

***FOUR PATHWAYS OF POWER:  
THE DYNAMICS OF CONTEMPORARY  
U. S. FEDERAL POLICY MAKING<sup>1</sup>***

*by*

**Timothy J. Conlan**  
*George Mason University*

**David R. Beam**  
*Illinois Institute of Technology*

**Paul L. Posner**  
*U.S. General Accounting Office<sup>2</sup>*

Prepared for  
The French Center on  
the United States

*September 6, 2002*

**FOUR PATHWAYS OF POWER:  
THE NEW DYNAMICS OF  
U. S. FEDERAL POLICY MAKING**

*In 1986, federal legislation mandating the removal of asbestos from the nation's schools (AHERA) raced through Congress, winning unanimous approval by both the House and Senate before being signed by a conservative president. Although the science supporting this legislation was incomplete--and the costs it imposed on school districts ran into billions of dollars--little opposition arose, even from the state and local governments that would have to pay for it. Because the measure was perceived as saving schoolchildren from a deadly menace, few legislators or lobbyists dared to publicly challenge or oppose it.<sup>3</sup>*

*In contrast to the speedy consideration of AHERA, efforts to reauthorize and enhance the 1970 Clean Air Act were bogged down in Congress for nearly a decade during the 1980s, caught in a complex stalemate between opposing political and economic interests. When reauthorization legislation finally began moving in 1989 and 1990, it included a landmark provision to control acid rain by utilizing "marketable permits" for sulfur dioxide emissions. This new regulatory approach enjoyed broad bipartisan support in Congress and from the White House, but not because it appealed to popular sentiment in the way that asbestos removal had. Rather, political consensus reflected careful preparation by environmental economists who, through years of research and advocacy had built support for this approach through skillful analysis and subsequent persuasion of policy elites.<sup>4</sup>*

*Finally, in 1995, the implementation of these and other environmental and safety regulations was suddenly challenged by a sweeping set of regulatory reform measures that sped through the House of Representatives. This legislation grew out of the "Contract with America" – a party platform constructed by Republican congressional*

*leaders and strategists to help win control of the House in the 1994 congressional elections. Although these controversial reforms were ultimately killed in the Senate, where party coalitions tend to be much weaker, the new Republican majority pushed its first installment, a regulatory moratorium, through the House in less than two months.<sup>5</sup>*

As these examples show, the process of creating public policy in the United States can vary widely from one program to the next, even within a single field such as environmental regulation. The process may be directed by the president in one case, guided by the norms of technical experts in a second, dominated by narrow interest groups in a third, or driven by populist sentiment in a fourth. Some policies race through the process at breakneck speed, while others become stuck in a policy quagmire for years or even decades. Some emerge fully grown almost overnight, while others evolve in slow incremental stages. Some are shaped in the glare of public visibility, while others are crafted in the shadows of obscure subcommittees and bureaucratic agencies.

Conventional treatments of the policy process have difficulty accommodating this variety. For example, comparative treatments of public policy tend to emphasize the institutional and cultural differences that distinguish American policy making from other western developed nations—both in content and procedure. A federal system, the separation of powers, and a weakly mobilized two party system all distinguish American political institutions from most of their European counterparts, as does the exceptionally individualistic character of American political culture. Domestic treatments of U.S. policy making typically portray a single, idealized model of “how a bill becomes law,” or they describe a common set of stages through which all policies are said to progress, from agenda setting to implementation and evaluation. While all these approaches have their merits, all fail to convey – much less explain -- the divergent political processes that shape specific policies in contemporary Washington.

Rather than a single route along which all policies progress, this study argues that the process of creating public policy in the United States today can be best understood as a set of

four distinctive pathways of public policymaking, each of which draws upon different political resources, appeals to particular actors in the system, and elicits its own unique set of strategies and styles of coalition building. These alternative avenues include:

The traditional **pluralist pathway**, where policies are constructed largely by the processes of mutual adjustment among contending organized groups, through bargaining, compromise, and vote trading. Unorganized, poorly represented interests, which may include the public at large, tend to exert little influence here. Policy outcomes that emerge from the pluralist pathway are prone to be modest and incremental in nature.

The **partisan pathway** has long provided the traditional route for large scale, nonincremental policy changes. In this model, a strong party leader—typically a president—sweeps into office with large, unified party majorities in Congress. He mobilizes the resources of office to construct a coherent legislative program and rallies the public and the party followers behind it. Under such circumstances, the legislative backlog of an entire political generation may be disposed of in a few months. But such periods of activity tend to be brief, as party coalitions succumb to internal forces of disunity or to electoral losses.

In more recent years, especially, an **analytic pathway** has developed, which provides a route for both incremental and nonincremental policy changes. This pathway is dominated by a growing cadre of policy experts and professionals in academia, the bureaucracy, and Washington think tanks. Their influence derives from the persuasive power of ideas that have been refined, refereed, and perfected within specialized policy communities. Especially where policy experts have achieved a broad degree of consensus, they can serve as effective reference points for the mass media, decision makers, and other non specialists in the policy making arena.

Finally, a **symbolic pathway** has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Like the analytic pathway, it too is built around the power of ideas. But symbolic ideas tend to be simple, value laden beliefs and valence issues whose power lies in their appeal to common sense notions of right and wrong rather than expert appeals to efficacy and empirical research.

The symbolic pathway relies heavily on policy entrepreneurs and communications via the mass media to bridge the gap between policy makers and the general public.

Overall, these four distinctive pathways are distinguished from one another along two critical dimensions. One dimension is *scale*, specifically the *scale of political mobilization*. Does the policy in question elicit attention from a narrow and specialized audience, or is it the focus of attention and concern by a large scale mass audience? This dimension is comparable to what an American political scientist, E.E. Schattschneider, called the “scope of conflict,” which he argued has a systematic impact on the politics of an issue. In Schattschneider’s words: “Every change in the scope of conflict has a bias. . . . That is, it must be assumed that every change in the number of participants is about something that the newcomers have sympathies or antipathies that make it possible to involve them. By definition, the intervening bystanders are not neutral. Thus, in political conflict, every change in scope changes the equation.”<sup>6</sup>

The second important dimension involves the primary method of coalition building involved in enacting a public policy. Is support mobilized primarily through organizational methods—principally through the efforts of specific interest groups or political parties—or is policy support gathered primarily through the construction and manipulation of ideas? (See figure 1)

Traditional democratic theory and politics emphasized the role of organizations. The history of representative democracy in the United States during its first two hundred years was largely a story of the development of organized groups representing major interests in American society, such as farmers, manufacturers, labor, and minority groups, along with the development of mass political parties to nominate candidates and mobilize voters. Both sets of organizations remain important actors in the policy process. Witness the tremendous growth of new interest groups in and around Washington D.C. over the past four decades, as well as the renewed strength of party leaders in the modern Congress.<sup>7</sup> In addition, “special interests” and political parties remain the chief actors in the policy process in the eyes of most members of the general public and members of the popular press.

