

New England Journal of Public Policy

Volume 30

Issue 1 *Wealth, Power, and the Public Interest:*
Building Equity Culture and Civic Stewardship | Select
writings by Marcy Murningham

Article 2

3-20-2018

Editor's Note

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Recommended Citation

O'Malley, Padraig (2018) "Editor's Note," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol30/iss1/2>

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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

I have known Marcy Murningham since the early 1980s when she worked for the late Robert Wood, once president of the University of Massachusetts system, then superintendent of Boston Public Schools during the heyday of court-ordered desegregation. During this tumultuous period in Boston's history, Murningham played a significant role, tasked by Wood to plan and direct the structural reorganization of the department.

Since then her career has taken many turns. She has churned out a plethora of reports and analyses for foundations, universities, the corporate world, and media monoliths. The result is a formidable body of work, from which the articles for this issue of the journal draws a tranche.

What comes through as you read is Murningham's focus on scholarship, on the minutiae that separate excellence from the average as she transverses a multiplicity of disciplines in public, corporate, and institutional domains. She commands our interest by venturing into issues that were not in the realm of public discourse ten or twenty years ago.

Shareholder rights, civic virtue and stewardship, the nexus of wealth and power, and corporate fiduciary responsibilities come under her rigorous scrutiny. She examines metrics to gauge a company's place on the scale of social responsibility and addresses morality and the media, equity and inclusiveness, and sustainability before it became the fashion of the day.

The scope and breath of Murningham's work can be gauged from the range of eminent institutions and luminaries that commissioned reports and in-depth analysis on social issues or supported her or were participants in her inquiry into emerging trends in several public policy areas. One constant permeates and brings convergence, outlining the framework of a moral economy to fulfill, she writes, America's covenant and democracy's promise, more fragile now in the rise of the alt-right, nationalisms, polarization, and increasing inequality. It is hard to believe that the richest 1 percent of global citizens own 50.1 percent of all household wealth.

Murningham is an original. Her research and scholarship, normative and prescriptive, are fused with a moral integrity that has not wavered in forty years. Few can match such a record. But Murningham's work has never received a wide audience. Academia could not pigeonhole her, its scope too narrow to accommodate her wide range of interests. She writes with a fluency and style, precision and clarity, that are certainly not traits one finds in the contents of many professional journals where obscurity is the litmus test of authenticity.

Her instinct in many instances is to move beyond prevailing views and accepted wisdom. Her propensity to see things in a different light, however, is sometimes discomfiting to those who are averse to a rigorous questioning of the established order. As we know, in many public policy domains, there are vested interests that see innovative thinkers as a threat, and advocates of disruption often find themselves marginalized.

Murningham's unwavering commitment to the media, our institutions of governance, and the corporate world and fiduciary trust holds to a moral standard that meets the Constitution's declaration to "We the people."