

community also anticipate the constraints that their proposals will face. They tailor their proposals to an anticipated budget constraint, they consider whether their proposals will gain the acquiescence of the mass public and specialized publics, and they alter their proposals to gain the approval of elected officials.

The policy stream thus produces a short list of proposals. This short list is not necessarily a consensus in the policy community on the one proposal that meets their criteria; rather, it is an agreement that a few proposals are prominent. Having a viable alternative available for adoption facilitates the high placement of a subject on a governmental agenda, and dramatically increases the chances for placement on a decision agenda.

CHAPTER 7

The Political Stream

Flowing along independently of the problems and policy streams is the political stream, composed of such things as public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress, and changes of administration. Quite apart from what happens in the community of specialists, and quite apart from bringing problems to the attention of people in and around government, such events as a new majority in Congress or a new administration occur. These developments in the political stream have a powerful effect on agendas, as new agenda items become prominent and others are shelved until a more propitious time. The new Reagan administration, for example, set agendas all over town, making some things possible that were impossible before, making other things out of the question, and creating a receptivity to some ideas but not to others.

Let us be clear of our language. When I use the word "political" in this context, I use the word in its colloquial Washington sense. Political science defines "political" very broadly, including just about any activity related to the authoritative allocation of values,¹ or to the distribution of benefits and costs.² The intra-Washington definition, implicitly, is more narrow. "Political" factors in such parlance are electoral, partisan, or pressure group factors. As one talks to practitioners of the art, they use "political" motivations, for example, to refer to politicians' attention to voter reactions, their skewering of members of the opposite political party, and their efforts to obtain the support of important interest group leaders. I employ this more narrow usage here.

¹David Easton, *The Political System*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 129.

²For example, Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1958).

Public policy analysis could treat these political events as somehow outside of the policy-making process. The making of public policy, such a notion would run, is the province of specialists, found particularly among bureaucrats, congressional staffers, and researchers. That conception, in my view, would be fundamentally wrong. It is misleading to conceive of policy making as if it were essentially a process such as the one described in the last chapter. To be sure, specialized program development is an important part of the process. But the political stream we are about to describe is also an important, integral part, not at all exogenous to policy making.

In this chapter, we will start with the public and work toward government. We first discuss a vaguely defined but nonetheless important national mood, and consider the place of social movements within that national mood. We then turn to organized political forces, patterns of support for or opposition to the prominence of certain agenda items, within interest groups or other extragovernmental structures. Governmental phenomena occupy our attention last, when we consider such factors as protection of bureaucratic turf and turnover of key personnel brought about by election results. We will end by describing consensus building in the political stream. Throughout, change will be seen as a function of the shifts of important participants (e.g., a change of administration or the influx of new legislators), or as a response to shifts in national mood or interest group configurations.

THE NATIONAL MOOD

People in and around government sense a national mood. They are comfortable discussing its content, and believe that they know when the mood shifts. The idea goes by different names—the national mood,³ the climate in the country,⁴ changes in public opinion, or broad social movements. But common to all of these labels is the notion that a rather large number of people out in the country are thinking along certain common lines, that this national mood changes from one time to another in discernible ways, and that these changes in mood or climate have important impacts on policy agendas and policy outcomes. In the view of close observers, these changes in public opinion are not confined to the policy communities we discussed in the last chapter, nor to the themes that float around in those communities. Instead, talk of a “swing to the right” or an “antigovernment mood” in the country means something much more general. As one health respondent replied when asked why there had been a shift in the direction of emphasizing the virtues of the private marketplace, “I think it is not related to the health field, really. There is a whole environment out there that is moving in that direction.”

³Thanks to John Campbell for this terminology.

⁴Cobb and Elder discuss a “climate of the times.” See Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, “Communications and Public Policy,” in Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders, eds., *Handbook of Political Communications* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), p. 405.

