

January 16, 2001

Dr. Robert J. P. Hauck
Editor - PS
American Political Science Association
1527 New Hampshire Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036

To the Editor:

The recent Association Reports in PS re the vitality of the discipline and weak NSF support reflect similar causes. A good political analysis can give a deeper understanding of the issues and our (possibly, more hopeful) options.

1.) Our NSF budget suggests the explanation that APSA may be an ineffective lobbyist. (Even the snail-darter has done better.) Perhaps the study group could run simple regression estimates and test the hypothesis that we are getting about the share of the pie that we deserve, given APSA's modest organizing and lobbying budget?

Thus perhaps the better policy recommendation is to fire our lobbyists (or double their budget)? Or to ask the Chairs of our leading fifteen Departments to be in Washington more frequently and work the Congress as the natural sciences have done?

2.) Re a political analysis: the more revealing unit of analysis is not political science per se but the social sciences, which have been marginalized and suffered institutional decline across several decades, to the point of today's alarm.

Looking back, we might have predicted otherwise - that is, continued vitality and growth. Many readers of PS will recall the 1960s when liberal assumptions and programs energized inquiry. The election of Ronald Reagan might have engaged an even more energized period of intellectual ferment, as contrasting truth claims were made by the political Right.

For example, President Reagan was an intuitive psychologist who preferred motivational ideas for economic policy to the rational-choice assumptions of academic economics. He perceived an idealized government and an emerging welfare state that were so powerful in their induced dependency and erosion of individual responsibility that new policies to cut back the size and prominence of government were needed to change national psychology. And he had a clinician-like faith that a restored and healthier national modal personality would increase private-sector entrepreneurship and sustained economic growth. It is hard to imagine a better opportunity for political science: competing paradigms and a naturally-occurring critical experiment. And, moreover, a competing paradigm of political economy that - if true - would have rewritten economics textbooks and also (by contrast with the conventional Michigan model of the American voter as an individual with a personality exogenous to political life) have rewritten American politics textbooks. And there would have

been enough pro- and/or con- conclusions about zealots of the Political Right to assure lively battles and the civic relevance that critics claim has been missing.

So, what happened to the future of scientific vitality, larger research budgets, and progress via critical examination of reigning orthodoxy? It is a political story. In the most consequential, early years it began with the successful preemptive strike by David Stockman, President Reagan's first OMB Director, who threatened to zero-out all behavioral science in the federal budget and sent a (now, permanent) message to our national science Establishment. Subsequently, the National Academy of Sciences created an agenda-setting panel (the Luce-Smelser Commission, partly funded by NSF) that endorsed non-controversial enthusiasms and quietly institutionalized the accommodations. (Duncan Luce later wrote a letter claiming that it was inconceivable for an institution that aspired to the political neutrality (sic) of our National Academy ever to endorse tests of ideological assumptions of Reaganomics and related policies, but his panel did not disclose such biases in a report that purported to give agenda-setting scientific advice).

But the nervousness was not Luce-Smelser's alone. The story has not been publicly discussed in PS, but our national science Establishment has continued to defer Big Picture progress via tests of ideological assumptions that shape public policy. In the Clinton years, the prestigious President's Committee of Advisers on Science and Technology (PCAST) quietly debated a proposal to restart progress but made a political judgment that in the realm of "belief-

based" v. "empirically-based" public policy it was not convinced of the degree of support from the American people and/or national elites for empirically-based policy. (Their summary of the rationale is available at www.policyscience.net.)

Put it another way: Humpty Dumpty was pushed.

There are heroes of the quiet inter-elite battles of recent decades, but few. David Hamburg's Carnegie Commission on Science, Technology, and Government held an off-the-record meeting with senior members of our national science Establishment and several of the bad actors. Our colleague Jack Peltason, as head of the UC system, attempted to persuade the Clinton White House to deal with the issue of ideological testing more effectively. But far fewer Presidents of major research universities spoke-out than one might have hoped. Even when, as today, many sub-fields represented on their campuses have fallen almost below a critical mass needed for vitality, and undergraduates have grown-up only with policy-argument television and have no textbooks or datasets that structure major ideological claims (e.g., the efforts to alter national modal personality) as testable, competing theories.

Where does a good political analysis move the PS discussion? Well, for example, it suggests that 1.) if we sum across the policy variables identified in these official APSA reports, they won't get us very far. And that is worth knowing.

2.) Second, there is a virtue to political courage and institutional leadership. In

the same period that the social sciences were being steadily pushed off-stage, neutered and (later) hand-wrung about, Surgeon General Koops faced-down political pressures to eliminate research on the health effects of smoking and AIDS: he said that he was the Surgeon-General of all Americans, and the zealots backed-off. In Washington, deterrence works, and a lack of political courage can be a formula for being ignored.

3.) My third conclusion is hopeful. Our fate does not have a current, rational justification and is an historical anachronism: The dangerous political forces have changed. The zealots are gone. David Stockman wrote a book to recant. Newt Gingrich has departed. The new President may be personally indifferent to major ideological claims and science alike, but he is not opposed - and has a respected Secretary of the Treasury who was Chairman of the Board of RAND (and a strong civic leader for empirically-based public policy) who might give good advice; and a National Security Adviser who was Provost at Stanford. If there is a well-organized coalition that wants empirically-based and workable public policy, or feels that we need a stronger research base (and professors with funds to travel overseas) to prepare students for careers and American leadership in a globalizing world (etc.) there may be plenty of money to go around if APSA can organize an effective lobbying effort.

Having said this: A lot has fallen apart. Revitalization will require political work, and the recommendation (above) to get our leading fifteen Department chairs into Washington for a sustained effort may be critical. Especially to the closed-door discussions, assurances, and possible institutional reform in the

packages to be negotiated.

[The Policy Sciences Center foundation, co-created by Harold Lasswell, has supported a project to engage these issues of government learning. Copies of published articles and testimony, supporting documents, and proposals are available on www.policyscience.net.]

Sincerely,

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge, Director
Government Learning Project