

The Door Swings Both Ways

“This will swing open a new door for the young people of America. For them, and for this entire land of ours, it is the most important door that will ever open—the door to education. This legislation is the key which unlocks it.”

Those were the words of President Lyndon Johnson as he signed the Higher Education Act (HEA) into law on November 8, 1965. In her EndSights commentary, AASCU President Muriel Howard says, “There is no doubt that Lyndon Johnson’s vision of improved opportunity for all Americans radically changed—and improved—both higher education and America in numerous ways. Not only did access to postsecondary education and training vastly increase as a direct result of federal support, higher education mitigated many of the historical inequities in our society. The expansion of opportunity made ours at once a more just and a more productive and prosperous society.”

This edition is one of the few themed issues in the 10-year history of *Public Purpose*. But given that access and opportunity are part of the historical mission of our members, what could be more appropriate than an in-depth look at legislation in support of that mission?

Stephen Pelletier’s “**HISTORY’S LESSONS: The Meaning of the Higher Education Act**” is an incisive and substantive look at the HEA—both strengths and weaknesses. Pelletier traces the act’s historical milestones and impact, as well as the impending challenges in the current reauthorization.

The federal role in higher education always seems to be part of the debate surrounding the re-authorization of the HEA. It is hard to put a price tag on opportunity, especially when the investment pays dividends that extend far beyond personal success. Complementing Pelletier’s piece is an article by Gayle Bennett that illustrates the point.

“If Not for Pell” tells the story of seven presidents, currently at AASCU institutions, who were able to attend college because of the grant program. These same presidents are “paying it forward,” serving as advocates for students who need financial aid.

I thought it was fitting to include this 1965 photo taken in the Oval Office. It features Allan Ostar, left, being introduced to President Johnson by Douglass Cater, special assistant to the president for education. The Pelletier article points out the role Ostar played in the development of the HEA; Ostar began his leadership of AASCU that same year.



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