However, several recent academic analyses of public policy making in Washington have tended to emphasize the power of ideas in the political and policy processes.<sup>8</sup> This in itself is an old concept.

Victor Hugo's phrase, "greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come" is an old and familiar one. But careful studies demonstrating the independent influence of policy ideas—often in opposition to the united positions of strong coalitions of organized groups—have reignited interest in and appreciation for the influence of ideas as political forces in their own right. All political ideas are not alike, however. Two very different kinds are important for understanding the development of public policy in contemporary America: "expert" ideas and symbolic "ideas." The former are typically complex, professionally salient ideas that structure opinion and consensus within expert policy communities. The latter tend to be simple, common sense notions that shape and mobilize the broad public mood irrespective of—and sometimes in direct opposition to—the norms of expert opinion.

(Figure 1 about here)

### **The "Politics of Organization": Two Traditional Methods of Mobilization**

Policy initiators and advocates all face the need to build support for their proposals if they hope to move toward enactment. Traditionally, they have done so by relying on two types of political organizations: so-called interest or pressure groups and the two major political parties. Interest groups were, for many years, regarded as the principal source and chief beneficiaries of governmental action. Furthermore, they--along with specialists in the executive branch and within Congress itself--were essentially alone in possessing the scarce resources of time, attention, and information that would let them participate effectively in developing or modifying programs.

Political parties, of course, were designed more for the electoral purpose of helping candidates capture office than for advancing particular legislative objectives. The selection (or "ratification") of candidates, and not the drafting of a policy platform, is the principal business at the quadrennial national party conventions. But, nonetheless, governing parties--and especially the party headed by the incumbent president--do devise and help advance a legislative program. Each form of political organization is associated with a distinctive style or pathway of American policy making.

## The Pluralist Pathway

In Washington, interpretations of “politics as usual” typically employ a “pluralist” perspective, which views policy making chiefly as a process of adjustment among contending organized interests. Politicians assume the role of brokers, while legislatures essentially “referee the group struggle” by ratifying interest group victories and defeats in statutory terms.<sup>9</sup>

The theory of budgetary and legislative incrementalism, to which pluralism is often wedded, emphasizes outcomes as well as processes. It recognizes that new policies usually involve only small departures from their predecessors, in part because of cognitive limitations: no individual decision-maker can rationally evaluate all the alternative means to multitudinous ends they might favor. Small, simple changes, various marginal adjustments, are more readily understood. But incrementalism also has a strong political rationale, because incremental change is normally the path of least resistance where there is a pluralistic distribution of political power. Since the existing allocation of benefits should conform to the allocation of political influence--and typically have been spread widely in a “distributive” pattern--any attempt to revise policies dramatically could be expected to spark heated opposition.

Prior to the 1980s, U.S. tax politics offered a good example of this pluralist-incrementalist model. The federal income tax grew enormously in fiscal importance and complexity after 1913, with the most significant revisions associated with periods of crisis: wartime emergencies and the Great Depression. But, setting aside these important but relatively brief and infrequent moments, the tax system did not change in basic structure, despite many criticisms and proposals for “reform.” John Witte correctly described the standard pattern as:

marginal adjustments to the existing structure. . . . Applicable rates, bracket changes, exemption levels, standard deductions, depreciation percentages, investment credits, depletion allowances--the list of changes that can be accomplished by simply altering a number is very long. . . . Tax laws can also be easily and marginally altered by expanding or contracting eligible groups, actions, industries, commodities, or financial circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the creation and expansion of tax preferences, which is among the more obvious

“incremental” additions and changes, has traditionally been attributed to the influence of organized beneficiary groups.<sup>11</sup> Groups and lobbyists representing individual corporations, industries, professions, and other economic and social interests actively solicit key members and committees of Congress for special preferences and provisions in the tax code that will benefit them financially.

Although this pluralist model accurately describes the formation of most tax policy most of the time, it is important to recognize that it does not account for some of the most important pieces of tax legislation in recent years, such as the passage of Ronald Reagan’s dramatic tax cuts in 1981, the adoption of the landmark Tax Reform Act (TRA) of 1986, or the enactment of George W. Bush’s tax cut legislation in 2001. These all followed very different pathways to adoption that departed from the pluralist model, which we have discussed in detail elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, on a day to day basis, traditional group politics continues to play an important role in shaping American tax policy. Sheldon Pollack, for example, notes that much of “the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 reads like a Christmas-list of special tax provisions targeted at the constituents of the Republican Party,” including the reduction in the maximum capital gains tax rate and increased exemptions for the federal gift and estate taxes.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, by the time that Congress had finished work on the 2001 tax relief act, many of these same constituencies has worked their way into the legislation as well.

Pluralist politics are common in other fields of American policy making as well. Farm, transportation, energy, telecommunications, and military procurement policies are typically shaped by classic interest group politics. Even elements of U.S. foreign policy-- which is most often developed through the analytic pathway, by narrow circles of policy experts inside the Washington beltway-- is not immune to pluralist politics. American foreign policies toward the Middle East and Eastern Europe, for example, have traditionally been influenced heavily by ethnically based constituent groups in the United States. Similarly, President Bush’s imposition of steel import quotas in March, 2002 can be traced in large part to heavy lobbying pressure by steel companies, labor unions, and congressional representatives from America’s “rust belt.”<sup>14</sup> The President’s action in this case was in stark contrast to his partisan rhetoric on free trade and at odds with the nearly unanimous advice of his economic and

trade advisors. Instead, it responded to a massive and costly lobbying campaign by integrated steel companies and steel workers unions, as well as the careful calculations of the president's political advisors who were seeking to defend vulnerable Republican seats in Congress.

### The Partisan Pathway

The pluralist pathway represents "business as usual" in American politics, when only specialized and narrow audiences are attentive to the policy making process and only modest changes from existing law are typically involved.. Historically, the American system has overcome the obstacles and political inertia that block bold, non-incremental policy changes only on those rare occasions when it resembles the ideal of unified party government. Typically in these cases, a strong president—such as Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 or Lyndon Johnson in 1964--sweeps into office with large party majorities in both chambers of Congress. He mobilizes the resources of his office to construct a coherent legislative program, rallying the public and his party followers behind it, often to address a real or at least perceived "crisis."