Governmental participants' sense of the national mood serves to promote some items on their policy agendas and to restrain others from rising to prominence. As for promotion, their sense of national mood is one thing that creates the “fertile ground” that we discussed in Chapter 4. We pointed out there that the seed can come from anywhere, but the key to understanding its germination and growth is whether there is fertile ground or an initial receptivity to the ideas. Many respondents pointed to a general climate of hostility to government regulation as one factor that made it possible for deregulation proposals in transportation to get a sympathetic hearing during the 1970s. As one put it, “These changes involve whole attitudes toward government which affect the administration's success in making new proposals. There was an appropriate mood for deregulation. It could have come earlier, but it didn't because that mood wasn't there.” Similar effects were evident in health, as prominent discussion of proposals to increase marketplace competition rose from near zero in the first three waves of interviews to 38 percent in 1979, and as Health Maintenance Organizations, a keystone of this procompetitive approach, rose to 63 percent.

In contrast to this ability of the national mood to promote a higher agenda status for some items, policy makers' perception of the national mood also serves as a constraint, pushing other items into relative obscurity. During the 1970s, the same time that this perceived antigovernment climate promoted deregulation schemes, it demoted proposals for ambitious new spending and additional government regulation. As one congressional committee staffer said, “Add to [the budget constraint] the panic of Proposition 13, and the overwhelming concern with inflation and with wasteful big government. These things affect the debate at every turn, and affect all the actions that you would want to contemplate.” Or as another said while describing the government interest in promoting good health habits and the public reaction against initiatives like banning saccharin and requiring seat belt interlocks, “Last year, the health side was pushing on this issue of lifestyle. This year, society is pushing back. The issue really is the limit on government telling people what's good for them.” Indeed, prominent commentary among my health respondents on the theme of excessive government regulation rose from 23 percent of health respondents in 1976 to 71 percent in 1979.

Not only do participants feel that they can accurately sense the national mood at any one point in time, but they also feel that they can sense changes in the mood. Most of my respondents in the mid- to late-1970s, for instance, were confident of their characterization of the national mood as conservative—against ambitious new federal programs, in favor of whittling down the size of government, against big expenditures, and against regulation in general terms. In my interviews this was called “the conservative tidal wave in which we are all engulfed” and “a general societal trend.” One respondent said, “There's a general antipathy toward government right now. I don't know why that is, but everybody feels it and it has effects.” Researchers on public opinion will long debate the validity of these perceptions, but for our purposes the critical fact is that important people held them strongly.

In some measure, such swings in national mood are regarded as inevitable as swings of a pendulum. Politics move left at one point in time, and as surely as a pendulum must swing back, politics will move rightward in turn. The 1970s, for instance, were seen as a reaction to the policy enactments of the Great Society in the 1960s. As one respondent claimed quite directly, "The ideas of the 60s are shot. There's an unease, an uncertainty about what to do, a lack of direction." Said another, "National health insurance would be the biggest social program of all, and there is a healthy skepticism about the social programs of the 1960s." Some of these swings of the pendulum may follow partisan realignments.⁵ Others may be feedback cycles; a program is enacted, problems with its implementation emerge, corrections are made, and new problems emerge from the corrections.

We have been speaking of a national mood as a rather vague presence that people in and around government sense, something that is palpable to them but hardly concrete or specific. Where does this mood actually reside, and how do these people sense its content? One fairly clear answer is that the mood does not necessarily reside in the mass public. Operationally, we could take sample surveys of the mass public to discern the popular preferences that make up the national mood or climate, and scholars often do. But to policy specialists and even to politicians, such samplings are a bit beside the point. Referring to the general antiregulation mood, for instance, one respondent argued, "I don't think that there is a great public groundswell in favor of fat in their meat, or in favor of Saturday night specials, or in favor of high-tar cigarettes. In fact, polls show that people overwhelmingly want gun control and some of these other things." Even as my respondents characterized the national mood as strongly antiregulation, for instance, the Gallup poll in 1977 actually showed the public favoring a government requirement for air bags on all new cars.

