



## **Time to Revive Public Options in the US, and Not Just for Health Care**

a review by Dick Burkhardt of

### **The Public Option: How to Expand Freedom, Increase Opportunity, and Promote Equality**

By Ganesh Sitaraman and Anne Alstott (2019)

....This excellent little survey of “public options” shows exactly how much the US has suffered from the ideology of neoliberal economics. We have a long history of public institutions which have served to help all of us, not just a moneyed faction. These institutions include the post office, public schools and colleges, public libraries, public transit, Medicare, Social Security, and more. They are public options

because private services are still an option. Some are “baseline” options like Social Security because they are universal but may be supplemented privately, such as by employer-sponsored retirement plans for Social Security. Others are “competitive” like public colleges since parents may opt to pay more for private colleges instead but poorer students still have good options.

Sitaraman shows a public option could rescue our poorly performing health care system, but also could have an important role in housing, banking, child care, internet service, credit reporting, and jobs. Along the way he shows how many market-based schemes, such as vouchers, have failed and why they can be so much worse than government run programs. For example, they often end up serving the more affluent or increasing prices and profiteering, such as the exploitation of Pell Grants by for-profit colleges.

A public health care option, such as a government-subsidized form of Medicaid open to all, almost got into Obamacare, and is now being promoted by some Democratic presidential candidates in forms that would replace most private health insurance. Or such competitive options could lead to a baseline option like single payer. Either way we’d get a substantially more equal and functional society at a far lower cost.

....However some existing public options have been seriously eroded in recent years by rising costs, such as for colleges and housing, so these need vastly more financing to restore their status as viable competitive options.