Because presidents have typically provided the essential leadership for such partisan action, we once called this pathway the "presidential-majoritarian" model. However, events in the 1990s showed that it can also be attempted from Congress. The Republican party's midterm election landslide in 1994 illustrated this approach, with leadership coming from the legislative branch, rather than the White House. Under the direction of then House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, Republican members succeeded in moving many of the initiatives contained in their far-reaching "Contract With America"--in effect, a binding party platform--through the House of Representatives in what was termed the "Republican Revolution." Some bills survived the somewhat more temperate Republican Senate as well, although many met with presidential vetoes from the incumbent Democrat, Bill Clinton. The interparty deadlock that resulted, as dramatized by shutdowns of the federal government beginning in November 1995, meant that the overall level of legislative activity for the 104th Congress was not particularly impressive. But the episode did show the ability of members of Congress to formulate, initiate, and advance a far-reaching legislative program without the participation of the White House. <sup>15</sup>

Partisan leadership and coalition building played a notable role in some of the most prominent

tax legislation of the 1980s and 1990s, including the Republican-led tax cuts of 1981 (as part of *ERTA*, the *Economic Recovery and Tax Act*), the tax increases and spending reductions in Clinton's 1993 economic package, and the Bush administration proposals that became the *Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001*. For example, one study described the politics of Reagan's proposals as follows:

Politically, the Reagan administration shunned the tedious process of building a bipartisan consensus for reform in individual policy areas. It succeeded instead in constructing a partisan-conservative phalanx that rolled major portions of the president's program through Congress in one bold sweep. For the single critical year of 1981 the narrow interest group subsystem politics and congressional fragmentation that characterized the Nixon and Carter years gave way to a highly visible, majoritarian style of presidential policy leadership.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the final vote on *ERTA* in the House divided the parties more sharply than any other tax vote since 1921. But, even so, this was not a purely partisan case, as Democrats joined Republicans in a "bidding war," matching their tax cut proposals nearly one for one, instead of steadfastly maintaining opposition.<sup>17</sup>

Bill Clinton's 1993 deficit reduction package, which was adopted during a short two-year period when Democrats held control of both the presidency and Congress, was nearly purely "partisan" in form. Assembled by his administration as a result of a campaign pledge to reduce the mounting deficit, the proposal resulted in bitter fights in Congress and never attracted the support of even a single Republican on any of eight critical votes.<sup>18</sup> Finally and most recently, the \$1.6 trillion tax reduction package that President George W. Bush helped push through Congress in 2001 sparked a great deal of partisan debate and division, especially in the House of Representatives. As *Congressional Quarterly* put it, "United Republicans managed to rush the centerpiece of President Bush's economic agenda through the House without even pretending to collaborate across the aisle."<sup>19</sup>

Overtly partisan strategies—and winning partisan coalitions—are most likely to appear in areas such as social and economic policy where the two parties are most likely to be internally united and philosophically opposed to each other. They can appear in other policy domains, but they are less

likely to do so because the two parties tend to be internally divided in many other policy realms. Foreign policy is the most notable example of an arena where, historically, reliance on overtly partisan coalitions has been discouraged. When Democrats gained control over the U.S. Senate in 2001, for example, they began to challenge the Bush administration's efforts to accelerate testing and deployment of a national missile defense system. The adoption of spending cuts and restrictions on NMD by the Senate Armed Services Committee produced what *Congressional Quarterly* called "one of the sharpest partisan divisions on the committee in decades."<sup>20</sup> Yet, these controversial restrictions were ultimately dropped from the Senate bill, in part because the Democratic chairman of the committee, Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI) was concerned about the degree of partisanship involved: "It's a very important goal that the committee act on a bipartisan basis," he told reporters.<sup>21</sup>

Even on divisive issues such as tax policy, the partisan pathway can be a risky strategy. The minority party is, by its very nature, forced to seek bipartisan support, and majority party leaders are often faced with defections in their own ranks. While there is a bit of truth to caricaturing Republicans as stridently "anti-tax" and particularly desirous of rate reductions benefiting the wealthy, including capital gains cuts--and the Democrats as more concerned for the well-being of the lower and middle classes, this division holds up far better in the media and on the campaign trail than in reality. In truth, neither party has developed and stuck to a consistent platform on tax issues and enacted it strictly by mobilizing the party faithful.

### **New Methods of Mobilization: Two Variants on the "Politics of Ideas"**

Traditional models emphasizing interest group pressure and partisan politics can help to explain many, if not most, legislative enactments, but an increasing number of statutes are difficult to account for in these ways. To interpret them, different or supplementary models are necessary.

These alternative approaches are informed by, and take into account, important changes in the American political environment during the past three decades. One of the many important developments is that the "foot soldiers" traditionally provided by political parties to work out in the precincts have become far less important than formerly. In contrast, money--needed for the hiring of campaign consultants, direct mail blitzes, and the particularly the purchase of costly television

advertising time--matters more. Especially with the rise of more numerous and highly publicized primaries, the battle for election to the presidency is fought out more “in the air” than, as in days’ past, “on the ground.”

Concurrently, the media have become more central to both electoral and policy politics. A great deal of governmental activity is under its close scrutiny--or has the possibility of becoming so--but, typically, in a manner emphasizing entertainment values: contests for power, the drama of debate and conflict, and of course, financial scandals and moral improprieties. Consequently, politicians--young ones bred on them and their seniors bowing to the new realities--have discarded traditions of deference and courtesy that once were commonplace in legislative operations and become more aggressively offensive and warily defensive in campaigning and policy positioning.

Congressional organization and procedures have been altered as well. To again single out one of the most important changes, in the early 1970s power was decentralized to a considerable degree, giving first-term freshmen a degree of visibility and opportunities for influence that would have been impossible to imagine in prior decades. At the same time, the legislative branch acquired greatly enhanced staff capabilities, as well as access to sophisticated policy information from proliferating Washington think tanks and other sources. These developments put Congress on a more equal position with the executive in terms of the capacity to identify problems and formulate or evaluate legislative approaches.

### The Expert Pathway

The best recognized new approach to interpreting politics and policy-making begins by emphasizing the significance of substantive ideas. Because it lacks the strong ideological passions and commitments found in Europe, American politics has commonly been viewed as pragmatic and interest-based. But, especially during the 1980s, more and more political scientists came to emphasize the role of ideas, beliefs and values as an important and independent influence. James Q. Wilson, for one, concluded after studying a number of regulatory statutes that “a complete theory of politics . . . requires that attention be paid to beliefs as well as interests. Only by the most extraordinary theoretical contortions can one explain [these laws] by reference to the economic stakes involved.”<sup>22</sup> John

Kingdon concluded his influential study of agenda-setting by pointing out that “if we try understand public policy solely in terms of [such concepts as power, influence, pressure and strategy] we miss a great deal. The content of . . . ideas themselves, far from being mere smokescreens or rationalizations, are integral parts of decision making in and around government.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Deborah Stone has suggested that “ideas are the very stuff of politics. People fight about ideas, fight for them, and fight against them. . . . Moreover, people fight with ideas as well as about them.”<sup>24</sup>

The increasing importance and influence of ideas in the public arena has vaulted intellectuals and experts--the natural generators and propagators of ideas--into positions of greater prominence. And when such experts and professionals are employed in and around government--in both staff agencies and “think tanks,” as has been increasingly the case since the 1960s and 1970s--they can sometimes influence policy quickly and directly. Daniel Patrick Moynihan traced much of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty to what he termed “the professionalization of reform.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Samuel H. Beer noted that, throughout these two decades, “people in government service, or closely associated with it, acting on the basis of their specialized knowledge . . . first perceived the problem, conceived the program, initially urged it on the president and Congress, went on to help lobby it through to enactment, and then saw to its administration.”<sup>26</sup> Another leading case in point was the deregulation of airline, trucking, and telecommunications in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which also depended heavily on the views of experts and the “politics of ideas.”<sup>27</sup> A more general factor has been the growing size and importance since the mid-1960s and early 1970s of both official staff research units and independent “think tanks.”<sup>28</sup>

Tax policy reform in 1986 provides a good case study of the analytic pathway in operation. Compared to other policy areas, the tax domain is unusual in that it includes such an extensive, well-informed, and highly-committed professional community of experts in positions of considerable influence. Its members may be found especially in Treasury’s Office of Tax Policy and on the staff of the unique Joint Committee on Taxation, as well as at the Congressional Budget Office and the Congressional Research Service, the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute, and elsewhere. Most of these participants share a commitment to a specific view of what would constitute “good” or “sound”

policy--an agreement on a set of normative “principles” that, in their view, should guide legislative action.

