

CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2016

Citizens in a Global Society

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**From Skepticism to
Engagement**

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**The Kettering Foundation
and US-China Relations**

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Kettering's Multinational Research



The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through inter-related program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

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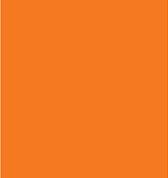
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Meeting the Challenges of a World Divided: Engaging Whole Bodies Politic

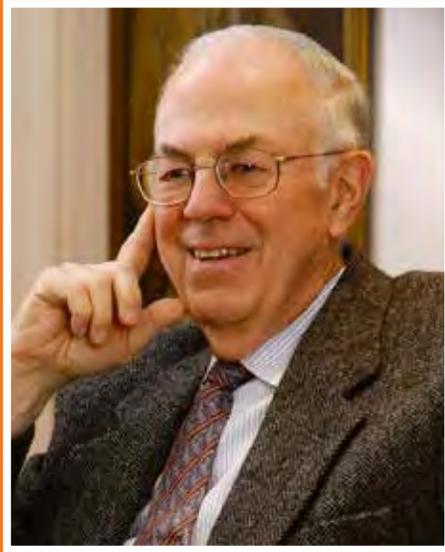
By Harold H. Saunders

Harold H. Saunders, assistant secretary of state in the Carter administration and the recently retired director of international affairs at the Kettering Foundation, who spent more than 20 years in high foreign policy positions in the United States government, died on March 6, 2016, at his home in McLean, Virginia. He was 85. Over the past 35 years, Saunders developed and practiced the process of Sustained Dialogue, which he described as a “five-stage public peace process” to transform racial and ethnic conflicts. He was the author of four books, coauthor of another, and coeditor of still another, all dealing with issues of international peace. This article is drawn from the revised edition of his book Politics Is about Relationship: A Worldview for the Citizens’ Century (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-11, 257.

Our country and our world are deeply divided. Too many people have lost the capacity to listen thoughtfully, to talk respectfully, and to relate constructively. A culture of dialogue generated and sustained over time by citizens outside government is critical to peace and to equitable and sustainable economic, political, and social development.

The challenges of our troubled world require political—not just technical—responses. There are some things only governments can do—negotiate binding agreements, make and enforce laws, provide for the common defense, fund public projects and programs. But some things only citizens outside government can do—transform conflictual human relationships, modify human behavior, and change political culture. Only governments can negotiate peace treaties, but only people can make peace.

As John Gaventa wrote, “When aware of their rights and agency, and when organized with others, citizens have the power and capacity to bring about fundamental and lasting change. . . . While the idea of citizen-driven change has been around for a long time, it still stands in sharp contrast to many other paradigms which dominate public affairs.”



The Kettering Foundation lost a respected colleague and friend when Harold (Hal) Saunders passed away early this year. He earned degrees in American studies from Yale, went on to the CIA, and wound up in the White House and State Department. He was known for his steady hand in difficult situations. He joined Kettering in 1991 as director of international affairs, where he was able to continue his work with the Dartmouth Conference and infuse all of Kettering's international work with this same steady approach to relationship building. Saunders believed in family and friends and his work, which focused on Sustained Dialogue. His hope was that others would take an interest in Sustained Dialogue, which grew partly out of his experience in the Middle East and also from his work with the Russians. Before he died, Saunders and his wife, Carol, were made aware of the Kettering Foundation Board of Directors' intent to establish the Harold Saunders Award for Research on Sustained Dialogue. They were delighted. The criteria and application process will be announced at a later date. The award will be a living memorial to his life's work.

The conceptual lenses we use to understand events determine how we act. Achieving a fresh way of understanding the world around us requires new conceptual lenses to bring a rapidly changing world into focus. Thus, we must spend some time reflecting on how we think about politics.

To act more productively, we must change our way of understanding how our public world works—a world that is falling behind in meeting its challenges. My aim is to help each of us see the world through new lenses and demonstrate that these can change how we act.

Five challenges top the human agenda at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Responses to all depend on citizens outside government as well as on the governments *they* constitute.

First is whether and, if so, how people of different racial, ethnic, cultural, historic, and economic backgrounds can coexist peacefully, justly, and productively. Whatever the specific arrangements societies make, the choice is between a productive peace and dehumanization and destruction. How such choices are framed, made, and executed is the essence of politics.

