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NATIONAL NEWS

Common Core Found to Rank With Respected Standards

Education Week

By: Nora Fleming

October 26, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/26/10standards.h31.html?kn=NWQFvCUgY0FJyKQc2SFclK0QoFCHjpthIGP&cmp=clp-edweek>

The common-core standards in English/language arts and mathematics are generally aligned to the leading state standards, international standards, and university standards at the high-school-exit level, but are more rigorous in some content areas, says a report released Wednesday.

Researchers at the [Educational Policy Improvement Center](#), or EPIC, a Eugene, Ore.-based research organization, compared the content and curriculum standards for California and Massachusetts; the [Texas College and Career Readiness Standards](#), a collection of competencies and skills for secondary students that complements the state's high school standards; the [International Baccalaureate standards](#); and the [Knowledge and Skills for University Success](#), a set of expectations endorsed by 28 research universities and used by the College Board as a reference in its own standards. The authors wanted to see how closely the content covered, the range of material included, and the depth of that material correlated with the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

While [the study](#) found alignment in the topics covered and the range of content between the common-core standards and the five others, the common core demanded a bit more cognitive complexity in some topics, particularly English/language arts, the report says. The comparison standards lacked the depth of challenge in reading for informational texts, writing, and reading and writing for literacy, and, on the math side, in geometry. However, some of the rigor of the common core will be defined by examples of student work and can't yet be measured for depth of knowledge required, according to the study.

It comes on the coattails of an increasing push at the federal level to ensure students are leaving high school ready for college. The Obama administration's recent waiver plan for the No Child Left Behind Act frees states from some of the law's accountability requirements if they adopt standards for college and career readiness. A bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, whose current version is the NCLB law, also makes that a priority.

But some experts ask whether having comparable international, national, and state-to-state standards means that the common core makes it more likely a student will be prepared for college.

"The study continues a line of evidence that the core standards that states have adopted have a solid research base and will help teachers and students," said Chris Minnich, the senior membership director at the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) who led the standards and assessment work at the CCSSO, one of the groups that shepherded the development of the common-core standards. "The next step for states is to ensure that during the implementation of the standards, teachers have the support and tools that they need to teach the new standards."

Just One Measure

The comparison standards selected were either highly regarded state standards or focused specifically on college and career preparation and rigor. David Conley, the lead researcher on the project and EPIC's founder and chief executive officer, was also involved in developing the IB standards, Texas' standards, and the Knowledge and Skills for University Success standards. Mr. Conley said his center selected the IB, Texas, and KSUS standards because its researchers felt confident those were of high

quality and focused on college preparation.

Still, he said, the report is not meant to measure the quality of one group of standards over another, but rather to test the conclusion that the common-core standards place a strong emphasis on preparing students for postsecondary education by comparing the standards with others that also focus on college readiness. States also shouldn't focus on trying to make sure everything in their standards and all the details line up exactly with the common core as they do their own in-depth comparisons, he said. Instead, they should look for broader correlations.

"We shouldn't think of one set of standards being better than another; different standards have different purposes," Mr. Conley said. "The goal is not to have perfect alignment between them, but to see if they are reasonably consistent."

"If everything doesn't line up [between their standards and the common core]," he said, "it doesn't mean they have to overhaul their curriculum."

While [Michael W. Kirst](#), a professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford University, had not yet seen the report, he said the comparison and alignment of the "long-standing, well-respected" IB standards with the common core was particularly noteworthy, given that the common-core crafters have claimed that they are internationally benchmarked, and the results of the study could give some support to the claim.

Comparison and alignment with Texas, a state that didn't adopt the common core, is also important, Mr. Kirst said, because the Texas effort to adopt standards was led by the Texas Coordinating Board of Higher Education as a way of ensuring the state's K-12 standards were focused on college readiness.

"Texas has been a leader in the establishment of college- and career-readiness standards, and overall received positive remarks for strong and in-depth coverage [in the report]," said DeEtta Culbertson, a Texas Education Agency spokeswoman. "In reviewing the study, what we see are findings that Texas College and Career Readiness Standards are found to be at or above the standards contained within the common-core state standards."

