

Past Event: 2024 NCSBN Leadership and Public Policy Conference - Health Policy and Regulation through a Jeffersonian Lens Video Transcript
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Event

2024 NCSBN Leadership and Public Policy Conference

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Presenter

David Brown, DC, Former Director, Virginia Department of Health Professions

- [David] I'm honored to be here today. I know of the important work that each and every one of you do

- [Woman 2] Architecture.

- Architecture. He's an architect. He's a landscape architect. And in order to do the kind of incredible stuff he does, he has to learn how construction works. He's really a contractor as well. What else?

- [Woman 3] Great quotes.

- I'm sorry.

- Great quotes.

Absolutely. He saw the dominant medical treatments of the day, bloodletting, purging, inducing vomiting, and thought to himself, "No, this doesn't make sense." In fact, he wrote, "The practice of medicine is worse than total ignorance."

He had this to say about the Philadelphia physician, Benjamin Rush, "In his theory of bloodletting, I was ever opposed to my friend Rush, who I greatly loved but who had done much harm in the sincerest persuasion that he was preserving life and happiness all around him."

In his notes on the state of Virginia, Jefferson wrote about hospitals, "The sick, the dying, and the dead are crammed together in the same rooms and often the same beds. Nature and kind nursing save a much greater proportion and with much less abuse." He struck a similar note in a letter to his daughter, Martha, during an illness of one of his grandchildren.

He was glad that she did not "Physic him, but instead left nature, free and unembarrassed, to repair what was wrong." But Thomas Jefferson did not reject medicine, ignoring the widespread belief that smallpox inoculation would spread the disease rather than preventing it.

In Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1760s, there were riots against inoculation. A physician who was doing inoculation had his house burned down. Despite this, in 1766, the 23-year-old Thomas Jefferson went to Philadelphia to become inoculated.

And after becoming President in 1801, he expanded his commitment to smallpox inoculation. He had followed the work of the physician, Edward Jenner, and his experiments using the milder cowpox as an effective immunization against smallpox. Jefferson promoted the use of this new vaccine, and he directed the inoculation of those enslaved at Monticello, his sons-in-law, and some of his neighbors, about 200 people in all.

He also tried to promote vaccination among Native Americans. So what would Thomas Jefferson think about the immunization challenges we face today? A growing number of people are skeptical or hesitant about vaccines, not just COVID, but childhood immunizations.

And I'm not just talking about anti-vaxxers. As pointed out by the National Association of School

He said, "A strong body makes the mind strong." He recommended two hours of walking each day. I'm

levels is education, certainly for the National Council, certainly for all the state boards, for nurse educators, for nurses in any clinical role, actually pretty much for any nursing.

Same with Thomas Jefferson. A key value throughout his life. After attending boarding schools at age 17, he began at the College of William & Mary. He studied under the Scottish scholar, William Small, who Jefferson said, "Probably fixed the destinies of my life."

He went on to read law under the direction of George Wythe. And in fact, a person in Virginia can still read the law apprenticed under a practicing lawyer instead of having to go to law school. It is said that Thomas Jefferson, at William & Mary, read and studied for 12 to 15 hours a day. In 1815, he famously wrote to John Adams, "I cannot live without books."

The reason, in the War of 1812, the British burned Washington and with it, they burned the collection of books at the Library of Congress, 3,000 volumes. Thomas Jefferson then sold his private collection of books to the Library of Congress, 6,400 volumes, and, of course, started collecting books again.

Next time you're in D.C., if you haven't seen it, visit the Library of Congress. It's an amazing place. And you can see the exhibit of Thomas Jefferson's books in various languages with numerous books on health and medicine. Thomas Jefferson believed strongly that the key to a democracy, the key to this experiment in representative government was an educated population.

He said, "Any nation that expects to be ignorant and free expects what never was and never will be." Like, I believe the profession of nursing, Thomas Jefferson does not just stop with identifying a problem.

He doesn't stop even after identifying potential solutions. He takes specific actions. Jefferson does much more than just write about education. After announcing to the world in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 that we are no longer a colony of Great Britain, one of the first orders of business is for all the states to create their own laws for governing.

Thomas Jefferson introduces a bill for the more general diffusion of knowledge into the Virginia legislature. In this plan, primary schools were to be free to students, both boys and girls, and the best male students were to attend the academies and the university at public expense. Virginia is not quite ready for that.

