for this plenary were:

Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research

Princeton Lyman, former ambassador to South Africa and Nigeria

William Niskanen, chairman of the CATO Institute

Approach Two: *The Democratic Project: Ensuring People's Rights*

Philosophically, participants embrace democratic principles but did not believe the US has the right nor should proselytize democracy. They felt that if people in other nations do not want a democratic society we have no right to impose this upon them. However, they did feel that if a society did want to choose democracy we should help them. There were concerns as to the costs of this kind of endeavor.

Approach Three: *The Global Market Prescription: Lifting All Boats*

There was considerable concern with this approach and its perceived impracticality. Specifically, participants felt that we cannot help all nations. Also, there was concern this could lead to the exploitation of people in developing nations and would not really “lift all boats”, i.e., some would still be left behind.

Approach Four: *Preserving Our Global Future: Facing Hard Tasks*

This approach elicited the greatest concern and support. The group was particularly concerned over the costs involved. Could the US afford the costs entailed in this approach? It was generally agreed that this approach has potential for much good, especially regarding AIDS and pollution but, there was concern that powerful corporations would exploit the situation (e.g., drugs for AIDS) or resist efforts to control pollution.

**Summary of the Small Deliberation**

The group participants felt there should be a fifth approach drawing something from all of the preceding approaches. They felt the US should use its military power when necessary but not in first strikes and not alone. They agreed the US should help those who freely choose democracy as a form of governing. Also, the participants felt the US should contribute to the global marketplace but not to help those already rich while leaving behind the poor. And, finally, the US should make greater investments in trying to solve problems relating to AIDS, pollution, famine and potable drinking water.

In spite of their differences, politically and socio-economically, the group was more in agreement with one another than not. The deliberation did not change anyone's mind but the members of

the group were able to achieve common ground in making policy choices. The deliberation was hard work for the participants but all left with “new knowledge”<sup>4</sup>. They acknowledged they had a much broader understanding of the issues than before their deliberation.

### **Sunday, January 12, 2003**

The participants, moderators, observers and others were transported from their hotels to the University of Pennsylvania for the videotaping of the *By The People* broadcast. There representatives from the twenty-four groups put questions to Ambassador Richard Haass, a United States Department of State policy maker and Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor, regarding foreign policy and the role they thought Americans’ should play in the world. The NIC participants presented informed and challenging questions to Ambassador Haass and Dr. Brzezinski.

Following the television broadcast, the participants completed their post-forum questionnaires.

### **The Deliberative Poll Results**

In the post forum questionnaire, with exception of the US acting alone against other nations, the 344 participants indicated significant movement in their positions from the beginning of the NIC. There was considerable movement regarding preemptive attacks against other nations. There was a considerable increase in the number of participants favoring aid to other nations to help address AIDS, pollution and poverty. Although there was not much agreement on how much money the US should commit to these issues or how the US should act regarding hunger, poverty, AIDS and pollution in other nations.

The Center for Deliberative Polling released the full results of the deliberative poll on February 12, 2003. The following is a summary of the poll results.

NIC participants perceived Iraq as a threat (87%) but only 37% thought the US should invade Iraq “if the US finds evidence that convinces the US but not the UN Security Council that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> They learned and appreciated the greater complexity of the issue as informed in the forum. Also, they learned greatly from the other participants in the forum.

Participants agreed that global warming was a serious problem (77%). Also, 77% supported “requiring higher mileage from automobiles (as a way of reducing greenhouse gases) even if that means less powerful automobile engines.”<sup>6</sup>

Only 33% believed that the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) should be repealed. And 33% thought that the World Trade Organization was a good way of dealing with trade.<sup>7</sup> And seventy-three percent supported helping poor countries through foreign aid.

A narrow majority of participants believed the US should help with problems of world hunger (53%) and AIDS (50%).<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, 69% of participants thought there should be increased support for the Peace Corps as a way of promoting democracy in other nations.<sup>9</sup>

## **Closure**

The *By The People* project began with the question of how informed are US citizens regarding foreign policy. At the conclusion of the NIC, it was thought that if the NIC participants are truly representative of the US population, then Americans are more informed than many, including those in government, have realized. That is a heartening realization. Since the NIC, the issue forum *Americans’ Role In the World* has been conducted by the Center for Community Leadership Development and Public Policy at Montgomery College once (with plans for more) and the results were similar to those of the NIC. The group the Center moderated was extremely well informed and many indicated they left the forum with new knowledge. There was a similar experience to those attending the NIC.

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<sup>5</sup> Page 2, *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*

<sup>6</sup> Page 16, *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*

<sup>7</sup> Page 17, *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*

<sup>8</sup> Page 5, *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*

<sup>9</sup> Page 17, *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*

For more information regarding the questionnaires, please refer to the By The People press release of January 13, 2003 and *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*, The Center for Deliberative Polling, University of Texas-Austin, February 2003. Alternatively, you can go to <http://www.By-the-People.org/> and link to “Shifts in Public Opinion During the Deliberative Poll” for a comprehensive break down of the poll results at the NIC.

#### Work Cited

The Center for Deliberative Polling, February 2003. *Two Deliberative Polls Reveal Informed Opinions on World Affairs*, University of Texas-Austin,