Though officials from Massachusetts had not yet seen the findings, a spokesman for the state education department said Massachusetts' involvement in helping write the common core and its adoption of those standards was tied to the close correlation between the two and the ability to augment the common core to be more Massachusetts-specific when implementing. As a result, the correlation would not be surprising, he said.

According to a related study EPIC released in August, most entry-level college professors found the common-core high school standards were relevant to college-level courses. Still, meeting those benchmarks is not the only achievement a student needs to be ready for to succeed in college, according to Mr. Conley.

"There's a big danger if you look at these standards as everything you need to know to be ready because it's not. If you think they're the perfect measure, they're not," Mr. Conley said. "The common-core standards are a step in the right direction, but we still need more information on what makes a student college- and career-ready and still have a way to go toward creating stronger standards and assessments than [evaluating a student] by a cut score on a test."

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The Wrong Fix for No Child Left Behind

New York Times

By: Editorial Board

October 26, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/opinion/the-wrong-fix-for-no-child-left-behind.html?_r=1&ref=opinion&pagewanted=print

The revised [No Child Left Behind Act that passed](#) out of [the Senate education committee](#) last week goes too far in relaxing state accountability and federal oversight of student achievement. The business community, civil rights groups and advocates of disabled children are rightly worried that the rewrite of the law would particularly hurt underprivileged children.

The bill's main sponsors — Senator Tom Harkin, a Democrat of Iowa, and Senator Mike Enzi, a Republican of Wyoming — should take the criticism to heart and go back to the drawing board.

The original No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is far from perfect. The Obama administration recognized that in September when it said that it would waive some of the law's requirements for states that agree to several reforms, like creating new programs to overhaul the worst schools and comprehensive teacher evaluation systems.

The waiver plan would allow states to be rated on student growth on math and reading tests instead of simply counting up the percentages of students who reach proficiency on those tests. It would also require states to set goals for all schools and plan for closing achievement gaps and end the pass-fail system under which high-performing schools are rated as needing improvement if one racial or economic subgroup fails to reach the achievement target.

The plan encourages states to embrace data-driven systems and teacher-evaluation systems that take student achievement into account. But it has not been well received in the Senate, where some lawmakers seem to feel as if it usurps legislative power.

The Harkin-Enzi bill lowers the bar for reform and reduces federal pressure on the states. It focuses only on the bottom 5 percent of schools, essentially allowing states to do as they please with the rest. It backs away from requiring states to have clear student achievement targets for all schools, and does not require most schools to evaluate teachers rigorously.

Lawmakers are right that No Child Left Behind needs to be overhauled. But Congress needs to do this carefully, without retreating from core provisions that require states to do better by children in return for federal aid.

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Foes of standardized tests for students have it all wrong

New York Daily

By: Miral Sattar

October 26th 2011

http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2011/10/26/2011-10-26_foes_of_standardized_tests_for_students_have_it_all_wrong.html

Opponents of accountability-based education reform say that student testing has run amok. They argue that students require focused attention, that standardized tests are biased. But for me, a standardized test saved my education.

I'm a 32-year-old entrepreneur and techie born in [Karachi, Pakistan](#). And though I moved here as a baby and have been a New Yorker for most of my life, I often encounter passersby who comment on my dark eyes and dark hair. I'm even complimented on how well I speak "good English."

I didn't speak much when I started school in an overcrowded classroom in Queens. The school's administrators mistook my shy and quiet disposition for not being able to understand the language. No one gave me a test or asked me any questions. Instead, the educators quickly profiled my family as non-English-speaking immigrants, despite the fact that my father graduated from the [University of Colorado](#) on a scholarship and my mother was an economics major at a university in Karachi. My parents were told I would be placed in English as a Second Language classes and were instructed to stop speaking to me in their native tongue of Urdu.

My 6-year-old self enjoyed ESL. We would play learning games and watch the math show "Square 1" with an instructor who, to me, looked like Cleopatra. But I wasn't learning much.

