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FOREIGN POLICY PUBLIC EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

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The American public's lack of understanding and interest in international issues is a major concern. According to a recent study only about 5 percent of the electorate is knowledgeable about and involved in current foreign policy issues; 20 percent are totally disengaged and alienated from the issues and the process; and 75 percent come in and out at will, depending on the issues and whether they feel that individuals matter and public opinion counts.

This lack of knowledge and participation on the part of the American people is especially disturbing when one realizes that the world in which we now live is truly international and interdependent. Nothing points out this "global village" concept more vividly than Harlan Cleveland's stunning example: "... a decision made by Tokyo executives can now affect a lathe operator in Des Moines whose mortgage payment schedule can affect a New York banker and before long, retail merchants in Amsterdam."

We live in a world in which the issues we face (both here and abroad) are simply too complex and too important to be left to just a few people, the so-called "policy makers" and foreign policy experts. These issues demand the attention and understanding of each of us. After all, our democratic society is predicated on the notion that "... to be a citizen is to hold an office—you are one of 240 million rulers of the United States" (Ketcham).

Unfortunately the American people have a general tendency to opt out of the political process, to act as if the issues don't affect them, don't matter or are too difficult to understand. Those of us who think differently need to join forces to stem this counterproductive and undemocratic tide.

These concerns are articulated by the International Task Force of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) in their paper, "Global Perspectives for Extension."

Two goals stand out:

1. to increase the public's understanding of our global interdependence, cross cultural skills, and knowledge of the factors that impact on hunger, development and trade; and

2. to strengthen extension's state-level capacity to plan and conduct international programs.

The goal-setting section concludes with the following statement: "To accomplish these goals, Extension leadership should promote the integration of relevant international perspectives in *all* ongoing Extension issues and priority programs."

The Foreign Policy Association (FPA), through its programs, publications and extensive experience in arranging public education forums, is uniquely qualified to help the Extension Service, and the public policy education specialists in particular, achieve these goals.

What Is the Foreign Policy Association?

The Foreign Policy Association is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan grassroots public education association dedicated to creating an informed populace in the field of U.S. foreign policy. It was founded in 1918 as the League of Nations Association in support of President Wilson's campaign to have the United States join the League of Nations.

While FPA has undergone many changes since its inception, its basic mission remains the same. It is dedicated to the democratic concept of creating an informed public—a public knowledgeable about foreign policy issues, confident in its ability to engage in dialogue on the issues and willing to play a part in the decision-making process.

FPA is committed to discovering, creating, publishing and disseminating information, nonpartisan materials, new ideas and techniques that a) help promote high quality international education programs across the country; b) are responsive to the needs of local communities; and c) bring the international education reform movement one step closer to reaching all people of this democratic nation.

Achieving FPA Goals

FPA's educational outreach efforts take many forms and reach many people. Our resources are current, timely, well-written and affordable. They address many of the most salient and pressing international issues facing our nation in ways that are understandable, readable, well-balanced and thought-provoking. And they foster discussion and interaction among their readers and users.

As the National Director of College and Community Programs, it is my responsibility to disseminate our programs and resources and to create new linkages between interested parties. The core of my ac-

tivities focuses on the Great Decisions Program, a study and discussion program based on the annual *Great Decisions* briefing book.

Written by FPA's editorial staff, this 110-page paperback contains articles on eight major foreign policy issues. Each article provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of the current national debate on the topics, pertinent factual information, a range of policy options and strategies, provocative discussion questions and recommended readings.

The topics for *Great Decisions 1989* are: Ethics in International Relations; The Persian Gulf; Latin American Debt; Arms Agreements; China; Farmers, Food and the Global Supermarket; The Horn of Africa; and International Drug Traffic.

In addition, each briefing book contains an opinion ballot that enables Great Decisions participants to take part in the decision-making process. Participants send completed ballots to FPA where they are tabulated and compiled into a National Ballot Report. This report is then distributed to members of the Executive Branch, officials at the Departments of Defense and State, and key members of Congress and the media. Many volunteer coordinators distribute them to state and local officials as well.

As a supplement to the *Great Decisions* briefing book, FPA publishes an annotated bibliography and is involved in the production of a television series. The series consists of eight half-hour multi-media programs that complement each of the *Great Decisions* topics. Available in the spring, it is carried by many Public Broadcasting Service stations around the country.

Great Decisions provides background reading on important current issues and common knowledge to a diverse general public so they can begin a discussion on a close-to-equal footing.

FPA also publishes the *Headline Series*, a series of monographs written by distinguished experts on contemporary international topics that are designed to fill the gap between scholarly texts and the front page of the newspaper; *Preview*, a monthly newsletter that looks ahead to the events and issues likely to be of major significance in the coming month; *A Citizen's Guide to U.S. Foreign Policy*, which has been published since 1968 in presidential election years and is an excellent resource for voters and candidates alike; and *A Guide to Careers in World Affairs*.

In addition to the above mentioned resources, FPA collaborates with academic institutions to (co)sponsor seminars and symposia; conducts in-service workshops for high school educators and students on the teaching of foreign policy and international affairs; hosts student and adult town meetings on current foreign policy issues; plans and executes luncheons and seminars featuring prominent national foreign policy experts; and provides technical as-

sistance to institutions and organizations working to develop and/or further expand programs on international issues.

A wide range of organizations, institutions and individuals are affiliated with FPA and, collectively, we reach more than 250,000 people nationwide. Despite our successes and the dedication of volunteer leaders around the country who help us make things happen, we continue to look for ways to strengthen, improve and expand our national outreach.

How Can You Help?

What do you have that FPA wants—and needs? In a word—people. You have people you are trying to interest in international issues, people who are already interested and people who want to make things happen. You have people who pull together educational materials and give them to other people. You have people who administer and deliver programs and you have superb resource people.

Basically what you have is a perfect audience for FPA's resources and programs. Our interests naturally intersect. When you combine your interests as public policy education specialists—seeking ideas for conducting state educational programs to increase knowledge and stimulate interest of rural groups in emerging policy issues—with FPA's interest in having its resources used by the widest audience possible—we have an unbeatable combination.

Where Do We Go from Here?

I would like to suggest a number of ways we can work together. One way is for you to integrate FPA's resources into ongoing county or local extension programs. *Great Decisions* topics can be included as part of a lecture series, incorporated into existing study and discussion groups, or used as the focus for groups looking for a course of study.

FPA's resources can be used as part of adult or youth leadership programs such as 4-H.

Perhaps you would be interested in putting together a community-based or county-wide town meeting. Ask one of your elected officials to discuss one of the *Great Decisions* topics with her or his constituents and use this event to launch "internationalism" in your area. Two upcoming topics, "Farmers, Food and the Global Supermarket" and "Latin American Debt," are good possibilities.

The programs you can design are limited only by staff and resources, not by imagination and the importance of helping to heighten international awareness, understanding and involvement among

extension clientele. As you develop your plans, be assured that FPA is available to help you in any way we can.

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