

Greater Good Gathering – Welcome

Convening: Greater Good Initiative

Speakers

ERIC B. SCHNURER
MERIT E. JANOW

The Greater Good Gathering held on February 6–7, 2019 explored the future of public policy and how best to advance the greater good in the 21st century in light of technological innovation, economic disruption, ideological polarization, and governance challenges. Event co-sponsors included Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia Law School, Union Theological Seminary, The Academy of Political Science, and Public Works LLC/Brain Storm Consulting.

ERIC SCHNURER: Thank you all for coming. My name is Eric Schnurer. I'm the founder of the Greater Good Gathering. I'd like to say a few quick words about where this event came from, what's happening over the next 24 hours and where we're headed after that.

The roots of this event lay in a variety of discussions concerning the future of government in an age of rapidly advancing technology. It's my belief that digital and social technologies will disrupt and reconfigure government business just as much as any other industry in the decades ahead. That means we need to rethink what it means to advance the greater good, because it won't be something we do collectively or just through public institutions. Public policy needs to be rethought as something that isn't just done by the public sector. That was the basis for the launch of this annual conference.

As you will hear more about tomorrow, most of the students here at SIPA are already thinking in those terms about their careers, but this requires some shared conception of the greater good, hence the name of the conference. To me this has nothing to do with partisan politics. In fact, somewhere out in the lobby I think we actually have a Republican. I don't quite see him in the room, but you'll be hearing from him shortly.

I'm just going to repeat here something I said at last year's inaugural conference about what we mean by the greater good. The question is whether you care about and apply your talents and education toward advancing the good of others than just yourself, whether in a single specific ethical decision involving just one other person's welfare or a lifelong pattern as a way of being. That is a simple definition of greater good that interests me. At the first Greater Good Gathering a year ago, we talked about that in the context of governments and governance. This year we are framing the discussion in terms of community. What today's technologies are doing to tear apart our sense of community from those personal interactions, on up to global relations, as well as the potential these same technologies promise and still hold to bring us together.

We'll start today by encapsulating these issues and examples everyone knows about because they are now daily headlines. We will end the day with a more hopeful vision of how the same technologies are being used to fight oppression and create communal interactions around the world. Tomorrow we will spend a full day exploring these themes from the ground up, starting with how these phenomena shape human cognition and then how that affects our relationships

with others, to what that portends for the nature of trust and the pursuit of truth for democracy and for global issues of confrontation and cooperation. We'll again conclude on a more hopeful note with students who are using technology to stretch the boundaries of public policy and advance the greater good in all sorts of creative ways. Let me conclude with what we'll do after that.

I actually didn't set out to start a conference. It's clear to me that we can't just end with a conference. In part, I hope this is merely one step in a conversation that continues amongst all of us for weeks and months to come. In part, I hope our friends from the media help amplify what is discussed here to bring others into the conversation. Beyond that, this greater good initiative will involve a series of continuing activities nationwide to bring Americans across the country into conversations like this about how we can collectively make the world and our small places in it better.

I'm working with some people at the Rand Institute and other higher education institutions, and with a cross-section of political professionals and opinion experts, on a new initiative to replicate this kind of discussion on a smaller scale, but in communities across the country and then blend these voices together technologically into an ongoing, interactive, nationwide conversation. The conversation will culminate in the Greater Good Gathering 3.0 where we will be talking about the implications of these technologies for the economy and the resulting political upheavals felt throughout the world today. We'll be announcing details of this in the spring.

In the meantime, let's get this conversation started. For that purpose, it is my pleasure to introduce Merit Janow, Dean of Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, our host for this event and a colleague of mine at Columbia Law School. Merit, thank you.

MERIT JANOW: Thank you very much, Eric, for bringing this really interesting initiative to SIPA and to Columbia where I feel it really belongs very naturally. SIPA is the interdisciplinary hub of policy research and engagement at Columbia. A lot of our students are thinking about the intersection of technology and public policy, which is cutting across our core fields here. I particularly want to thank our partners across the university. I am really pleased when SIPA can work with other departments and parts of the university. We have a number of individuals who have joined in this effort. I also want to acknowledge our own faculty members, Esther Fuchs and Robert Shapiro, both of whom have played a lead role in bringing this together at SIPA.

I think when we first came to realize the potential of the internet and interconnection and the power of globalization, we thought these trends were going to bring the world together. I think what we found is that there have been tremendous opportunities unleashed for creativity and entrepreneurship, but also new drivers of polarization and divisiveness that have profoundly revealed themselves in the United States and across the world. I've come to think of the power of social media and data really as an amplifier of our own tendencies within societies in ways we profoundly need to think about.

A couple of years ago at SIPA we started something I've called the technology and policy initiative. It is really aimed at introducing more of a curriculum around the way technology and data were changing our core fields, because our students are trying to change the world, trying to contribute to public policy by going into government, nonprofit organizations, and business. Technology and data are part of the skill set that they must have to be effective in these different settings, but these are also areas that require new research and I think are still strangely under-researched. The channels that I think we've deepened in recent time have been around cyber security, internet governance, and the digital economy, but there are so many new dimensions in each of those very big categories that I think warrant deep scholarship. Engagement in the world around data governance and privacy, new regulatory frameworks, opportunities for civic tech, and all of these subjects and more are very natural topics for SIPA, working in collaboration with other parts of the university.

I think what you've brought together is quite a sprawling agenda but with a clear logic to it. I welcome that and I applaud you for doing that. I hope that it also contributes to our own student engagement as well as future faculty research and training. Thank you very much for bringing this to SIPA and Columbia, and I look forward to a very exciting day. You have remarkable speakers. I thank all of you for coming here today and hope we will come away from this motivated to do more. Thank you.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

ERIC B. SCHNURER, founder of the Greater Good Gathering, has been involved with public policymaking at the highest levels for nearly forty years, since he worked in the White House during college writing speeches for President Jimmy Carter. He has served in all three branches of the federal government and for numerous state governments, as a speechwriter, prosecutor, policy advisor, general counsel, and chief-of-staff—and has worked in the private sector as a journalist, professor, business executive, and social entrepreneur. Today, he is President and CEO of a policy consulting firm advising Members of Congress, governors, mayors and other officials across the country; a regular contributor on the future of government and public policy for several major national and international publications; an adjunct professor of policy at various universities; and a sought-after speaker internationally. His latest venture is Virtu.us, a start-up designed to boost investment in human capital and public goods—and build community—in an era of declining public-sector responsiveness.

MERIT E. JANOW is an internationally recognized expert in international trade and investment, with extensive experience in academia, government, international organizations and business. In addition, she has had a life-long involvement with Asia and is an expert in that region. She has been a Professor of Practice at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and affiliated faculty at Columbia Law School since 1995. She teaches graduate courses in international trade/WTO law, comparative antitrust law, China in the global economy, international trade and investment policy, among others. Currently, in addition to being Dean of SIPA, she is also Co-Director of the APEC Study Center and until recently Chair of the Faculty Oversight Committee of Columbia's Global Center East Asia. Her research interests focus on international trade and investment, Asia, competition law and economic globalization. She has written several books, numerous articles and frequently speaks before business, policy, and academic audiences around the world.