A few years later, my family left Queens for a [New Jersey](#) suburb. The school once again placed me in ESL, and in the third grade, my teachers tracked me into the lowest-level groups for reading and math. During two-hour ESL sessions, I would practice basic sentence formation. It broke up the monotony of school, and I was delighted to have a break.

But when fourth grade came around, all students took a required test called the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. I scored the highest in my grade, shocking everyone, including my teacher.

The administration thought there had been a mistake - they even suspected I'd cheated - and ordered me to take the test again.

Children were typically sent to the principal's office for smoking or getting into fights. I was sent to the principal's office because I had aced a test that everyone expected me to fail. She grilled me for an hour about my background, only to get one-word answers from me.

"So where is your family from?" she asked.

"Queens."

"Originally?"

"Pakistan."

"Do you know you scored the highest? Twice?" she said with disbelief.

"No."

"So why are you in ESL and in the lowest math group?"

"I don't know."

"Well you sound like you can speak English just fine, and your mathematical skills seem advanced. We'll call your parents and administer an IQ test."

"Okay."

The following week, in another standardized test, I scored off the charts again.

A few parent-teacher conferences later, I was moved into the highest math and reading levels, with official apologies that I had slipped through the system for so long.

Regardless of whether you are for or against education reform, standardized tests might be the only tests that are color- and culture-blind.

I had cruised through city schools as an academic failure until a state exam proved teachers wrong and turned my life around. I would go on to attend [Columbia](#)'s engineering school and currently enjoy building user platforms and integrating new

technologies into news products as a tech entrepreneur.

If we turn our backs on testing, how many other children's true strengths or weaknesses will go undetected? How many will miss the opportunity to receive the education they deserve?

Miral Sattar is a [New York](#)-based writer and entrepreneur. She is the founder of the digital publishing platform [BiblioCrunch.com](#).

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STATE NEWS

Michigan House Democrats question whether charter schools provide options for all parents

Grand Rapids Press MLive.com

By: Dave Murray

October 26, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/10/house_democrats_question_wheth.html

LANSING – Charter schools provide choice not for all parents, but “choice for those with means,” said Democratic state House members who oppose bills that would lift a cap on the number of charters and attract out-of-state providers.

House Education Committee members said Wednesday they feared a parent empowerment package would launch a proliferation of new charters they feared would weaken existing schools by “cherry picking” better students and state aid dollars without assurances the new programs would provide a better education.

But charter school advocates said the bill provides layers of accountability and offers frustrated parents more opportunities.

“Some children face failing in life because they attended a failing school,” said state Rep. Thomas McMillin, R-Rochester Hills.

“Saving kids from a doomed life is not cherry picking.”

Michigan has 255 charter schools, intended to be innovative, independent schools approved by a public university, community college or school district. Expanding their numbers is among reforms backed by state GOP leaders and President Obama.

The House began testimony on a package of bills already approved in the state Senate that would lift the cap on charter schools authorized by state universities

The bill lifts a cap on the number of schools authorized by state universities, but also includes a variety of changes intended to make it easier for successful charter school operators from out of state to set up shop in Michigan. Among the provisions is waiving the property taxes for groups that own property leased to charter schools.

Representatives posed questions about the number of charter schools that are operated by for-profit management companies.

Schools are run by non-profit boards, but about 80 percent of contract with a company for at least one service.

Rep. Doug Geiss, D-Taylor, said he's concerned that companies would tend to operate schools in more affluent areas so the programs would appear more successful, serving as a better business model as the companies eye expansion.

He also said few of the charter schools provide transportation, making it difficult for some poor families to send their children to different schools.

“A child attending a failing school in my district would have to walk three-and-a-half miles to get to the closest charter school,” he said. “My concern is that you are not providing choice to 100 percent of the students, but choice for those with means.”

Rep. Lisa Brown, D-West Bloomfield, said she has concerns about accountability. She said there is nothing in the bill preventing a failing charter schools from being shut down and simply reopening a block away.

She also said the charter schools have an unfair advantage because they can turn students away when they reach capacity.

Representatives of an Ann Arbor-based parent advocacy group said the charter bill would offer parents choices, but not necessarily better options.