Although no statute is ever a pure type, the 1986 Tax Reform Act is an outstanding example of the operation and influence of “expert” politics, which was especially important in its formative stages. First, the movement for tax reform rested above all else on the shared conviction of knowledgeable experts in and outside of government that the federal income tax system had grown indefensible from the standpoint of professionally salient values. Further, by the mid-1980s there was widespread agreement among these tax specialists on the basic features of an ideal income tax system: it should be horizontally equitable, investment neutral, and administratively efficient. All three goals could be attained by broadening the tax base and lowering rates, as Joseph A. Pechman had demonstrated in the 1950s and as had been more recently emphasized by the “flat tax,” Bradley-Gephardt, and Kemp-Kasten proposals.<sup>29</sup>

This professional consensus was especially important in shaping the first draft reform bill, dubbed “Treasury I.” “Political considerations were irrelevant,” Secretary Donald Regan had told his staff. Consequently, the initial Treasury plan was an astonishingly pure expression of expert views. Although never formally proposed as legislation, it--rather than current tax law--became the standard against which subsequent proposals were measured, and the basic contours of the final TRA--base broadening, reduced rates, revenue and distributional neutrality--all were fixed at this early stage. Expert consensus also accounted for the removal of a large number of the poor from the tax rolls, a particularly costly feature, and for the sharp hike in the corporate tax rate, which helped to pay for lower individual rates.

As one would expect, professional ideas were less dominant throughout the remainder of the legislative process, but they were still influential. For example, the vast scope of the reform initiative overwhelmed members, leaving an enormous number of issues to be decided by the Joint Tax committee staff. Joint Committee staff also exercised life or death power over countless alternatives considered by decision-makers by controlling the all-critical revenue estimates.

U.S. foreign and defense policies also tend to be crafted through the processes of the analytic

pathway to a greater extent than is true of most domestic policies. Even more than in field of tax policy, the foreign policy domain is subject to design and influence by well trained professionals in key positions of responsibility. It also attracts little consistent attention and interest from the general public and, overall, markedly less active and sustained involvement from the types of organized social and economic interests that actively shape and constrain policy formation in most domestic fields. Moreover, the lingering legacy of the cold war, which mitigated partisan cleavages in the foreign policy realm, continues to constrain use of the partisan pathway in this arena, although such cold war influences appear to be diminishing over time.

Defense policy tends also to be highly specialized. Although the presence of large numbers of veterans and military contractors makes defense policy more subject to the influence of powerful organized groups than is true of other forms of foreign policy, the existence of a unique professional cadre of military officers who possess a near monopoly over key sources of information in the defense policy arena results in greater deference being paid to the expertise of policy experts in this field compared to most others.

### The Symbolic Pathway

Policy experts are concerned, in most cases above all else, with the actual substance of policy. For most, the key questions are “will it work,” and will it “do good” by accomplishing its objectives.

But proposals are very frequently advanced for other reasons as well. Programs may be designed around a popular prejudice or to fit a widespread preconception or even clearly recognized misconception. Sloganeering (like “three strikes and you are out” for certain crimes or “two years and you’re off” concerning public assistance) can sometimes dictate substance.

Furthermore, candidates frequently promise actions or results that they (or their advisers) know have little chance of being realized. Advocates may urge initiatives to gain attention to themselves or to a cause, even if the positions advanced have little chance of being adopted or implemented successfully. Issues also may be raised simply to embarrass opponents or to force a legislative vote that can be used as a campaign weapon during the next electoral cycle. For example, a Republican spokeswoman said that they never expected the recent House bill abolishing the Internal Revenue Code

in 2002 to become law, but they hoped that it would “make some [Democrats’] lives miserable for defending the current tax code.”<sup>30</sup>

We would term these “symbolic” policy proposals, as they draw the bulk of their appeal simply by appearing to respond to a problem in a manner that is easily comprehensible to the general public.<sup>31</sup> Such initiatives are associated more with their abstract goal than evaluated according to technical concerns like program structure. Established or anticipated effectiveness is a secondary (or sometimes even non-existent) concern.

The symbolic pathway contrasts with more traditional means of fashioning support for legislation, like compromising over the provisions of an act, logrolling many different benefits into one program, or deferring to the expertise of individual legislative specialists. Compared with these methods, it is a faster and less expensive means to win support. While to be successful, symbolic proposals must strike a rich pre-existing vein of sympathy, their advocates need not possess a reservoir of power or resources for bargaining with a broad array of interests. So long as Congress’ attention can be focused on some widely-shared (or possibly greatly-feared) legislative aim--rather than on more complex questions about which program approach is most appropriate to address the goal--coalition-building can be greatly simplified. Such proposals may ultimately reach the floor in a form that essentially compel approval, in a way that no one can afford to oppose. “Issue framing,” “position-taking,” and “blame avoidance” loom large.

The symbolic pathway, then, has both familiar and distinctive characteristics: One feature of symbolic ideas is that they tend to be evocative and metaphorical rather than precise and analytical. Such ideas tend to elicit emotional and visceral responses from people, rather than reflection and deliberation. In addition, symbolic ideas tend to be simple rather than complex. Finally, symbolic policies tend to generate significant unanticipated consequences. Each of these features is discussed below.

First, symbolic politics tend to be evocative rather than analytical. Whereas expert ideas draw persuasive power from the strength of their logic, reasoning, and evidence, symbolic ideas derive power from metaphors and/or their ability to evoke widely shared values and broadly accepted folk

wisdom. As Mark Moore observed in an essay on “What Makes Public Ideas Powerful”:

It is not clear reasoning or carefully developed and interpreted facts that make ideas convincing. Rather, ideas seem to become anchored in people’s minds through illustrative anecdotes, simple diagrams and pictures, or connections with broad commonsense ideologies that define human nature and social responsibilities.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, if a policy under consideration can become so closely and inextricably linked to some widely accepted value or idea, so that the decision becomes viewed as one of support for the value or idea itself rather than the particular approach to achieving it, then a favorable outcome is often a foregone conclusion.