Similarly, the shifts that we have come to call social movements may not be very widespread in the general public. Ordinarily, social movements need organization and leadership to have a policy impact.⁶ Indeed, they may be led by just a few very active people, and have surprisingly few adherents. The consumer movement, for instance, started, grew, and prospered due to the efforts of Ralph Nader, a few other activists, and their allies in Congress.⁷ The successful social movements, of course, catch on in the more general public and

⁵See Benjamin Ginsberg, "Elections and Public Policy," *American Political Science Review* 70 (March 1976): 41-49; Barbara Deckard Sinclair, "Party Realignment and the Transformation of the Political Agenda," *American Political Science Review* 71 (September 1977): 940-953; and David Brady, "Congressional Party Realignment and Transformations of Public Policy in Three Realignment Eras," *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (May 1982): 333-360.

⁶For a statement of a "resource mobilization" perspective on social movements, which emphasizes the importance of leaders mobilizing resources, see John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (May 1977): 1212-1241.

⁷See Mark V. Nadel, *The Politics of Consumer Protection* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), Chapter 5.

eventually have electoral impacts. Politicians, seeing the electoral payoff, climb on the bandwagon. Such movements eventually add up to the sort of shift in national mood that we have been discussing here. But organizationally, they may not be the broad-based movements that we tend to assume they are.

If the national mood does not reside in the mass public, then where can it be found? And how, specifically, do people in government sense it? I find it difficult to give very precise answers. Generally, governmental officials and those near them have a lot of experience with collections of attentive publics, activists, and political elites out in the country. They hear from interest groups' leaders both in Washington and in the hustings; they read newspaper editorials; they give talks and listen to questions and comments at meetings; they see how public events are being covered in both general and specialized media; and they talk to party activists and other politicians who presumably have their ears to the ground.

The process of sensing a national mood works in two ways. First, elected politicians judge their constituents' mood from such communications as mail, town meetings, smaller gatherings, and delegations of people or even individuals coming to them during their office hours in the district. Second, nonelected officials tend to sense the national mood from what they hear from politicians. It is quite common for career bureaucrats, for example, to discuss the political climate or the national mood in some detail, with the current statements being made on the Hill as the only evidence for their conclusions. They simply assume that politicians have their fingers on the national pulse because it is their business and their livelihood to do so.

The diffusion of an impression of the national mood does not work exclusively in this version of a two-step flow from politicians to nonelected officials. Both sets of people follow the media, for instance, which is filled with commentary on and impressions of the nature of the times. And the national mood may, in some important respects, be an echo of events at the governmental level. Reagan is elected, and everybody assumes that the national mood has swung in a conservative direction. Leading columnists write that the climate is thus-and-so, and this in turn affects the national mood. A president communicates his sense of priorities to the nation, influencing the viewpoints relayed by the general public to their elected representatives.

People in and around government believe quite firmly that something like a national mood has important policy consequences. It has an impact on election results, on party fortunes, and on the receptivity of governmental decision makers to interest group lobbying. A shift in climate, according to people who are actively involved in making or affecting public policy, makes some proposals viable that would not have been viable before, and renders other proposals simply dead in the water. Advocates for the newly viable proposals find a receptive audience, an opportunity to push their ideas. Advocates for the proposals currently out of favor must adapt to their unfortunate situation, present their ideas for consideration as much as is possible under the circumstances, and wait for the mood to shift once again in their direction.

ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCES

The arena of organized political forces is a more standard stock in trade for political scientists than many of the subjects discussed in this book. Students of politics are comfortable with notions of interest group pressure, political mobilization, and the behavior of political elites. These organized political forces form the second component of the political stream.

In Chapter 3, we reviewed the place of interest groups in the processes of agenda setting and alternative specification. We had occasion then to discuss interest group resources, the frequency of blocking and of promoting activities, and the place of other organized forces like political parties. Thus it remains here to consider how the forces described in Chapter 3 are fed into the political stream, how people in and around government perceive and react to various organized activities.

