

Gaus Lecturer Kaufman Predicts Struggle within Public Administration

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Funded through a bequest from former APSA President John M. Gaus, an annual lectureship on the work of political scientists in the field of public administration has been established by the APSA Council. Herbert Kaufman, the 1986-87 Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Professor of American Politics at Boston College, delivered the first John Gaus Lecture as part of the APSA program for the 1986 Meeting. For Kaufman, a prominent scholar whose principal publications focus on city politics and public administration, this was an especially appropriate role, since his own work was strongly influenced by the questions Gaus raised with respect to the ecology of administration and organizational theory.

Thirty years ago Kaufman formulated a prediction concerning the future course of public administration. He argued that the doctrines of public administration would undergo change as the central focus of the field shifted from a concern with building a public bureaucracy to a concern with how to control it. This transformation would generate divisiveness, first in terms of doctrinal cleavages and ultimately in terms of disciplinary allegiances among public administration academics, he predicted.

In his lecture Kaufman now sought to probe the extent to which the passage of time had either confirmed or undermined his developmental scenario.

By way of background Kaufman noted that the New Deal era had forged a consensual tradition within public administration that did not show signs of visible strain until the mid-1950s. Although scholars have variously praised bureaucracies for their neutral competence and expertise, for how well they represented diverse interests, or for the disciplined fashion in which they responded to strong executive leadership, the New Deal fostered a fortuitous coalition



Herbert Kaufman delivering the first annual John M. Gaus Lecture.

between two of these competing schools of thought: between advocates of a politically neutral government apparatus and advocates of a powerful presidency.

By 1956 bureaucratic opposition to President Eisenhower's programs demonstrated that the two values of neutral competence and executive leadership did not necessarily coincide. Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, Richard Nixon's hostility toward the permanent bureaucracy, and Ronald Reagan's energetic use of appointments to overcome agency resistance further drove home the lesson that tension rather than coalition marked the relationship between a strong executive and the federal bureaucracy.

For public administration academics the destruction of the New Deal tradition opened a set of new questions. Would public service be improved by protecting it from the president? Should presidential control be cut back by restricting the chief executive's power of appointment and control over budgets? Should the traditional branches of government interfere less in the workings of the bureaucracy? Does political intrusion, from Congress, result in the casual overriding of

carefully thought out decisions in favor of questionable rewards for constituencies or special interests? Is the bureaucracy better qualified than outsiders to administer programs?

Should the traditional branches of government interfere less in the workings of the bureaucracy?

According to Kaufman, some public administration scholars have embraced a new view—that the bureaucracies are and *ought to be* constitutionally coequal to the traditional branches of government. As a fourth branch of government, the bureaucracy would take its rightful place alongside the legislature and the courts. Instead of cowering before Congress or being treated as a “gun for hire by any president,” the bureaucracy would be included as part of the constitutional order expressing the will of the people. Indeed, the claim can be advanced that the bureaucracy is more representative than Congress.

Kaufman asserted that most students of bureaucracy reject this approach. They prefer a pro-executive position and evince a concern about fragmentation in policymaking, a phenomenon to which the already considerable independence of the bureaucracy contributes. Indeed, the

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government apparatus is held insufficiently responsive to new officials. From a normative perspective, executives should stand at the apex of bureaucratic hierarchies, with the permanent civil servants obligated to obey political appointees, even when they disagree with directives.

The legislature also has its admirers. It can be argued that Congress owns the bureaucracy, that collaboration marks the relationship between these two institutions. On the other hand, the bureauc-

racy has proven adept at playing off the two elected branches, and any claims that the bureaucracy represents the people can only arouse congressional distaste.

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For Kaufman, “what is at issue are the legitimating myths of our system.” Myths are essential to social order, and the most basic axiom in democracies is that the authority of officials springs from the will of the people. While there are myths that grant special autonomy or independence to federal judges, the myth regarding the bureaucracy promotes a vision of civil servants loyally subordinate to their superiors.

The outcome of this struggle over the extent to which the bureaucracy should be insulated from—or made more responsive to—elected officials is not pre-ordained. Kaufman predicted that “attempts to reduce bureaucratic autonomy will meet heavy sledding,” because the civil service is both well organized and a “sacred symbol.” While a single party in control of both houses of Congress and the White House might undo some of the protection of the civil service, any ensuing scandals would evoke sympathetic public support for the bureaucracy against the “evil demands” of executives.

Within the public administration community, these doctrinal cleavages over the proper role of the bureaucracy may lead to organizational splits. Kaufman contended that scholars favoring a politically neutral civil service will gravitate toward an affiliation with public administration, while champions of the chief executive will embrace different organizations. Kaufman concluded that tomorrow’s students of public administration will find the field more divided than their predecessors. □