Steven Norton of Michigan Parents for Schools said there is nothing in the bills that would improve education, “opening up more and more ways for people to walk away from struggling schools.”

But James Goenner of the National Charter Schools Institute disputed concerns that lifting the cap would “open the floodgates.”

Goenner said university authorizers are not going to take on more schools than they can properly oversee, and said after the meeting that slow growth is more likely. About 7 percent of the state's students are enrolled in charter schools, and he said could grow to slightly to 10 percent in five years if the bill is approved.

The former head of Central Michigan University's charter program, Goenner said many of the same dire predictions of the demise of traditional schools were raised back when charters were created in Michigan in 1995, and have not become true.

Goenner told Brown that poorly performing charter schools have been shuttered, “And I've got the scars to prove it. I was on 'Nightline' and I've been called every name in the book. But at the end of the day, money was returned to the school aid fund” after schools were closed.

Education Committee chairman Paul Scott, R-Grand Blanc, said he expects more testimony on the bill next week.

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Proposal calls for cutting in half Tennessee lottery scholarships for some students

Memphis Commercial Appeal

By: Richard Locker

By: October 26, 2011

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/oct/26/proposal-calls-cutting-half-lottery-scholarships-s/>

NASHVILLE -- State policymakers are examining a plan that would cut in half the \$4,000-per-year Hope Scholarship at four-year colleges for students who achieve only one of the program's two eligibility criteria.

Currently, high school graduates who make either 21 on the ACT college entrance exam or have a 3.0 high school GPA qualify for the base \$4,000 annual scholarship at four-year institutions in Tennessee or \$2,000 at two-year schools.

But a state Senate task force examining how to close an \$18 million annual deficit in the scholarship program was presented with a new policy option Wednesday that would require students to achieve both standards to qualify for the full \$4,000 scholarship at four-year schools. The amount would remain \$2,000 at community colleges to encourage some students to start at the two-year schools.

The Senate Lottery Stabilization Task Force will decide next month what recommendation it will make to the full legislature, which must approve any changes in the lottery-funded scholarship program before it goes into effect.

Students who achieve only one of the two standards would receive \$2,000 per year at either four- or two-year schools but could start earning the \$4,000 grant in their third year of college if they maintain at least a 2.75 GPA during their first two years.

Higher education officials presented research indicating that students who meet only one of the two standards are more likely to drop out of college and will have a better chance of success starting at a two-year school and transferring to a four-year school to pursue baccalaureate degrees.

The change would save the lottery program about \$17 million a year if approved. It would be the first major tightening of the scholarship program since it began in 2004.

The proposal appeared to have support on the committee. "I think it gained some traction but there are still some question to be answered," Sen. Dolores Gresham, R-Somerville, the chairman of the task force and of the Senate Education Committee, said afterward.

But the sentiment was not unanimous. David Gregory, a Tennessee Board of Regents administrator, cited data accompanying the proposal indicating the change would "disproportionately affect African-American" students and low-income students.

The statistics estimated that 23 percent of students who would receive a reduced award would be black, 65 percent would be white and the remaining 12 percent students of other races, and 44 percent of students who would receive a reduced award would be from households with adjusted gross incomes of under \$60,000.

If lawmakers adopt the plan, they also will decide when it would go into effect. The policy option as presented assumes it would go into effect for students entering college either in the fall of 2013 or 2014 -- students who are currently 10th- or 11th-graders. If that occurs, it would depart from lawmakers' earlier discussions in favor of delaying any tightening of the scholarships for all current high school students on the grounds that they are already building academic credentials based on the current requirements.

At its first meeting in August, the task force reviewed several other options, including imposing income ceilings on eligibility for the first time. But the panel appears to be narrowing its focus toward the new proposal and toward options for increasing lottery revenue, including allowing lottery purchases with debit cards. Tennessee requires lottery ticket sales in cash only but 34 of the 44 states with lotteries allow purchases with debit cards.

The scholarship program has enough money in reserves, \$379 million, built up in the early years of the lottery to keep the program solvent until at least 2024, the task force was told at its first meeting.