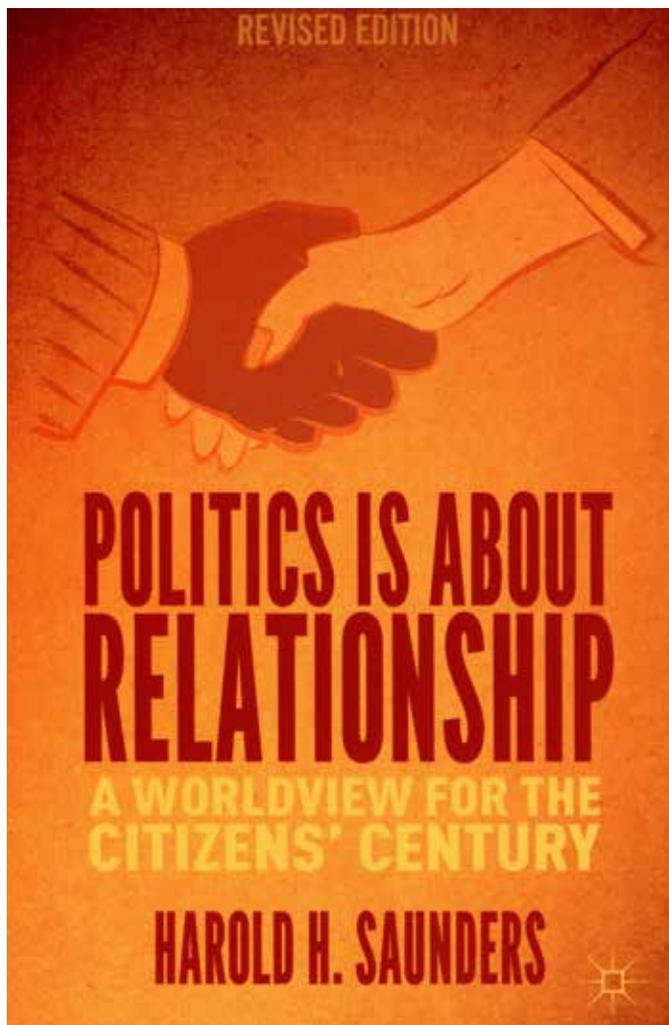
Second, the gap between the rich and the poor widens—both within and between countries. Societies are

increasingly fragmented, crime-ridden, and violent; we neglect the power of citizens to build whole bodies politic worthy of defining their identity. Sustainable and just economic development requires building productive relationships within and across polities.

Third, ideological gulfs within and between societies widen and deepen. Recent events demonstrate that alienation, hopelessness, ideological extremism, and anger can be expressed in devastating ways by tightly organized, committed, and marginalized individuals. The challenge to polities is political—creating an environment that offers dignity and realistic engagement to all. A violent response alone cannot make the world either more peaceful or more just.

Fourth, we are taxing the earth beyond its ability to sustain us. Since 1972, periodic global conferences have placed the environment on the global agenda and urged multilateralism to protect it. Technical remedies may meet some challenges, but we lack political capacity to right the balance.

Fifth, some see the new century as a crossroads for humankind, but governance falls far short of the challenge. In the words of former Czech President Václav Havel: “It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways of managing society, the



economy, and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave.”

The global project of the twenty-first century is political: to engage citizens in and out of government in whole bodies politic in responding to these challenges. With some leap of faith, I have called this “The Citizens’ Century.” Only citizens can change political culture. Only citizens can decide to work and relate in different

ways. Only by engaging the resources of whole bodies politic can we as citizens meet our challenges. Bodies politic that exclude or ignore much of their populations are not whole, nor are they engaging the full richness of resources they need to meet the challenges of this new century. Engaging whole bodies politic is both a practical and a moral imperative.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WHOLE HUMAN BEINGS IN WHOLE BODIES POLITIC

The conceptual lens used for the study and practice of politics prevalent for two generations at the end of the twentieth century has focused on

government and other political institutions such as political parties and interest groups—the structures and wielders of power. In internal affairs, the mantra has been “politics is about power” with power defined as control or the ability to coerce. In international politics, we have spoken of the “realist paradigm” or “power politics model” focusing on states pursuing objectively defined interests in zero-sum contests of power with other nation-states. We need a way of understanding politics that embraces citizens both inside and outside government since each have work that only they can do. If we see them as parts of a whole dividing the labor, the challenge to each group is to enlarge their own capacities—and then to stretch those capacities by learning to work together to build whole bodies politic. Today, neither government nor civil society is strong in its own right because citizens in and out of government are not conducting their relationships in productive ways.

I present new conceptual lenses—new assumptions about how the world works, a new political paradigm, and an operational concept with a practical instrument for putting that paradigm to practical use. The paradigm and the assumptions behind it are the starting point for changing how we act.

