

A close-up portrait of Bill Bradley, a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

The New American Story

New York Times bestselling author of *Time Present*, *Time Past* and *Values of the Game*

Bill Bradley

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Plenty of people want to help improve the public schools. An organization called Donors Choose was started in 2000 by a young high school teacher in New York, who was inspired by a sad fact: Teachers can't always get the materials needed to do their jobs. Donors Choose (www.DonorsChoose.com) is a Web site where public school teachers post requests for financing of specific projects that will make them more effective in the classroom. The projects include "Where did all the pencils go" (\$60), "Dictionaries for At-Home Use" (\$259), and "Geological Field Trip" (\$200). Most proposals are for far more than microscopes and other materials. They are creative ideas for helping students learn. "Cooking Across the Curriculum" asks for cookbooks, mixers, bowls, and a mini-refrigerator for a third-grade class. The teacher writes that "cooking incorporates curriculum areas in an engaging and memorable way," for example, experiencing how matter changes when you bake a cake (science), or how an apple gets from the tree to the pie (social studies), or how recipes require you to know fractions (math). Donors select what project they'd like to fund and send their money to Donors Choose, which pays the bills the teacher submits. Donors Choose sends each teacher a thank-you notes kit, and the kids tell their benefactors how they feel about getting the book or the microscope. Today Donors Choose serves over 4,745 schools in ten states and has received over 37,000 donations from all fifty states; the \$9 million raised has helped more than half a million kids. It is this kind of idealism that can turn teaching into the mission of a generation.

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People need opportunities to make their world a better place where they are. Serving your fellow human beings resonates with many people, especially the young. There is no reason that Democrats can't have local party chapters joining in with nonprofits to do hands-on community work with children or seniors or neighborhood improvement projects. Why couldn't groups such as Teach for America or Donors Choose originate inside the Democratic Party?