Central to an understanding of these perceptions and calculations is some concept of consensus and conflict among the organized interests. If important people look around and find that all of the interest groups and other organized interests point them in the same direction, the entire environment provides them with a powerful impetus to move in that direction.⁸ But if there is some conflict among the organized forces, then political leaders implicitly arrive at an image of their environment that strikes some balance between those for and those against a given proposal, or for and against the emergence of an item to agenda prominence. Their perception that the balance of support is tilting against a proposal may not necessarily prevent that item from being seriously considered, but it does indicate the price that will be paid for attempting to push the idea forward. On the other hand, support for an item allows it to be pushed, and may be solely responsible in some cases for its rise to agenda prominence, as in the phrase, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease."

There are many examples of this type of assessment in the interviews. On the consensus side, one respondent said of an administration proposal for child health assessment, "It doesn't threaten anybody, it doesn't regulate anybody, and we're doing something for our precious mothers and children." To illustrate the conflict case, consider the Carter administration's proposal for hospital cost containment. One knowledgeable respondent described its lack of support: "To a politician, it's not a very popular bill. They don't hear anything positive from anybody, and they hear a lot of negative." Or as a Hill staffer elaborated:

The support for this kind of legislation is quite weak compared to the opposition by the interests that are directly affected by it and see a really large stake in it.

⁸This discussion is reminiscent of the way legislators make decisions on the floor: by voting with a consensus of the forces important to them. See John W. Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, 3rd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), Chapter 10. For another discussion of the importance of consensus, see Nelson's emphasis on valence issues. Barbara J. Nelson, *Making an Issue of Child Abuse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Chapter 5.

Hospitals, providers, and those natural opponents of the bill have gone out and enlisted allies like suppliers. The opposition has not only been constant, but it has increased. And the hospitals are still among the good guys, you know, the community leaders. It's tough to go against them.

It is difficult to portray precisely how people in and around government arrive at their notion of where the balance of support and opposition lies. In part, their calculations involve their perception of communication flows. If they hear a lot from one side and not from the other, they assume that the balance lies with the first side. They make this assumption in part because intensity does count for something, and they consider communication to be an index of intensity.⁹ In part though, their assessment of the balance turns on their implicit calculation of the various groups' resources. Even if communications were roughly equal in frequency and vigor, one side might be awarded the upper hand, so to speak, because important people believed that the dominant side had superior political resources, such as group cohesion, their advantage in electoral mobilization, and the ability to affect the economy.¹⁰ While the determination of the balance of support and opposition is somewhat imprecise, the fact that decision makers do arrive at an assessment of the balance is not. In most cases, respondents can be quite specific about who is on which side and which side has a greater strength, however they define that strength.

Much of the time, a balance of organized forces mitigates against any change at all. Important interests with the requisite resources are often able to block not only passage of proposals inimical to their preferences but even serious consideration. Advocates of such proposals, looking over the terrain they would have to traverse and the land mines strewn in their path, sometimes decide not to raise an issue at all rather than see their energy and their capital squandered on a losing cause. The costs to their resources and their reputations would be too great.¹¹ They seem to go through a calculation of intensities with regard to agenda setting similar to those made by legislators as they decide how to vote on the floor.¹² If there is intense opposition to a proposal, an advocate will often back off just like a politician facing intense opposition to a contemplated vote. As a respondent laid out one reason for failing to push a particular initiative, "If too many people get angry, it's not worth it."

⁹For an argument for the importance of intensity in a democratic system, even a majority rule system, see Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), Chapter 4. For an application, see Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, op. cit., Chapter 2.

¹⁰For a fuller treatment of resources important to agenda-setting processes, see Chapter 3 of this book.

¹¹See Light's discussion of how the agenda is structured by benefits and the alternatives by costs. Paul C. Light, *The President's Agenda* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 11.

¹²Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, op. cit., Chapter 2.