Proposed change

If the lottery scholarship program moves toward requiring students to receive both a 21 ACT and have a 3.0 GPA to qualify for the full \$4,000 annual Hope Scholarship, or a \$2,000 grant at 4-year schools if they achieve only one of the two criteria, officials estimate:

- That in the first year, 5,257 fewer high school grads would qualify for the full benefit.
- That African-American students and students who traditionally attend Tennessee Board of Regents schools would be "disproportionately affected."

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Wisconsin is at an educational crossroads

By: Tony Evers
October 25, 2011

<http://www.biztimes.com/blogs/milwaukee-biz-blog/2011/10/24/wisconsin-is-at-an-educational-crossroads>

Editor's note: The following is the text of the address delivered by Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers at the BizTimes Get Smarter Conference on Oct. 20. To view a Wisconsin Eye video of the conference, click [here](#).

Thank you, Steve Jagler, BizTimes executive editor, for that kind introduction and for inviting me to participate in today's conference. In fact, I commend you and Dan Meyer, BizTimes publisher, and all the sponsors for hosting and supporting this event. The focus of this conference is right on: smart schools do lead to smart students, who become smart employees that result in smart companies headed by smart leaders.

Milwaukee is a focus of my work. After I was elected state superintendent, I established an office in Milwaukee, providing me a home base here for my work. I have joined the new Milwaukee Succeeds effort to improve the educational outcomes for all children in the city, regardless of whether they attend traditional public, charter, or private schools.

Through my federal and state authority, we are working aggressively to improve student achievement in our lowest performing and largest school district: the Milwaukee Public Schools. We have required MPS to adopt a uniform curriculum, implement data-driven student intervention systems, and implement turnaround strategies in nearly a dozen low performing schools.

I have enjoyed working with Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Greg Thornton. His solid leadership is producing results for students.

Reading and math scores are improving, particularly in the elementary and middle grades, and MPS has reduced the number of suspensions by over 26,000, an astonishing 36 percent! Dr. Thornton understands that kids can't learn if they are not in school, and I commend his hard work.

As state superintendent, I have the privilege of being able to visit schools and communities across Wisconsin. Overall, I am tremendously proud of the accomplishments of our public schools and proud of how diligently our educators are working to help students thrive and achieve, making Wisconsin a better place to live and work for everyone.

Wisconsin's public schools continue to lead the nation in graduation rates and college entrance exam scores, and we are best in the Midwest for students taking and passing rigorous college-level courses.

However, our great successes too easily mask the deep and long-standing challenges we face. Our graduation and achievement gaps are far too large, especially for students of color and low-income students here in Milwaukee and across Wisconsin. This is a challenge for our schools, our business and our economy; our future success depends on addressing this challenge head on.

Too many Wisconsin students drop out of school — one of every 10 students fails to obtain their high school diploma. The drop-out rate is much higher for our African-American, Hispanic, and Asian students, and for students with disabilities.

Dropouts are a statewide problem, but they aren't a problem in every district. In fact, 50 percent of the state's high school dropouts are right here in Milwaukee. Sixty percent can be found in just 10 school districts, and 80 percent are found in 50 school districts. Like any good business, we need to be laser-focused on this challenge and strategically deploy resources to address it.

Because the reality is that high school dropouts earn less, rely more on social services, and are four times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates. Our least skilled, least educated workers are bearing the brunt of this difficult economy, and we must remember that our future prosperity is tied up in their success.

Our high school graduates must have reading, writing, and computation skills that support the teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking that employers want. Not every student wants a college degree — some have different goals and aspirations—and our schools need to capture student interest and respond to varied learning styles so all students are successful. We need the support and involvement of Wisconsin's business community to help our educators and schools prepare students for the future.

The bottom line is this: Our system works for most kids, but not all kids. Our mission must be to prepare them ALL to succeed in college or career. Wisconsin needs all children on the pathway to prosperity.

Despite enormous challenges, we are doing everything we can to build this pathway to prosperity, to ensure Every Child is a Graduate ready for college or a career. To that end, we are focusing on four simple, but powerful questions:

- What and how should kids learn?
- How do we know if they learned it?
- What do we do if they don't? and
- How do we pay for it?

