

We Must Have Private Philanthropy

by Susan M. Fitzpatrick

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Regarding James Piereson's "Philanthropies as Creatures of Government" (op-ed, April 22): It is unfortunate that too few individuals know or care to learn about the rich history of the effectiveness of American private philanthropy and its use of private funds to address public needs that has been a core attribute of our country from its inception and is the envy of the world.

The 1975 report of the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs staunchly defended the advantages of having a robust third sector "most broadly defined by what it is not. It is not government... and it is not business." The commission noted that there is an irreplaceable strength in not relying always on a single centralized body, but fostering large numbers of nongovernmental organizations providing diverse decision-making. In more modern language, philanthropy serves as private venture capital for the common good. Our generous philanthropic culture has served Americans well for several hundred years. Unfortunately there are always a few individuals who think they make better decisions than the rest of us and who will always try to wrangle available resources under their control. For our own sakes, we should resist.

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