



FEATURED QUOTES

Michele Jolin, Founder and Managing Partner of Results for America

“Without building more knowledge about what works and changing the way that government allocates resources, it will be impossible to make large-scale progress on the most significant challenges facing kids and their families. And that’s what this book is all about: dramatically expanding opportunity by making sure that policy and funding decisions by governments at all levels are informed by the best possible data and evidence about impact....

The path laid out in the [book] offers a way to make a tremendous impact on social outcomes in America. And that truly matters. Because while this book might concern itself largely with budgets and data, our real subject—our true purpose—is how we can create opportunities for all Americans.

This effort will not be easy. The challenges facing our communities are complex. And there will always be judgment calls about how to interpret and use data and evidence. But the authors of this book believe, rightfully, that we can achieve something substantial for the American people if more and better information is used to guide the vital investments our nation makes in young people, their families, and communities. We hope you agree. And if you do, we hope you’ll join us in the quest to make this a reality.”

Peter Orszag, former OMB Director (Obama) and CBO Director Jim Nussle, former OMB Director (G.W. Bush) and U.S. House Budget Committee Chairman

“At its heart, Moneyball is about crunching numbers and relying on hard evidence—not emotion or tradition—to drive decisions about how to allocate scarce resources. It’s also about determining what data matter and what don’t (in the case of baseball, concluding that on-base percentage matters a lot more than total home runs). When it comes down to it, it’s a way to get more with less.

Which raises important questions: Can data, evidence, and evaluation similarly revolutionize America’s government? Can we provide better services to millions more Americans while actually saving billions of dollars? Can we make this country a better place for children and families by investing in what works, by testing it and retesting it, and by holding ourselves to a higher standard? In short, can government play Moneyball?

The answer, we believe, is a resounding yes. It might seem obvious that the government, which collects more than \$2.4 trillion in taxes each year (and spends more than \$3 trillion), would want to know whether it is spending that money effectively. But too often we lack the answer to that very important question. In fact, astonishingly, based on our estimate, less than one dollar out of every hundred dollars the federal government spends is backed by even the most basic evidence. We might know a program is popular. We might even see data that suggest the program is performing efficiently. But it is the relatively rare case when we actually have the evidence to tell us a program is working as intended and it’s the most effective way to achieve the outcome we desire.”

Glenn Hubbard, former Council of Economy Advisers Chairman (G.W. Bush)

“There is no doubt that gathering and evaluating evidence of impact in a complex world is challenging. At the same time, researchers and policy makers across government are already hard at work applying these approaches to build evidence for what works and what doesn’t. They’re coming to conclusions that are reducing homelessness and improving hospice care. They’re simplifying financial-aid forms and boosting college enrollment for disadvantaged students. And they’re showing that—with the right resources and a changing landscape that puts evidence-based policy front and center—it’s possible to do more than talk about making government work better; we can evaluate the data and marshal the evidence to make it happen.”

Gene Sperling, former National Economic Council Chairman (Clinton and Obama)

“What should be clear is that whether one is seeking to allocate resources more efficiently in times of scarcity or to make the case for significant expansions in investments to address critical needs, evidence of success is the best assurance for policy makers that they are fulfilling their responsibilities. It also should be clear that, in the absence of perfect evidence, it is still essential that policy makers gather the most useful information available in the short term, as they—and we—move toward an evidence-driven future.

There is great power in evidence and in proving success. It is the power not just to change outcomes but to change minds, to convince policy makers—and the public—that we can move the needle and genuinely improve the lives of our fellow Americans, as well as the poor we seek to empower in other countries. That is a worthy goal whatever your political affiliation or ideology, and it is one we are on the cusp of embracing. It’s just a matter of playing Moneyball the right way.”

Melody Barnes, former Domestic Policy Council Director (Obama)

John Bridgeland, former Domestic Policy Council Director (G.W. Bush)

“Despite significant government investments in young people and their families over the years, Americans are still not prepared for the twenty-first-century workforce. American families are still experiencing little social mobility and growing inequality. Why? What’s missing?”