These questions are the cornerstones for reforming our education system, and we have aggressively tackled each one.

First, with regard to — What and how should kids learn?:

- We adopted the Common Core State Standards—rigorous, internationally benchmarked English language arts and mathematics standards that are now shared across 46 states and territories, and we are working to bring these new standards into the classroom.

- We are putting a new emphasis on early reading. Wisconsin used to be a national leader in elementary reading performance, but the reality is too many of our children aren't reading on grade level, and other states are closing early reading achievement gaps faster than we are. To address this, we are working to strengthen our early learning standards, exploring statewide early literacy screening, and retooling educator preparation and ongoing professional development to promote early reading success.

- We are also engaging in next generation learning projects that use technology to customize the student experience. Technology-driven instruction personalizes and supports student learning beyond the classroom walls, creating the possibility of individual learning plans for each student in the not too distant future. Southeastern Wisconsin school districts, through the leadership of CESA 1, are leading the way with this.

- Finally, we must continue to bridge the divide between high school, college, and career by expanding opportunities for every student to earn college credit or secure industry certifications while in high school. Industry certifications and expanded career and technical education opportunities will increase the employability of our graduates and reinforce the value of a high school diploma.

Second, with regard to — How do we know if kids learned?:

- We are developing next generation assessments tied to our new standards. Soon, these online adaptive exams will provide students, parents, and teachers the timely feedback they need to improve learning.

- We are also upgrading our data systems to provide a wealth of information regarding student progress. For the first time, we are matching student progress from K-12 into higher education. And, we are exploring ways to capture critical early learning data as well.

The third question — What do we do if students are not learning? — focuses on supporting improvement through accountability.

- With stakeholders across Wisconsin, we are leading the way in advancing educator effectiveness and school accountability.

- Together with a team of education leaders, we are crafting a fair and robust educator evaluation system. The reforms we are building are being developed with teachers and education leaders— not imposed upon them. Bringing our world-class educators to the table to advance meaningful reforms not only values their role as professionals, but results in a better product for students.

- On school and district accountability, we have long known that the system imposed by No Child Left Behind is broken. Congress is five years overdue in reauthorizing this broken law, and, without changes, every school in the country could soon be labeled as “failing.” My fellow state education chiefs and I have pushed Congress and the U.S. Department of Education, and, as a result, Secretary Duncan has agreed to give states waivers in exchange for comprehensive, state-led reform.

- As a result, Wisconsin is leading a nationwide movement to build state accountability systems that will replace NCLB. Our new system will include growth and attainment and will focus on graduating all students ready for college or careers. It will identify and support struggling schools as well as reward and replicate the practices of our highest performers. And, perhaps most importantly, our system will focus on outcomes for all children; and thus will include all publicly funded schools — traditional public schools, charter schools, and private choice schools.

- We know with Wisconsin voices at the table, we can create something better than what Washington has imposed. More importantly, this is a remarkable opportunity to have a statewide conversation about what we value about our schools and then build an accountability system that mirrors those values.

And, of course, the final question — How should we pay for schools?:

- Last year, we advanced the first comprehensive school finance reform plan in decades, our Fair Funding for Our Future plan. The plan laid the groundwork to prioritize existing resources and created a pathway for significant and necessary re-investment in our public schools. I urge our leaders to take this up now.

The path to prosperity is paved by having smart schools. We must move beyond the harsh rhetoric of the past few months and begin the slow process of rebuilding. Recently, Bill Penzey of Penzey's Spices said that to be “pro-business is to be pro-education.” I not only appreciate his comments, and his donation of gift boxes to 10,000 educators in Milwaukee, I think we can all agree that to be pro-business, you have to be pro-education.

We cannot afford to let conflicts among adults rob our children of the educational opportunities they need to succeed. I am committed to finding common ground and working together to improve education for Wisconsin's children wherever possible. Our kids deserve no less from us.

To keep Wisconsin's economy moving forward, it will take a sincere investment in our public schools.

Middle class opportunities are fading in the face of a struggling economy, declining wages, growing income and wealth inequality, and disinvestment in education. These challenges are threatening the foundations of our economy and democracy.

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