A second and related characteristic of symbolic ideas is that they tend to be visceral and emotive rather than deliberative and reflective. As Philip Heymann has observed:

Frequently, perhaps generally, unproven and perhaps unprovable assumptions about human behavior are crucial to government choices. These assumptions are grounded more in our personal psychologies and histories, in our group memberships and accepted mythologies, than in any scientific evidence.<sup>33</sup>

Emotional responses allow for snap judgments and quick decisions. Policy advocates often seek to take advantage of this and move quickly; opponents may seek to slow the process down and hope that the outcome will change as emotions cool and reflection sets in.

The proposed “flag burning” Amendment to the Constitution, which generated much political discussion in the late 1980s and early 1990s, provides a good example. Perhaps no symbol in American politics carries greater emotional attachment than the flag. So long as proponents of the amendment could focus on visceral images of long haired, flag burning demonstrators, they had a clear political advantage. Once opponents were able to slow down the legislative process, allow passions to cool, and reframe the issue as one of upholding Constitutional values, the political advantage shifted their way.

Welfare reform --sought periodically but largely unsuccessfully from the 1950s onward-- provides another example of visceral symbolic politics. Historically, few issues have incorporated

more emotional and symbolic baggage in American politics than welfare. For example, polls of public opinion have produced dramatically different results depending on whether people were asked about their support for “welfare” or “aid to needy citizens,” because each phrase elicits very different images in the minds of respondents. This is what lent such power to Bill Clinton’s 1992 promise to make work-and-time limits the cornerstones of his welfare reform policy. Experts who had spent years conducting studies to investigate work disincentives in welfare programs suddenly found that “values trump analysis” once issues were moved to a broader public arena where “two years and you’re off” was all it took to capture the public imagination.<sup>34</sup>

The “two years” slogan illustrates a third important characteristic of symbolic ideas: simplicity. To be effective, symbolic ideas do not have to be, and indeed ought not to be, complex and comprehensive. Short slogans that express the public mood, tap an emotional current, or capture the conventional wisdom are the best candidates for symbolic success. To quote Mark Moore again:

Many ideas that become powerful lack the intellectual properties that policy analysts hold dear. Most . . . are not very complex or differentiated. There is no clear separation of ends from means, of diagnosis from interventions, or assumptions from demonstrated facts, or of blame from causal effect. All are run together in a simple gestalt that indicates the nature of the problem, whose fault it is, and how it will be solved.<sup>35</sup>

Examples of this process in modern politics are increasingly common. Slogans such as “three strikes and you’re out” in criminal justice, “ending welfare as we know it,” and eliminating the “marriage penalty” and “death tax” in tax policy have not only littered the realm of political rhetoric in the 1990s, they have proceeded to shape and constrain the actual policies adopted in ways that most substantive experts found nonsensical or repugnant. Nor are symbolic ideas confined to sloganeering. Even powerful concepts that have shaped long term economic policy, such as the crusade against deficit spending, have been rooted more in commonsense extensions from family budgeting practices than in sophisticated economic theory.

### **Distinctive Patterns of Pathway Politics**

The brief cases, examples, and anecdotes relayed above convey a broad, intuitive sense of the

differences between the four pathways of American policy making, but many of the distinctive patterns of behavior that coalesce into the four different pathways can be rendered with greater precision. Table 1, which summarizes patterns from four examples of each policy type, illustrates the degree to which they differ empirically in terms of policy actors who lead the policy process, the speed of policy development, and levels of consensus and partisanship involved during legislative consideration. The different pathways also can be distinguished in terms of their scale of policy change, the sustainability of those changes, and the predominant methods of coalition building.

(Table 1 about here)

For example, the chief sponsors and leading actors in pluralist politics tend to be senior members of the congressional committees with jurisdiction over the policy area involved. Outside of Congress, active involvement comes from interest groups most affected by the policies in question. In contrast, while senior committee leaders tend also to be the legislative initiators of policies in the analytic pathway, external supporters tend to come from academia, think tanks, and the bureaucracy, while many key interest groups may be actively opposed. Key initiatives in the partisan pathway are typically led by the highest ranking political leadership in the government, including the President and/or congressional party leaders in the House and Senate. Finally, formal sponsorship of symbolic initiatives can be highly variable, including all of the actors above. However, unlike the other pathways, lone members of Congress who lack the resources and prerogatives of legislative leadership positions, and even political entrepreneurs outside of government, such as Ralph Nader, on consumer protection, or Rachel Carson, on the environment, can effectively generate and lead symbolic coalitions, usually with active attention and support of the mass media.

The time frame for policy development also varies systematically between the different styles of policy making, in terms of both policy incubation and policy enactment. Policy incubation consists of the period of time between the first appearance of an idea to its adoption. This is a difficult concept to measure with precision. What constitutes the first serious proposal of a policy idea is not always clear or easy to identify. However, an examination of the legislative histories of the 16 policies included in Table 1 allows for rough generalizations. The average incubation period for policies in most pathways

is measured in years. This is true even of ideas in the partisan pathway, many of which are enacted quickly once a strong party coalition is assembled. Often these enactments represent the backlog of ideas from an entire generation of party activists. The exception to this pattern of lengthy incubation periods is symbolic policymaking. The four symbolic measures examined in Table 1 had an incubation period of 110 days. The ideas literally sprang from almost nowhere.<sup>36</sup>

The enactment period in Table 1 represents the amount of time between the introduction of a bill and its eventual passage during the legislative session when it was finally enacted. The maximum period of time in this case can be no longer than twenty four months, and it is often two to three months shorter than that. Thus, it is significant that, on average, policies that follow the analytic pathway typically consume practically the entire Congress available to them, as coalitions are carefully constructed and opposition is fought off or mollified. Similarly, policies on the pluralist track consume more than a year as well. The Partisan pathway can be quite different, however. In the four high profile cases of majoritarian policy making examined here, the average time of enactment was five months. The New Deal model of adopting an entire legislative agenda in the first 100 days of a new Congress, before internal divisions and factions weaken the majority party coalition, remains alive and well in the partisan pathway. Even more astonishing is the average enactment time of recent symbolic measures in Congress, which is best measured in days rather than months. Speed, not deliberation, carries the day in such cases.

Although partisan and symbolic policymaking resemble each other when it comes to speed of enactment, they appear very different when one looks at the degree of legislative consensus. In the four cases of symbolic policymaking examined here, the *typical* vote in Congress was unanimous. These clearly come before the legislature in a form that Members feel they cannot openly oppose, even if the ideas or policy details were controversial before or after enactment. Broad consensus is also very common within the pluralist pathway. Here, successful ideas build upon consensus within the committees of Congress, and non-committee members tend simply to defer to such agreement when the issues reach the floor. In contrast, Congress is often bitterly divided over policies in the partisan pathway. Here, the majority party typically wins over the vigorous dissent and opposition of the

minority party.