But Virginia eventually does adopt the last part of this plan in what Jefferson refers to, tongue-in-cheek, as "The hobby of my old age." He designs the University of Virginia. He selects the faculty. He writes the curriculum consistent with his views on the importance of religious freedom.

When it opens in 1819, UVA is the first university in the country without a religious affiliation. Consistent with his views on the importance of science-based healthcare, he establishes a school of medicine.

Jefferson, though, always regretted that what he viewed as the most important part of his plan, broad primary public education, was not adopted in his lifetime. He told friends working with him in the formation of the University of Virginia, that if it was a choice between public primary schools and the university, he would choose the former because, "It is safer to have a whole people respectably enlightened than a few in a high state of science and the rest in ignorance."

There are so many areas in which Thomas Jefferson would have had commonality with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. The National Council is an organization of state boards, each with its own laws and regulations. Innovations in practice or regulation arise in one state that if successful can serve as a model for other states.

Thomas Jefferson embraced the notion of state's rights and he's leery of excessive centralization of government power. The power in regulation is not with the National Council, it's not with the federal government, but with the states themselves. And cooperation is enhanced, workforce is optimized, and burdens on practitioners lessened through the compact.

Jefferson would be pleased. Jefferson had trust in the people. He would have supported having citizen members on licensing boards as a check on the self-interest or perceived self-interest on the part of professional regulators. As you may have experienced, professional members of licensing boards, many, if not most, who have been active members of their professional associations sometimes need a reminder that their role is to protect the public, not protect the association.

So let's talk about innovation. Another commonality between Thomas Jefferson and nursing. As a guide at Monticello, I notice that with all the cleverness on display, from the unique design of the house itself, the house, by the way, is a world heritage site since 1987, the only individual house to receive this honor, to the clock in the entrance hall, to the double doors that can be closed with one hand, to the wine dumbwaiters built into the dining room fireplace, to the beds built into alcoves in the wall, to the device that allowed him to make a copy of a letter while he is writing a letter.

So now I'd like to bring up a couple of ideas, a couple of issues that I'm concerned about that I think Thomas Jefferson would have been concerned about and that I'd like to call to your attention. Did anyone read in "The New York Times" recently, a week ago or so, an in-depth article on marijuana? It was titled "As America's Marijuana Use Grows, so Do the Harms."

- Claire Morris.

- I'm sorry, Claire Morris. Jay Douglas is old news. So if they're talking about the health effects of cannabis, they want Caroline Juran, who runs the Board of Pharmacy there. They don't need another politician. They don't need necessarily other people. So developing relationships, learning who the effective lobbyists are because like it or not, lobbyists kind of make the world go around in the legislature.

Develop individual relationships with legislators. And if nothing else, developing your own relationship with the legislators that represent you. Attending their fundraisers, you know, going to meetings, letting them know who you are so that when they have a nursing bill come before them, they might think to call you to find out what you think.

Thank you, Jay. And thank all of you.

- [Man] I just wanted to ask, it sounded like you had studied Jefferson for some time, but was there something that you discovered about him after you started working as a tour guide, a docent there at Monticello, something that perhaps you had not known about him previously?

- I should have an answer to that. You know, I've learned a lot. I mean, it would be a real exaggeration to say that what I know now I knew all along. It really came through an intensive course of study. I didn't know going in that Jefferson died in such debt. I assumed that he invented a lot of stuff.

I would say the main thing I learned about Thomas Jefferson was how even though he is Virginia gentry, you know, he's the upper crust of Virginia society in the 1700s and early 1800s. Yet he genuinely feels so strongly that this should be a nation of the people.

That people should be empowered. That he's genuinely a man of the people. He dresses simply. And when he's president, I would say in the White House, but it wasn't called the White House yet because it wasn't painted white, it became white after the War of 1812 when it got stained from fire, but when he's in the White House, he has lots of dinners.

That's kind of how he is successful, is having small groups of people, conversation, get people thinking how he's thinking, right? Well, he does what's called the pell-mell style of dining, which means that instead of having people seated based on rank or privilege at the table, people seated themselves. Drove the British ambassador crazy.

But he's making a statement. We are no longer... We're not an aristocracy. We're not a monarchy. We're a government of the people. And what better way to make a little statement every time people eat there? So thank you very much.