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## **PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION ON INFLATION**

*Otto Doering and Bob Jones*

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The objective of our approach is to provide general economic education as a context for more detailed discussion on inflation. We find an increasing amount of material on inflation, but the citizen has no frame of reference from which to evaluate this information. Thus, we try to provide the individual with a critical approach towards policy alternatives. In a sense, we try to instill a number of the important questions which we feel ought to be asked.

### **Audiences**

We attempt to work with mixed audiences. It is especially important that the audience include both those who gain and those who lose from inflation. It has been critically important to the success of our program to have different values and viewpoints represented in the audience.

### **General Format**

The first portion of our program is the general economic context. We then work into specific aspects of inflation, relate this to gainers and losers, and then present policy alternatives. In a sense the "dull" subject matter comes first. We feel this is important because by the time we get to the alternatives the audience has been made aware of the many basic trade-offs that usually prevent any single alternative from having all benefits and no costs.

At times we have discussion and questions following our presentation. More recently we have divided the audience into groups and had them debate the alternatives among themselves and try to reach agreement.

### **Team Teaching**

We have handled this program on a team basis and have found it invaluable. Both the topic and the breadth of interest from most audiences makes it almost impossible for one individual to respond

adequately, let alone cover a broad base of material initially. While this is a substantial commitment of resources for public meetings, we would not present such a program without the breadth that two individuals of different backgrounds provide.

### **Program Concerns**

One concern is whether public meetings are the most effective format. Would we be able to reach a wider audience through mass media? Our bias is that on a complex topic like this, the public meeting is better, because of the time we then have to develop the subject, and because of the feedback we get through questions and discussion.

Another concern is evaluation. We have not been formally evaluating our public policy programs with our audiences. Can we develop an instrument that would measure the degree to which we improved the individual's capacity to make informed choices? Evaluation of public policy education is not the same as evaluating a meeting where technical information is given and adoption of a new technology is to follow. We know many of our clientele feel the meeting was valuable. We're not sure we could measure more than this subjective response.