One major reason for governmental inertia is the nearly inevitable building of a clientele in favor of an existing program. Once a government program is established, the clientele it benefits organizes into an impressive collection of interest groups whose major purpose is to protect the program from which they draw their sustenance. Not only does this clientele fend off attacks on the program, but it also makes consideration of proposals that might change the program difficult. The highway trust fund, originally established to build the interstate highway system, is an interesting case in point. The expenditures flowing out of that program benefit quite a formidable array of groups, including state highway departments, contractors, construction and maintenance people, truckers, and shippers. This so-called "highway lobby" supports the continuation of the trust fund, opposes proposals to change the fund, and supports a redefinition of the fund's purpose to keep the flow of benefits coming should the original definition prove to be inadequate to that purpose. Thus, as new interstate highway construction has gradually come to an end, more and more attention has turned to the use of federal monies to rebuild and maintain existing highways. This shift in focus is partially rooted in the need for maintenance, but the shift also serves to keep the federal dollars flowing to the program's clients. As one respondent said of the impending end of new construction, "They have to figure out some other way to keep pouring concrete."

To counter this strong inertia, it is common for knowledgeable informants to cite the need for a constituency favoring change, and to prove their point by citing examples in which ideas failed to get serious consideration for lack of such a constituency. As one of them put it to me, "There are a lot of causes in this town, but they don't have the necessary muscle." Many respondents used the Carter administration's hospital cost containment proposal as their leading example of a cause with no supporters. As one said, "Clearly industry is hostile, the doctors are hostile, the hospitals are hostile, and even the labor unions aren't very happy about it. This is a measure that has no natural constituency." Subjects having to do with buses received only fleeting mentions in my interviews for lack of a well-placed, vocal, middle- to upper-class constituency that rides buses, as we pointed out in Chapter 3. There is a complex set of reasons for the low agenda prominence of such items, but one of the major reasons is this deficiency in articulate beneficiaries and supporters.

Yet opposition to change is sometimes overcome. A version of trucking deregulation did finally rise to prominence on the governmental agenda and did pass, despite the formidable opposition of the regulated truckers and Teamsters. As we noticed in Chapter 3, the application of the resources of major interest groups against a proposal does not necessarily carry the day. Swings of national mood and the shifts of administration and of seats in Congress brought about by election results can be sufficient to overcome organized opposition, and to define the political stream as leaning toward change. On other occasions, the collection of organized interests itself changes. The highway lobby, for example, has sometimes been thwarted by the organization of such counter groups as neighborhood freeway opponents and environmentalists. On still other occasions, politicians take on organized opponents in the

hope of stimulating support for their positions. So this balance of organized forces, far from constituting a comprehensive explanation for public policy outcomes, is but one element—albeit an important one—in a more complete understanding. Decision makers do take soundings in the sea of organized interests, and they do anticipate the cost they would pay if they were to take on well-organized, vocal opposition.

GOVERNMENT IN THE POLITICAL STREAM

The third major component of the political stream—in addition to swings of national mood and the balance of organized political forces—is composed of events within government itself. Administrations change, bringing with them marked changes in policy agendas. Seats change hands in Congress, creating opportunities to push some proposals and to bury others. Bureaucratic agencies and congressional committees battle for their share of the policy turf, affecting agendas in the process. We examined the importance of each of the governmental actors separately in Chapter 2. It is now time to introduce them into the political stream. Instead of concentrating on each actor individually, as we did earlier, we will now examine two major processes by which these actors affect policy agendas, turnover, and jurisdiction. Agendas are changed because some of the major participants change, and agendas are markedly affected by the drawing of jurisdictional boundaries and by battles over turf.

Turnover of Key Personnel

When it involves governmental actors, agenda change occurs in one of two ways. Either incumbents in positions of authority change their priorities and push new agenda items; or the personnel in those positions changes, bringing new priorities onto the agenda by virtue of the turnover. In Chapter 2, we considered the first of these at some length. We discussed the importance of the president's or a committee chair's priorities, for instance, and noticed that hospital cost containment was high on the health agenda largely because the Carter administration insisted that it stay there. We also noticed that catastrophic health insurance rose abruptly on the health agenda between 1978 and 1979 because of Senator Long's decision to take his Senate Finance Committee into markup sessions. Let us concentrate here, then, on turnover.

