Baird suggests that the Court can cue sophisticated litigants by signaling to them a receptivity to hear matters it considers important, by creating or suppressing legal issues in its opinion. Certiorari petitions do not arise randomly, but many involve strategically chosen cases for shaping the path of the law. Sometimes, in statutory interpretation cases, the Court suggests congressional action. In other cases, including those affecting the interpretation of the Constitution, the Court sends signals about its willingness to reconsider issues, given the right "test case." Presumably, knowledgeable interest groups respond to these signals and enable the Court to shape the law.

After considering apparent examples of this process, Baird empirically examines the agenda of the Supreme Court. For factors such as formal alterations of precedent, prominent cases, reversals, and others, the book finds a distinct increase in related cases around the fourth year after the original decision. Although one might ordinarily expect a Court set on legal change to respond immediately, in the first or second year, the dramatic effect does not occur until later.

One might believe that the Court has such a vast portfolio of certiorari petitions that cuing litigants would be unnecessary, but that is plainly not the case. The author discusses briefly the implications of her findings but elides the very dramatic implication about the constraints that the law imposes on the Court. Were justices truly just policymakers, like legislators, they would be able to take prompt action to effect their preferences, using any vehicle. However, it appears that the Court requires the *right* case and facts to pursue its policy agenda. This fact demonstrates the limits of its power, which is bounded by past law and case facts. Although cuing to sophisticated litigants can facilitate the Court's power, this is a slow process. The need to use this method demonstrates the significant legal constraints under which the Court operates.

Charter Schools: Hope or Hype? By Jack Buckley and Mark Schneider. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 376p. $35.00.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592708080262

— Scott Abernathy, *University of Minnesota*

The contribution of political science to an analysis of the effectiveness of recent reform efforts in American education has not been without its share of controversy. Balanced against the conclusions of a group of careful, theoretically grounded, and objective studies of school reforms have been questions about the role of ideology, lack of evidentiary support, and overly optimistic pronouncements raised against other studies in the field. It is against the backdrop of this sometimes tendentious literature that Jack Buckley and Mark Schneider examine the possibilities of one of America's larger and more controversial school reform initiatives in their recent book, *Charter Schools.*

The focus of these authors is primarily on the demand side of the educational equation—the parents who act as customers, critics, motivators, and cobuilders of social capital—an approach that builds on the work of Schneider, Paul Teske, and Melissa Marschall in *Choosing Schools: Consumer Choice and the Quality of American Schools* (2000). In addition, Buckley and Schneider draw on the challenges raised by Jeffrey Henig in *Rethinking School Choice: Limits of the Market Metaphor* (1994).

Buckley and Schneider weigh and measure charter schools along five broad dimensions of the possible consequences: competition, choice, community, accountability, and achievement. Their primary sources of data are twofold: The first is a multiwave panel consisting of telephone interviews with a first-wave sample of roughly one thousand parents with students in Washington, DC, schools (half in charters, half in traditional public schools); the second source consists of data collected from DCSchoolSearch.com, a Website created by the authors and two local nonprofit organizations to assist parents in gathering information for their choices. As with any attempt to collect panel data, particularly from parents in urban settings (with their high rates of transfer and mobility), the authors have had to contend with nontrivial levels of attrition, an issue that they discuss and address in some detail.

Much of what they find challenges the most optimistic hopes of charter school advocates, particularly in the "charter school as systemic solution" model. While charter school parents begin with high levels of satisfaction and enthusiasm, over time these hopes fade, raising the possibility of disillusionment. While charter schools appear to do no worse than traditional public schools on standardized measures of academic achievement, the evidence that charter schools are educating more challenging students (whereby similar scores would be a sign of success) is just not there. Although the authors find strong evidence that good information can produce better school choosers, the information that is out there, at least in Washington, DC, is not very good, and race plays a troubling role in some parental calculations (a finding based on an innovative use of parental search criteria on their Website).

The care with which the authors approach and discuss their data, methodology, and findings constitutes the book's greatest strength. Their primary contribution is not in trying to close the debate about charter schools, but something more useful: a thoughtful exploration by scholars who understand "the complexity of the real world of schools and how parents' behavior and attitudes shape and are shaped by the many aspects of schooling" (p. 62).