The policy pathways differ empirically in two other important respects as well: the magnitude of the change they entail and the sustainability of those changes. Table 2 shows the pathway and magnitude of change involved in 30 federal policy adoptions between 1981 and 2002. This table does not reflect a representative sample of federal enactments over this period; it is weighted towards important laws proposed or adopted during this period. Nonetheless, clear differences between the paths are apparent. As one might expect, three quarters of the policies examined that predominantly followed the pluralist pathway involved modest or incremental policy changes, whereas 86% of the policies adopted through the partisan pathway involved major policy changes. Expert and symbolic policies in this sample were about evenly divided.

(Table 2 about here.)

Expert and symbolic policies also appear most vulnerable in terms of sustainability. As indicated in Table 3, over two-thirds of the policies we classified as adopted through the expert path were reversed or substantially modified by a subsequent Congress. The experience with catastrophic health insurance coverage for older Americans in Medicare offers a prime example. In 1988, Congress adopted—by large margins of support—a new social insurance program to cover the costs of catastrophic illness among the elderly. Congress fashioned the legislation along the lines recommended by health care and fiscal policy experts, requiring the program to be self funded—and thus not adding further to the large budget deficits of the era—and imposing the costs on well-to-do elderly beneficiaries rather than through payroll taxes on the young. Hailed by policy experts and the media as a landmark achievement, the new law generated massive opposition from the affluent elderly who were expected to pay for the measure, and their intense lobbying efforts caused Congress to reverse course and repeal the law the following year.

(Table 3 about here)

In contrast to the vulnerability of enactments that follow the idea-based paths, legislation adopted through the pluralist and partisan pathways has proved to be more stable. Sixty to 75% of these policies were sustained over the time period examined. This suggests an area of advantage for

organizationally based politics.

**Conclusions:  
The Strategic Nature of Pathway Politics  
and the Ascendance of Symbolic Policy Making**

We have found the pathways framework to be helpful in understanding and interpreting the substance and volatility of recent federal policy making, both domestic and international. For analytical clarity, the alternative paths have been described up to this point in relatively exclusive terms, implying that all or most legislation is advanced along a single policy pathway. That implication would be misleading. Many bills and new initiatives switch tracks at different stages of the policy process. In fact, it is quite usual for enactments to move along different pathways at different stages of the policy process. It is certainly the case that within each policy domain, major policy enactments tend to evolve from one pathway to another over time.

This process of switching paths results in part from the strategic behavior of actors in the policy process. Different actors compete to place policies onto a pathway most favorable to them. Some have incentives to switch tracks as they seek to move issues onto more friendly or familiar terrain. Others fight to retain control over issues by working to keep them within their own domain. Thus, while interest groups and specialists may prefer to address issues within the comfortable confines of their established policy networks, presidents and congressional leaders are interested in seizing issues around which they can rally their entire party, while policy entrepreneurs are generally interested in crafting hot issues which they can market to institutionally powerful actors and the mass media. Sophisticated practitioners of the policy process understand their own strengths and weaknesses and are likely to follow the path that maximizes their resources.

This process of strategic competition has important consequences. Both the character of the policy process and a proposal's substantive content are likely to change--sometimes unexpectedly--when issues switch or are moved onto different tracks. As noted earlier, experts in welfare policy quickly lost control over issues of welfare reform once slogans such as "ending welfare as we know it"

captured the public imagination. Similarly, professional specialists who sought to craft a program guaranteeing affordable health insurance for all found their concerns were quickly shunted aside when opposing interests mounted a costly and effective media campaign playing on fears of “big government” and the loss of an individual’s ability to select his or her personal physician. In other instances, a broad party mandate may be captured by specific interest groups once issues move from the realm of electoral pronouncements to the backrooms of congressional committee, as occurred when the broad value statements in the Contract with America were translated into hundred-page bills by congressional committees and their interest group allies.

Partly because of this competition for control, different initiatives within any single policy domain often follow different routes to passage over time. For example, the 1978 Revenue Act saw Congress seize the tax writing initiative from the Carter administration and construct a modestly-sized but loophole-laden bill that epitomized the workings of interest group pluralism.<sup>37</sup> Three years later, ERTA, a much larger and far more comprehensive tax cut package was passed by Congress, reflecting the power of a popular president to seize an issue, expand the scope of conflict, and mobilize his party and the media to help advance it. The characteristics of expert-driven reform were highlighted in the Tax Reform Act of 1986, while the politics of symbolism took center stage in the congressional actions of 1997 and 1998, which culminated in measures for “taxpayer relief” and “IRS reforms” that were anathema to most tax professionals in or close to government.

This process of dynamic evolution is evident in other policy fields as well. For example, many traditional agricultural policies were shaped and advanced within the protective confines of a highly specialized and politically narrow policy community.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in describing the politics of the nation’s basic pesticide law--the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) of 1947--Christopher Bosso wrote that “The 1947 act . . . was essentially the product of close cooperation among members of the House committee on Agriculture, mid-level personnel within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and those representing the major agricultural pesticides makers—a classic ‘iron triangle.’”<sup>39</sup> Until the 1960s, the resulting pesticides policy bore all the marks of pluralist-incremental policy making, including a remarkable stability and resistance to change. When change

did come, it was because policy formation was forced onto a “symbolic” track, driven initially by the entrepreneurial activities of environmentalists like Rachel Carson and the explosion of media interest which followed.

Education policy also offers examples of different policy paths at work. The landmark act of federal involvement in education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was a classic example of the partisan model. Its enactment, according to one study, was a story in which “the Executive initiates,” “the House acts,” and the “Senate assents,” all in the wake of the Democrats’ landslide election victory in 1964.<sup>40</sup> Republicans, who were disgruntled by the Democrats’ success in ramming the bill through Congress, even employed the metaphor of a policy pathway when they dubbed it “the railroad act of 1965.”<sup>41</sup> The politics of the ESEA stood in stark contrast to those of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), the so-called “Buckley amendment.” That provision, designed to guarantee the privacy of student records, had all the hallmarks of symbolic policy making. It emerged suddenly--seemingly out of nowhere insofar as most higher education experts were concerned--having been initiated by an entrepreneurial Senator who read about the problem in *Parade* magazine, a Sunday newspaper supplement. It swiftly passed the Congress--with no hearings, little debate, and serious technical problems--by virtue of its appeal to symbols of personal privacy.<sup>42</sup>

In short, thinking of the American policy making system as a network of distinct but interconnected pathways of power, which constrain actors in the system but also provide strategic avenues by which to advance their aims, can help us make sense of these dramatic changes in the nature of the policy process. Each of these pathways tends to function best in a certain environment, favors particular tools of decision making, employs a unique style of coalition building, and is associated with a characteristic type of policy outcome. Each also tends to appeal to particular actors in the policy system, who seek to steer issues onto a path most familiar to them and conducive to their success. Strategically-minded actors may attempt to borrow a successful decision making technique from another pathway or to switch tracks altogether, but they are likely to change the overall style of policymaking in the process.

