



Presidential Commission
for the Study of Bioethical Issues

TRANSCRIPT

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WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

DR. GUTMANN: Good morning, everybody. Are there any Commission members who are not seated yet? I could ask who's – Nelson. I can just give – Nelson appreciates orders, right? Thank you. Thank you. I'm Amy Gutmann, and I'm President of the University of Pennsylvania. I welcome those of you who are not members of the University of Pennsylvania here to our Annenberg Public Policy Center Building. And I'm also Chair of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. And on behalf of myself and our Vice Chair, James Wagner, the President of Emory University, I would like to welcome you to our 26th meeting. Twenty-sixth meeting, that's pretty remarkable. Let me begin by noting the presence of our Designated Federal Official, Bioethics Commission Executive Director, Lisa Lee. Lisa, please stand. Thank you. I'd also like to ask our Bioethics Commission members to introduce themselves. Barbara, why don't you begin?

DR. ATKINSON: Barbara Atkinson. I'm the dean at UNLV School of Medicine.

DR. FARAHANY: Nita Farahany of Duke University.

DR. HAUSER: Stephen Hauser. I'm a neurologist at the University of California, San Francisco.

DR. GRADY: Christine Grady from the NIH Clinical Center, Department of Bioethics.

DR. ALLEN: Anita Allen, proud to be Vice Provost for Faculty here at Penn. I'm also Professor of Law and Philosophy here at Penn.

DR. SULMASY: Dan Sulmasy at the Department of Medicine and Divinity School, University of Chicago.

DR. KUCHERLAPATI: I'm Raju Kucherlapati from the Department of Genetics and Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

COL. MICHAEL: Nelson Michael. I'm a vaccine researcher at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

DR. GUTMANN: Thank you. Before we begin, there is one important transition in higher education that I want to call our attention to. After 13 years of leading Emory University and leading Emory on a steady rise of excellence and diversity, our Vice-Chairman, James Wagner, has now officially stepped up from that post. And I just want

to say a few words about – because I've gotten to know Jim, now, personally and as a colleague in bioethics, but I followed Jim's career. He started before I did as President, and it's been an exemplary career in higher education. To the point of this commission, Jim, who, as you know, is an engineer and a very accomplished engineer, established Emory as one of the great centers for the study of ethics, and that legacy will continue on. Jim, across the board, made Emory just a great research and teaching university and a remarkable community. He's somebody who motivates people to want to work together.

DR. GUTMANN: He models the ethics and the engineering expertise, the 'can-do' spirit that he also incentivizes in his faculty and students. He also is someone who, true to being an engineer, always looks at how you can put good ideas into practice, and I think he's helped us – I know he's helped us very greatly as a commission. Jim, you've been truly the best partner I could have leading this commission, which really doesn't need leadership. It just needs to be – we just have to stay on time and make sure we get our work done because deliberation has really come quite naturally. But you've been a fantastic ally. You've been insightful and your contributions to this commission will always be greatly appreciated by all of us. So, I ask all of you to join me in thanking Jim Wagner.

[Applause.]

DR. WAGNER: Amy, thank you so much. The fact that you would – well, it is, in fact, the case that today is the last day that my business cards are valid. Having said that, the transition to Emory's new president, Claire Sterk, has been a smooth one and is complete. I'm not missed on campus. Today is my final day. The fact, Amy, that you would take a moment to do something entirely off the agenda of why we are assembled here today, and that the others of you would applaud, I think speaks to the fact that this group has brought not only its competencies and excellence in its respective – members' respective areas of expertise and professionalism, brought not only, as you mentioned, a natural inclination to be colleagues, but we have developed and bring also friendships. And I thank you for your kind acknowledgment of my tenure and your thanks and best wishes. Thank you all very, very much.

DR. GUTMANN: Jim and I, by the way, did something that's almost unprecedented in higher education. We jointly sponsored and chaired a joint alumni event in Atlanta with Penn alums and Emory alums. And that was more generous on Jim's part, you can understand, because it was located in Atlanta, than on mine. But it was really terrific, and I think it is relevant to this commission to recognize how important higher education is for the furtherance of both the theory and the practice of bioethics. So, I'd

like to take a moment to explain how we'll take public comments. There are comment cards, and all the members of our staff have comment cards. There are comment cards on the desk and all of them have comment cards.

DR. GUTMANN: We found that it is better if people write down their comments and they come up – bring them up here so we can read them so everybody can hear them with the microphones. So, staff, raise your hands with comment cards. Anyone? So, please, if you even think you might have a comment, just take a comment card so we can get them. This is the second of two meetings during which we're going to reflect on the impact and role of past, present and, we hope, future national bioethics bodies in the United States and globally with the goal of informing a path forward.

DR. GUTMANN: So, while this will be retrospective in the sense that we have some of the most accomplished and eminent leaders of past bioethics commissions here today – which I, in advance, thank you all for participating – the goal here is not to write a history of bioethics commissions – we are not going to be doing that, but, rather, to reflect on the history in a forward-looking way as to what the best advice we all can give, our presenters as well as the Commission itself, can all give to the next President and successive presidents about bioethics commissions, their role, their limitations, how we could do better, whatever comes up in this set of discussions.

DR. GUTMANN: We, as a bioethics commission, issued a report in May that did reflect on what we thought two of the most important roles of bioethics commissions and bioethics in our society are – those two roles being education and deliberation – and how important it is to educate for the sake of the competency of deliberation among citizens and, vice versa, how important deliberation is in education. It's an important part of education. So, we also noted the need, the dire need, for improvement of bioethics education and the dire need for more forums for deliberation in our society. It's been striking to us over our seven years as a commission how rare the kind of forum we, as a commission, is now in American politics.

DR. GUTMANN: Deliberative forums that are not mired in polarized partisan politics have become rarer. I just noted, as somebody who studies civic education and has a great concern for it, I noted the fact – and I hadn't known this – that one of the protean forums for deliberation for democratic citizens in this country, and it's quite distinctive, is the jury trial, is being part of a jury. Juries have declined precipitously in this country. At the federal level, they've declined by over a half.

DR. GUTMANN: Because of very harsh mandatory sentencing laws, there are many more pleas now than there were ten years ago. So, there are many, many fewer citizens

at the local – whether it be local, state or national, who participate in jury trials, which is one very important – it's been called a "school for deliberation." And so we, as a commission, I think, have an obligation to reflect on what it is that both – not just the subject matter of bioethics, but the way in which we can cultivate virtues of citizenship and virtues of mutual respect through deliberation.

DR. GUTMANN: And that was what our report, a very important part of what our report, focused on. The field of bioethics has grown and bioethics has expanded, so the opposite of what's happened to the jury trial has happened in bioethics. There are more and more bioethics bodies and the field has actually grown. It's now incorporated into the curriculum of many academic and research institutions across the country.

DR. GUTMANN: When I started my academic career, there was The Hastings Center, and it was a path-breaking, but there were very few other centers for bioethics. And bioethics as a discipline or an interdisciplinary field in higher education was virtually nonexistent. That has evolved in a very positive direction. And in the same context, national bioethics advisory bodies have evolved over time. And it's important for us to reflect, and that's what we're here for today, to reflect on the evolution and the impact of these advisory bodies in order to inform the work of future national bioethics commissions or we may hear recommendations of some alternatives or additional kinds of public bodies. So, we hope these discussions will help prepare future advisory bodies for success.