Readers who are interested in the often conflicting consequences of institutional design on educational and social outcomes and in the sensitivity of policy recommendations to the way in which questions are asked and data interpreted, and who appreciate that "facts are stubborn

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things" (p. 268), will find this book very rewarding. Some sections do, however, take a bit of effort to follow, and more casual readers may be put off by the complexity of some of the discussions. Yet given the presence of grand pronouncements based on occasionally opaque results in some of the recent school reform literature, the considerable attention to the strengths and limitations of the data and findings is refreshing and appropriate. Weighing in on school reform should be challenging and complicated. The stakes are too high for anything else.

One area where readers might be left wanting more is on the question of how charter schools fit into and fare under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Clearly, this is not the result of a flaw in the authors' basic research design; the first wave of their panel was conducted just before NCLB became law. In addition, Buckley and Schneider do discuss accountability more broadly and NCLB briefly, the latter primarily in the context of school reporting requirements. However, charter schools are in an interesting position under No Child Left Behind. They are both solutions and problems. The reconstitution of a persistently failing school as a charter school is one of the options under NCLB's progressively severe consequences. On the other hand, charter school failure rates under NCLB are quite high in some states, on a par with or above those of traditional public schools. Why they are failing is an interesting and complicated issue, and more attention—at least by way of discussion—to NCLB would have been welcome.

Do charter schools present us with cause for hope or is their promise nothing more than hype? In the authors' estimation, there is much to give us pause. By raising and then dashing parental hopes for quick and profound success, the hype surrounding charter schools may actually reduce the possibility of success. Parental self-sorting based on demographic characteristics will likely weaken, not strengthen, any potential benefits accruing to the traditional public schools from competition.

However, on the broader and perhaps equally important question for the discipline—"Political science research on education reform: Hope or Hype?"—the work of Buckley and Schneider is an essential component of a very hopeful trend.

The Welfare State Nobody Knows: Debunking Myths about U.S. Social Policy. By Christopher Howard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 260p. $29.95.

Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance, and Globalization. By Sanford E. Schram. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. 208p. $64.50 cloth, $21.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592708080274

— Kimberly J. Morgan, *George Washington University*

These two books on the American welfare state seek to challenge conventional understandings of redistributive policy and politics in the United States. Christopher Howard does so by looking at the many tools of social policy that, he argues, have been downplayed or ignored in most academic research. In addition to the well-known social insurance and transfer programs such as Social Security and public assistance, he argues, tax expenditures subsidizing private welfare provision (e.g., child tax credit), regulatory policies, minimum wage laws, tort laws, housing loan guarantees, and entities such as the Pension Benefits Guarantee Corporation should all be included within the definition of the welfare state. Doing so reveals that the American welfare state is not a "chronic underachiever" but, in fact, "large and far-reaching" (p. 1). Howard cautions, however, that this heterogeneous mix of social policy tools does not make the American welfare state particularly effective. On the contrary, given enduringly high rates of poverty and widening income inequality in this country, the welfare state is paradoxically both extensive and limited in its ability to address some of the greatest social problems in the United States.

The aim of *The Welfare State Nobody Knows* is to debunk the many myths that Howard believes are pervasive in scholarly work on the subject. Some of his more persuasive challenges come in Chapters 1 through 4, in which he shows that the American welfare state is quantitatively larger than is often believed; that the welfare state is not divided into two tiers of programs in which the upper tier consists of programs that are more generous, uniform, popular, and less politically vulnerable than the means-tested programs of the lower tier; and that social policy advances did not occur in two "big bangs" of policy innovation during the 1930s and the 1960s when Democrats had unified control of government. By embracing a wider understanding of the welfare state, Howard is able to show that many of the unconventional social policy tools were developed at other times and under situations of divided government, with Republicans often playing an important role in crafting these policies. Chapter 5 also levels a powerful attack on the notion that means-tested programs are more politically vulnerable than broad-based ones, using the expansion of Medicaid and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as examples of successful, targeted programs. The remaining chapters are less provocative but still interesting, and include analyses of American public opinion toward the welfare state (which is shown to be more supportive of social provision than commonly believed), the role of race and federalism in undermining redistributive policy, and a rejection of the argument that senior citizens dominate the policymaking process and are "greedy geezers" who care only about the social programs that benefit them.

Sanford E. Schram challenges existing work on the welfare state, not by the kinds of programs he studies but rather through his mode of analysis. Schram argues that

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