## The Ascendance of Symbolic Politics

Strategic switching between policy pathways constitutes one form of change in the policy system. It tends to be an unpredictable process, which reflects the resources and intelligence of the actors involved as well as the political environment in which they are operating. However, there also appears to us to be a long term shift in the importance of symbolic politics, and a resultant increase in the volatility and unpredictability of the American policy making system. Whereas pluralist politics tend to be highly stable, changing only as the alignment and interests of dominant groups shift slowly over time, symbolic politics tend to be impulsive and unpredictable, subject to the breathless life cycle of media attention and the changing eddies and currents of public opinion.

We may be witnessing a relative shift toward the ideational forms of politics—and especially the symbolic—as party loyalties in the electorate weaken and as interest groups splinter and multiply. Certainly, the expanding volume and complexity of knowledge, increased levels of education, and the growing demands on government have all fostered the politics of expertise. But, in an often conflicting current, changes in the nature of electoral campaigns and the growing influence of the mass media have tended to elevate symbolic politics.<sup>43</sup> So has the precipitous decline in legitimacy of established policy making institutions, particularly Congress. This has encouraged policy makers to “go public” with issues, in the hopes of establishing a kind of populist legitimacy, much as reformers sought to embrace forms of direct democracy during the crisis of institutional legitimacy at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20th centuries. Whereas policy textbooks once called congressional enactment the “legitimation stage,” Congress has lost so much public confidence in recent years that alternative forms of legitimation have become more attractive. Thus, the increased volatility of policy in recent years

may be evidence in itself of the shift from pluralist and party politics towards the expert and symbolic forms.

At the same time, old policy dogs have proven adept at learning new tricks. In attempting to maintain control over issues that are important to them, interest groups have been going beyond traditional methods of interest representation and adopting techniques borrowed from political parties, expert, and symbolic politics.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the big growth areas of interest group activity in recent years have been grassroots organizing, coalition formation, and media marketing.<sup>45</sup> Although many groups have a long history of participation in party politics, they have become increasingly sophisticated actors in the electoral arena. They contribute soft money for “party building” efforts, run ads during election campaigns, and inform and mobilize voters. On the ideational tracks, groups hire their own experts, create their own think tanks or mobilize counter elites, and they seek to play in the realm of symbolic politics by mounting independent media campaigns and issue advocacy drives. Thus, tobacco companies successfully fought off recent antismoking legislation with a major ad campaign that focused on the negative symbols of government interference and excessive new taxes, quickly killing a bill that had previously seemed certain of adoption. Political parties have also gone the ideational route, building links to their own think tanks and using the techniques of symbolic manipulation, as exemplified by the Contract with America.

If this trend toward symbolic politics is real and continuing, then the distinctiveness and volatility of American politics and the unpredictability of its policy processes may continue to grow. Long viewed as more pluralist, and less partisan, than the politics of most European nations, American politics have long had a strong streak of populism as well. The continued rise of symbolic policy making is likely to reinforce and reemphasize this dynamic, though often troubling, characteristic.

**Figure 1. The Four “Pathways” of Power**

(with prototypical examples listed)

	SCOPE OF MOBILIZATION	
	SPECIALIZED	MASS
IDEATIONAL  FORM OF MOBILIZATION	<p><b><i>Analytic</i></b></p> <p>[1986 Tax Reform] [Airline Deregulation]</p>	<p><b><i>Symbolic</i></b></p> <p>[Accounting Reform] [Welfare Reform]</p>
ORGANIZATIONAL	<p><b><i>Pluralist</i></b></p> <p>[1989 Medicare Catastrophic Care Repeal] [2002 Farm Bill]</p>	<p><b><i>Partisan</i></b></p> <p>[Clinton 1993 Tax Act] [Bush 2001 Tax Cuts]</p>

- Actors can mobilize support through either political organizations or political ideas.
- The scope or scale of mobilization can be either limited or broad (the “inside” or “outside” game).
- The four pathways to power or methods of political coalition-building each typify a style of policy-making.
- Legislation often moves through multiple sectors on its way toward defeat or passage.

Table 1

Program and Policy Type	Chief Sponsor	Incubation Period	Enactment Time	Degree of Consensus	Partisan-ship
<b>PLURALIST</b> FIFRA <sup>1</sup> CDBG <sup>2</sup> R & D Tax Credit Education Construction Grants	Authorizing Committee Chairs and Ranking Members	Seven Years	16 Months	High House: 377-34 Sen: 90-6	Low
<b>PARTISAN</b> New Deal Great Society OBRA-ERTA <sup>3</sup> Contract with America	President and Congressional Party Leadership	Years	5 months	Low 256-153 305-129	High
<b>EXPERT</b> TRA of 1986 Airline Deregulation CFO act <sup>4</sup> HMOs <sup>5</sup>	Committee Chairs and Ranking Members	4 years	22 months	Moderate/variable	Low/variable
<b>SYMBOLIC</b> NEPA <sup>6</sup> Buckley Amendment Megan's Law Emergency Resolution & Appropriation of 2001	Variable--individual members to leaders	110 days	107 days	High House: 420-0 Sen: 98-0	Low

<sup>1</sup> Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act.

<sup>2</sup> Community Development Block Grants.

<sup>3</sup> Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act and Economic Recovery and Tax Act of 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Chief Financial Officers Act of 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Health Maintenance Organization legislation.

<sup>6</sup> National Environmental Policy Act.

**Table 2**

**MAGNITUDE OF POLICY CHANGE**

<b>PRIMARY PATH</b>	<b>MAJOR CHANGE</b>	<b>INCREMENTAL CHANGE</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
PLURALIST	12%	78%	8
PARTISAN	86%	14%	7
EXPERT	57%	43%	7
SYMBOLIC	50%	50%	8

**Table 3**

**POLICY SUSTAINABILITY**

Number and Percentage of Policies Overturned within 10 Years

PLURALIST (25%)

PARTISAN (40%)

EXPERT (72%)

SYMBOLIC (40%)

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article were presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Boston, Massachusetts, and published in part as David R. Beam and Timothy J. Conlan, "Four Pathways of Power: Probing the Political Dynamics of Federal Tax Policy in the Turbulent 1980s and 1990s," in Seeking the Center: Politics and Policymaking at the New Century, Martin A. Levin, Marc K. Landy, and Martin Shapiro, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> All of the views expressed here are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the U.S. General Accounting Office

<sup>3</sup> See Paul L. Posner, The Politics of Federal Mandates (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1998), chap. 6.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see Richard Cohen, Washington at Work: Back Rooms and Clean Air 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Timothy J. Conlan, From New Federalism to Devolution (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), chap. 12.

