

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on February 2, 2021,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Martin Stuart
Feldstein was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

MARTIN STUART FELDSTEIN

BORN: November 25, 1939

DIED: June 11, 2019

Martin Feldstein, who taught at Harvard for more than half a century, was one of the most influential economists of our era. His scientific contributions, spanning an astonishing number of applied fields, pointed the way to new areas of inquiry and new ways of carrying out research that countless economists followed. He advised numerous U.S. presidents and other public officials, serving as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Reagan administration, on the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board under the second President Bush, and on President Obama's Economic Recovery Advisory Board. His economic ideas, in key ways a departure from what had prevailed since World War II, came to represent mainstream American economic policy thinking. And through his leadership of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) he reshaped the research structure of the economics profession and with it the regular activities of thousands of his fellow economists.

Born in New York City in 1939, Marty (as he was known to everyone who knew him) graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard College and then did his graduate work as a Fulbright Scholar at Oxford. He joined the Harvard faculty in 1967, becoming a full professor two years later and the George F. Baker Professor of Economics in 1984. Perhaps uniquely among Harvard professors, he was elected by his classmates as the Chief Marshal of Commencement at his 25th college reunion. He obtained the highest honors for American economists as well. In 1977 he received the John Bates Clark Medal, then awarded every two years to the most outstanding American economist under age forty, and in 2004 he was elected president of the American Economic Association.

Marty's research encompassed numerous fields within economics—health economics, public finance, macroeconomics, international economics, and others—but always related to important economic policymaking issues. A consistent emphasis was incentive effects of activity carried out by the public sector, including areas such as taxation, retirement, unemployment insurance, and the financing of education. His doctoral dissertation, on the U.K. National Health Service, provided the foundations for the economic analysis of health care. He was a longtime advocate of U.S. Social Security reform. He analyzed perverse effects

of a series of aspects of the tax code and of the unemployment insurance system. He highlighted inefficiencies in how government influences the economy and in the provision of a wide range of government services. If there was a better way to fulfill any of these public responsibilities, Marty wanted to learn what it was and then to educate the public about it and campaign for its adoption. His influence on economic policy was profound.

Marty's approach to economics was even more influential among economists than his many research findings. In his view, to affect an important policy question successfully, a conclusion had to emerge from repeated studies based on multiple empirical methodologies, using diverse data sets as well as essential institutional information. Much of his own research involved construction of new variables, use of previously unexploited data, or calibration of previously unmeasured effects. The legion of students who followed him—he supervised nearly 100 dissertations and countless award-winning senior honors theses—adopted and propagated his approach.

The list of Marty's former students is stellar and their contributions many and influential. His conviction that empirical, policy-oriented economics promised to address the important questions presented by our economic way of life, and therefore make our country and our world a better place, proved irresistible to talented young scholars. He showed them that economics, more than a field of study, was a calling. Just as Marty strove to influence thinking by the public at large, he wanted to influence more students than he could possibly supervise directly. For 21 years he taught Economics 10, usually the largest course at Harvard, and in most years he taught another large-enrollment undergraduate course as well. He could shift effortlessly between talking with the president of the United States and with a Harvard freshman. He could educate them both, making each feel equally valued.

Marty was also a phenomenal intellectual entrepreneur. When he assumed leadership of the NBER, it was a respectable but musty New York institution with 32 affiliated researchers working in a few areas of long-time expertise. He immediately moved its headquarters to Cambridge, expanded its reach nationally, restructured its research program, and opened up its activities to economists more generally. His goal was to redirect economists' work, and he succeeded. When he left the job three decades later, there were more than 1,000 NBER-affiliated economists and thousands more participated regularly in NBER conferences and research projects. In the pre-internet era, Marty also democratized access to leading-edge research through the NBER Working Paper series. By the time he left, the Bureau was pre-publishing about 900 papers by affiliated researchers every year.

In December of what turned out prematurely to be his last year of teaching, Marty canceled what was to have been the final lecture in his popular undergraduate course "American Economic Policy." He had been asked to attend the funeral of former President George H. W. Bush. He wrote to his students with a final charge: "Every day when I come to class, I enter the Yard through a gate from Mass. Ave. Above the door are the words 'Enter to Grow

in Wisdom.' And when I leave, through the same door, the words on the opposite side are 'Depart to Better Serve thy Country and thy Kind.' I hope that will be a lesson for all of you." Marty spent 56 years at Harvard, first as an undergraduate and then 52 years teaching. He was deeply loyal to this institution, which he loved, and he ably served his country and his kind. He influenced people, institutions, and events.

Marty loved his family as well, and to them he was absolutely devoted. He leaves his beloved wife, Kate (a Radcliffe graduate); his two daughters, Margaret and Janet; and his four grandchildren. He died on June 11, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Raj Chetty
James M. Poterba
Lawrence H. Summers
Benjamin M. Friedman, Chair