Part of the answer, we believe, is evidence and evaluation. Too often, we know what problems need to be solved, but that doesn’t mean we are making the right kinds of investments to address them. In many cases, we still don’t know what the right kinds of investments are. We have government programs that don’t work very well but take up precious resources. We have others that work effectively but are dangerously underfunded. And we have many more for which we just don’t know whether they are generating good outcomes. This is where the gap lies between improving performance and improving results. Our goal can’t just be to do more things better, especially if they are the wrong things. We need to do the right things well....

We don’t need complicated new legislation or big new spending. Nothing will require a constitutional amendment or a court fight. We don’t even have to wait for the current, toxic political environment to shift. Instead, we can take a number of relatively modest steps that will dramatically improve the data and evidence that policy makers and elected officials have access to in order to make better decisions. In this way, a relatively unexciting but achievable list can get us to a very exciting and ambitious place—a place where we can have the evidence to make a bold proclamation (“Solve ten social problems in the next ten years!”) and feel more confident that we know the best way to get it done. For those of us who have worked with these issues for years, these achievable changes in process add up to one big reason we’re so optimistic about playing Moneyball for government.”

Kevin Madden, former Romney 2012 presidential campaign senior advisor
Howard Wolfson, former Clinton 2008 presidential campaign senior advisor

“Fortunately, while it’s true that there are very real obstacles to making Moneyball work, it’s also true that there’s a clear path forward on both sides of the aisle. Democrats and Republicans may fight like cats and dogs—feral ones at times—but the Moneyball approach offers a lot for both sides to like and to capitalize on. Case in point: the two of us are advocating for it together from a political perspective, a space where we almost never agree with each other.... We have sparred privately and publicly on a range of issues on any number of occasions. But on this one, we both agree: government should—and can—play Moneyball.”

Kevin Madden:

“Instead of framing our message as antigovernment, the GOP should talk about keeping programs in place that work as intended and having the courage to cut those that don’t. Republicans should demand high-quality evidence before any new program is created, and Republicans should insist that all discretionary spending be subject to evaluation to determine whether it is having an impact. This would be a powerful—and widely popular—campaign promise. Republicans who support the Moneyball campaign can then run on having the bravery to make the tough decisions to defund or discontinue programs that aren’t working or haven’t met standards or don’t demonstrate positive trends toward success. We should be the party of thrift and thoughtfulness, economy and empathy, metrics and heart. Doing so will give us a smaller government and a bigger tent. It will make our country and our party more competitive. In other words, on both the politics and the policy, Moneyball is a home run—and a no-brainer—for the Republican Party.”

Howard Wolfson:

“[Moneyball] is about making sure that we are doing right by the people we’ve committed ourselves to serving. It’s about making sure that our values aren’t just articulated in our efforts but in our outcomes, and that we can actually say that we are delivering on our promises. How can we be willing to marshal the resources to invest in early education but not be willing to make sure we are spending it on the very best preschool? How can we hold job training up as a solution to our unemployment crisis if we aren’t willing to make sure the programs we’re funding actually help Americans find work? Democrats have done so much in this area already. But it’s time to do even more. To embrace Moneyball. To own it. To define it not as a debate about the size of our investments but one about investing in what works. Because in the end, making government work well is critical to our entire operating philosophy. It’s the idea that government can, in fact, work, that programs aimed at making our health care more affordable, our schools more effective, our economy stronger, and opportunity greater are worth investing in. Among the greatest risks to the progressive agenda is the American people concluding, whether eagerly or reluctantly, that government is not capable of delivering on its promises—that our problems are beyond our capacity to solve. The more people begin to believe that, the more difficult it will be for progressives to get elected and to translate their values into policy.”

Michael Gerson, former Assistant to the President for Policy and Strategic Planning (G.W. Bush)

Raj Shah, former USAID Administrator (Obama)

“The two of us, of course, come from different political parties and probably would disagree on many issues concerning federal spending. But we are completely aligned in the belief that results-oriented programs should not go unfunded or underfunded. Not when we know they work. Not when they are saving millions of lives every year. Not when spending on all foreign assistance amounts to less than 1 percent of the federal budget. The idea is risible that America has a budget problem because it gives out too many insecticide treated bed nets or provides too much AIDS treatment.

We also appreciate that in times of budget constraint, increases in foreign assistance may be hard to come by. It will be necessary to make every dollar count. The key, ultimately, is to ensure that programs offering proven, measurable outcomes are given the space and resources to continue. And by the same token, the U.S. ought to be sure that money spent on ineffective programs is reallocated so that the impact we want is the impact we actually achieve.”

Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH)

Senator Mark Warner (D-VA)

“What the authors of this book have done so well is to show three things. First, they’ve demonstrated that we can—and should—use evidence and data about what works to improve the lives of young people and their families. With so much at stake—measured not just in dollars but also in the well-being of Americans—it’s not enough to keep groping in the dark for solutions. We have to demand more. We need to kick the status quo to the curb and elevate evidence in our country to create real change. That means revamping our approach toward policy making and budget decisions, ensuring that the right information gets into the right decision makers’ hands at the right time. This is not about passing one bill or signing a few executive orders; it’s about transforming the process by which we make decisions.

Second, we don’t all need to agree on everything politically in order to agree to use evidence more effectively. Moneyball doesn’t require Washington to reach a consensus on health-care reform or defense spending. But it does require that we introduce more objective evidence and data into our policy-making process and budget decisions, even as we continue to debate what those policies and dollar allocations should be. Our choices should be more informed by what will have the most impact and have the best results.

Third, this book illustrates—provides evidence, you could say—that Moneyball is in the best interest of both Democrats and Republicans, and, more importantly, of the nation as a whole. It gives Republicans a chance to strip out unnecessary programs and prove that smaller government is effective government. It gives Democrats the opportunity to prove that government, irrespective of its size, can help improve outcomes for Americans of all walks of life. And does anyone doubt that such a commitment from both parties would yield a smarter, more useful, more compassionate government? What Thomas Jefferson called, more than two centuries ago, “a wise and frugal government”?...

After too many years of hand-wringing and wishful thinking, it’s time to reimagine how government can work on behalf of children and families and communities. It’s time to move from an approach that serves only to further polarize our political process to one that works productively to better the lives of all Americans. A decade and a half into the twenty-first century, the batter’s up and the bases are loaded. It’s time to play Moneyball.”

Linda Gibbs, Former Deputy Mayor of New York City, Founder of the Center for Economic Opportunity

“If you can get your program outcomes measured and aligned to the ultimate values and goals you bring to the table, that ability to measure and give feedback to providers about how well they’re doing is the most powerful way to move programs more closely to the goals....

You need to create very concrete consequences in performance-based contracts, where those who do well are rewarded with either higher rates or a greater share of the work, and those who do poorly have consequences for that. Because ultimately if there’s not a consequence, then the data won’t matter one bit and people won’t take it seriously.”

Tiffany Cooper Gueye, CEO of Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)

“We embraced a Moneyball approach because too often we see resources being deployed in communities for things that we don’t think make a meaningful difference for the children and families being served. And when that happens, it obviously gets in the way of things that are more effective. So a Moneyball approach was something we embraced because we wanted to see greater results generated when resources are allocated, and it’s just not happening enough right now in our sector.

Of course a big fear before we got started—and still remains so—has been that one data point will be used in a black-white way. Something either works or it doesn’t work. Instead, a Moneyball approach has to be about using a range of data to help inform resource-allocation decisions.”

Dan Cardinali, President of Communities in Schools

“[W]e began a slow but intentional process of building the organization’s capacity to really understand what it was doing, whether what it was doing was effective, and then ultimately, building a culture of quality improvement. We began to establish what has become our virtuous learning cycle....

The data was your friend. It was sometimes very difficult to confront, but it was critical if you wanted to improve and do right by the students and families that we serve. Over time, the virtuous learning cycle was a kind of muscle that got built. It built our capacity to drive fundamental change in our organization. There was both a clarity of purpose and a pathway to achieving that purpose.”

Jim Shelton, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

“What you call the Moneyball approach to us was a simple belief in the power of data and evidence to drive improved decision making and outcomes. From the beginning of our work, we’ve recognized the need for new and bold solutions as well as the need to do a much better job taking what works to scale.

You need to create a continuum of evidence ... People often think that just because they’re doing something new that rigorous analysis of the process and the outcomes should be reserved for later-stage development when you have a large-scale study that can be completed. But in fact, at every stage of development, with data collection, analysis, and comparison, you can add appropriate rigor to determine whether things seem like they’re on the right track and use that information to make adjustments to improving design and implementation.”