<sup>6</sup> E.E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realists' View of Democracy in America (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1960), pp. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> See Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, Organized Interests and American Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); David C. King and Jack L. Walker, "The Provision of Benefits by Interest Groups in the United States," The Journal of Politics, Vol. 54, No. 2. (May, 1992), pp. 394-426; and Larry J. Sabato and Bruce Larson, The Party's Just Begun: Shaping Political Parties for America's Future 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> See the masterful study by Martha Derthick and Paul J. Quirk, The Politics of Deregulation (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985); John W. Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984); Deborah A. Stone, Policy Paradox and Political Reason (Glenview IL: Scott-Foresman, 1988); and Timothy J. Conlan, Margaret T. Wrightson, and David R. Beam, Taxing Choices: The Politics of Tax Reform (Washington: CQ Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Earl Latham, "The Group Basis of Politics: Notes for a Theory," American Political Science Review 46 (June 1952): 390; and David Truman, The Governmental Process, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Knopf, 1971), p. 507.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Witte, The Politics and Development of the Federal Income Tax (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985): 244-45. For a recent analysis of the politics of tax expenditures, see Christopher Howard, The Hidden Welfare State: Tax Expenditures and Social Policy in the United States, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley S. Surrey, "The Congress and the Tax Lobbyist: How Special Tax Provisions Get Enacted," Harvard Law Review 70 (May 1957): 1145-82.

<sup>12</sup> The TRA was remarkable, for example, because it was adopted in the face of significant opposition from most organized groups, many of which lost significant tangible, financial benefits. Major losers included real estate, heavy industry, oil and gas companies, major banks, and a host of others. Such traditional powerhouses not only largely failed to advance their aims but, in the words of one close observer, "were annihilated." in the political process. Similarly, the initial politics of President Bush's tax reduction package were organized sharply along party lines, especially in the House of Representatives.

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon D. Pollack, "The Politics of Taxation: Who Pays What, When, How," Paper prepared for delivery at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, September 3-6, 1998, p. 13.

- 
- <sup>14</sup> Neil King, Jr., "Bush's Steel Trap: If He Raises Tariffs To Aid Producers, Users Will Be Mad," The Wall Street Journal (February 11, 2002). <http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB101337896166050560.djm,00.html>.
- <sup>15</sup> John B. Bader argues that legislative party leaders often have played a more important role than generally recognized. See his Taking the Initiative: Leadership Agendas in Congress and the "Contract with America", Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996.
- <sup>16</sup> Timothy J. Conlan, New Federalism: Intergovernmental Reform From Nixon to Reagan (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1998), p. 114.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 137. See also Graetz, pp. 124-126.
- <sup>18</sup> George Hager and Eric Pianin, Mirage: Why Neither Democrats Nor Republicans Can Balance the Budget, End the Deficit, and Satisfy the Public, New York: Random House, 1997, p. 223.
- <sup>19</sup> Lori Nitschke, "Tax-Cut Bipartisanship Down to One Chamber," CQ Weekly Report (March 10, 2001), p. 529.
- <sup>20</sup> Pat Towell, "Armed Services Democrats' Move To Shackle Anti-Missile Program Sets Up Fierce Senate Showdown," CQ Weekly (Sept. 8, 2001), Page 2079.
- <sup>21</sup> Chuck McCutcheon, "Can Levin Be an Agent of Change On a Panel Known for Bipartisanship?" CQ Weekly (Jan. 26, 2002), Page 254.
- <sup>22</sup> James Q. Wilson, ed., The Politics of Regulation (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 372.
- <sup>23</sup> Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, p. 131.
- <sup>24</sup> Stone, Policy Paradox and Political Reason, p. 25.
- <sup>25</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan, "The Professionalization of Reform," The Public Interest I (Fall 1965): 6-16.
- <sup>26</sup> Samuel H. Beer, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Democracy in America," American Political Science Review 72 (March 1978), p. 17.
- <sup>27</sup> See Derthick and Quirk, The Politics of Deregulation.
- <sup>28</sup> On the latter see David M. Ricci, The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and James A. Smith, The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite (New York: The Free Press, 1993).
- <sup>29</sup> See Joseph A. Pechman, "Erosion of the Individual Income Tax," National Tax Journal 10 (March 1957). Summaries of key reform proposals appeared in Joseph A. Pechman, ed., A Citizen's Guide to the New Tax Reforms: Fair Tax, Simple Tax, Flat Tax (Totawa NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985).
- <sup>30</sup> Janet Hook, "House Passes GOP Proposal to Kill Tax Code," Chicago Sun-Times, July 18, 1998, p. 26.
- <sup>31</sup> The following discussion draws on Timothy J. Conlan and Steven L. Abrams, "Federal Intergovernmental Regulation: Symbolic Politics in the New Congress," Intergovernmental Perspective 7, 3 (Summer 1981): 19-26.
- <sup>32</sup> Mark Moore, "What Makes Public Ideas Powerful?" in The Power of Public Ideas, Robert B. Reich, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988), p. 79.
- <sup>33</sup> Philip B. Heymann, "How Government Expresses Public Ideas," in The Power of Public Ideas, Robert B. Reich, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988), p. 89.

---

<sup>34</sup>For an insider's account of this process in the case of welfare reform legislation, see David T. Ellwood, "Welfare Reform as I Knew It: When Bad Things Happen to Good Policies," American Prospect 26 (May-June 1996).

<sup>35</sup>Moore, "What Makes Public Ideas Powerful?", p. 79.

<sup>36</sup>This is not inevitably the case with symbolic policies however. Important elements of the recent Accounting reform legislation adopted by the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress had a history of consideration and debate extending back several years. Until the crisis environment of the post Enron and Worldcom scandals, however, they had been successfully blocked by the accounting industry.

<sup>37</sup>See Witte, The Politics and Development of the Federal Income Tax, pp. 207-217.

<sup>38</sup>For detailed analyses of the subsystem concept, see Douglass Cater, Power in Washington (Vintage Books, 1964); J. Leiper Freeman, The Political Process, rev. ed. (Random House, 1965); and Randall B. Ripley and Grace A. Franklin, Congress, the Bureaucracy, and Public Policy (Homewood IL: The Dorsey Press, 1976).

<sup>39</sup>Christopher J. Bosso, Pesticides and Politics: The Life Cycle of a Public Issue (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), pp. 10-11.

<sup>40</sup>Eugene Eidenberg and Roy D. Morey, An Act of Congress: The Legislative Process and the Making of Education Policy, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), pp. 75, 96, 145.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>42</sup>Conlan and Abrams, "Federal Intergovernmental Regulation," pp. 19-26.

<sup>43</sup>For more discussion of these political changes, which Hugh Hechlo has termed "hyperdemocracy," see C. Eugene Steurle, Edward M. Gramlich, Hugh Hechlo, and Demetra Smith Nightingale, The Government We Deserve: Responsive Democracy and Changing Expectations (Washington: The Urban Institute Press, 1998), chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup>Concerning the counterattack by business see David Vogel, Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America (New York: Basic Books, 1989), esp. chapter 8.

<sup>45</sup>Kay L. Schlozman and John T. Tierney, Organized Interests and American Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 155-157.