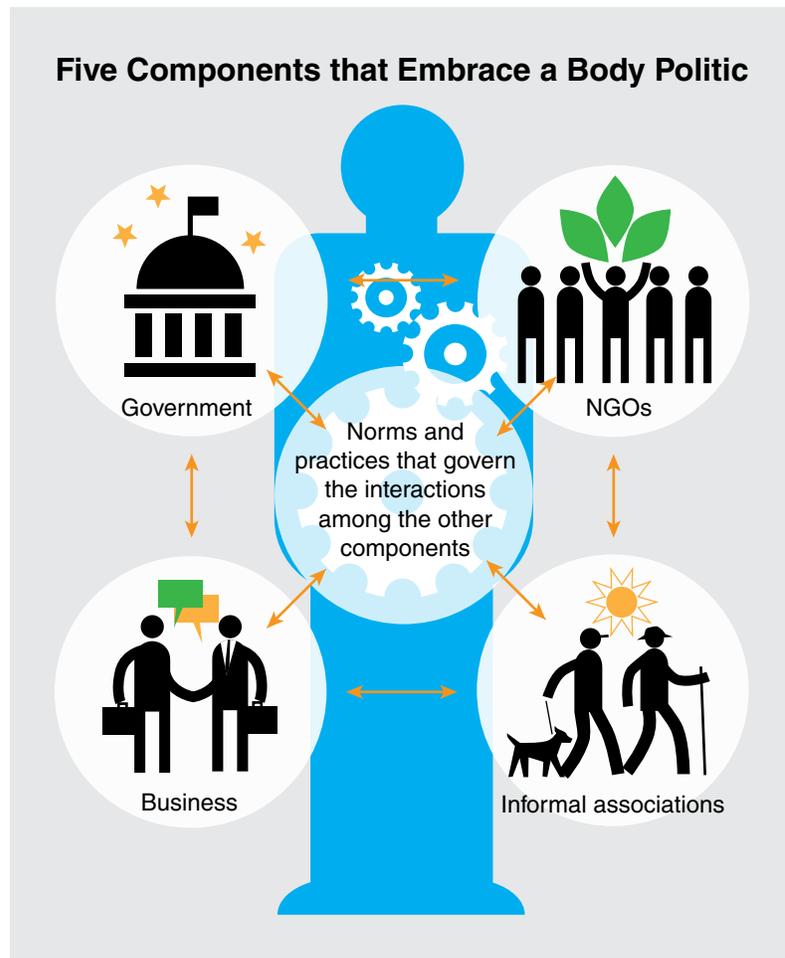


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The proposed paradigm: *politics is a cumulative, multilevel, and open-ended process of continuous interaction over time engaging significant clusters of citizens in and out of government and the relationships they form to solve public problems in whole bodies politic across permeable borders, either within or between communities or countries.* This focus on a *multilevel process of continuous interaction among citizens* contrasts to the traditional focus on a linear sequence of actions and reactions among institutions as in a chess game. Continuing *interactions* are the essence of that process. What is important are the interplay and interpenetration between entities—not just the action by one upon the other.

To capture this process of continuous interaction, I have used the human word *relationship*, carefully defined in terms of five components: identity, interests, power, stereotypes, and patterns of interaction. Relationship is a diagnostic tool because it enables practitioners to organize the elements of complex interactions for analysis. It is an operational tool because practitioners can get inside each component of relationship to change it.

This paradigm and the concept of relationship bring human beings—citizens outside as well as inside government and related institu-



tions—into the study and practice of political life. That does not denigrate the importance of states and governments. By itself, however, government is not enough. Citizens need their own instruments. The paradigm, the concept of relationship, and the instrument of dialogue broaden our focus to include the rich resources of whole bodies politic.

My hope is that we can find common purpose across the spectrum of

scholars and practitioners in meeting the challenges humankind faces. The success of our attempt depends heavily on recognizing that there is nothing more authentic than the experience of whole human beings tackling their most difficult challenges in whole bodies politic. Experience nurtures a different way of knowing. I know of no fuller way to understand political life than to plumb the complexity of human experience.

As a framework for analysis, I suggest—and a few others are moving in this direction—thinking of a body politic as embracing five components: government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), business, informal associations that citizens form to pursue their interests, and the norms and practices that govern the interactions among the other components. The manner in which these elements interact defines the “governance” of a body politic. The focus is on the interaction. Do they act in authoritarian, competitive, or conflictual ways? Or do they interact in complementary or collaborative ways respecting such principles as reciprocity? The question is not only whether government can attend effectively to the needs of citizens but also whether citizens can interact productively to do the work that only they can do. The norms and practices that govern the totality of those

interactions may grow out of years of experience, or they may need to be negotiated as in the wake of a revolution or the sudden overthrow of an authoritarian regime.

Effective, creative, and just government is, of course, a key actor in promoting development, but as many citizens have said, government cannot do it all. Sustainable, just, and equitable development requires constructive interactions among all elements of a body politic—good *governance*.

THE CITIZENS’ CENTURY

Politics is about relationship—citizens connecting to improve the quality of their lives together. Dialogue is their instrument, enhancing their capacities to concert. Human beings will not be whole until they learn to relate through open and honest dialogue. To create a just and compassionate political environment, they constitute government. Citizens inside and outside government must learn to relate peacefully and productively for the benefit of all. Politics will not be whole until all citizens—inside and outside government, scholars and practitioners—are engaged collaboratively in serving the whole.

Engaging whole human beings in whole bodies politic is the great project of the Citizens’ Century. ■