The interviews and case studies are filled with examples of the dramatic impact of turnover on policy agendas. The election of 1964, for example, produced a turnover of congressional seats that enabled the Johnson administration to push for and enact a sweeping series of domestic initiatives, including Medicare, Medicaid, aid to education, the poverty program, civil rights bills, and a host of others. The election of 1980, to take another example, which produced the Reagan administration and a Republican Senate, yielded a substantial change in direction, certainly in terms of the items on the governmental agenda and even in terms of the budgetary initiatives and other programs enacted. As

one House committee staffer said, "New faces mean that new issues will be raised."

Not only does turnover produce new agenda items, but it also makes it impossible to consider other items that might be thought deserving at another time. The new Reagan administration, for instance, structured the governmental policy agenda to include items on which it placed a high priority, but in the process made it virtually impossible to get other potential initiatives seriously considered. Thus people in and around government worked on such subjects as cuts in domestic spending and school prayer, but did not devote serious attention to such subjects as comprehensive national health insurance. Among the easily recognizable products of a new administration or a shift in ideological or partisan balance in Congress is the rise to agenda prominence of some agenda items. Less recognizable but fully as important is the fact that other items do not rise, as a new administration makes their consideration impossible.

As intimated above, one of the most powerful turnover effects is a change of administration. As we noted in Chapter 2, the administration is at the very top of the list of actors in the policy-making arena. The first year of a new administration is clearly the prime time for preoccupation with the subject of change. Fully 83 percent of my health interviews and 81 percent of my transportation interviews in 1977 contained prominent discussion of administration change. At the time of a change of administration, people all over town hold their breath in anticipation, waiting to see what the new administration's priorities will be, what its policy agendas will look like.

We have been speaking primarily of turnover in Congress and change of administrations. The same point applies in other locations. In such regulatory agencies as the Civil Aeronautics Board and the Interstate Commerce Commission, for instance, many observers pointed to the importance of turnover. The CAB pushed along aviation deregulation proposals, for instance, partly because of the appearance of a more receptive chairman during the Ford administration (John Robson), partly because of the vigorous advocacy of Carter's appointee to the same post (Alfred Kahn), and partly because of the turnover of board members. The ICC also moved in the direction of deregulation, albeit more slowly, due in large part to the resignation or retirement of some commission members who had been staunch supporters of government regulation, and then the addition of new, more proderegulation members during the Carter administration. Such events make it tempting to attribute policy change to the actions of certain prominent individuals, thereby adopting a kind of personality model of agenda change. Alfred Kahn, for instance, a very dynamic and personable advocate of deregulation, might be cited as "the" reason for the CAB's change. The driving forces, however, are more structural than that. They involve a more general change in mood toward regulation, and the nomination process that would lead a president to propose and the Senate to confirm someone like Kahn to head an agency like the CAB.

Questions of Jurisdiction

In addition to turnover, the second central governmental process involves jurisdiction. In general, a major impact of constitutions, charters, statutes, and regulations is to establish jurisdictions. In the case of the federal government, administrative agencies and congressional committees have their claims to turf. Their positions are affected by their jurisdiction, agenda setting is affected by battles over turf, and some items are ignored because they are "defined away" by the drawing of jurisdictional boundaries.

There is ample evidence in this study for the maxim, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit."¹³ Positions taken in battles over policy directions quite commonly reflect the jurisdictions and interests of the agencies involved. The Office of Management and Budget, for instance, has some enduring orientations that persist, regardless of the turnover of personnel within OMB or the comings and goings of administrations. Because a budget manager is interested in controlling as much of the budget as possible, transportation people can always count on OMB to oppose trust fund arrangements and to attempt to erode existing trust funds. Everybody in government, furthermore, can count on OMB to be interested in cutting budgets, and, in the case of new initiatives, opting for the least expensive program possible. In the battles over many features of the national health insurance proposals during the Carter administration, for example, one knowledgeable respondent explained, "HEW would take the liberal side and OMB would take the conservative side. They were expected to by the people in those organizations."

There are similar battles for turf within executive branch departments. Many respondents within the health area, for instance, attested to a deep and abiding difference in orientation between the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Public Health Service (PHS). SSA, with jurisdiction over Medicare and hence over the largest pot of money in health, seemed primarily interested in social insurance questions: paying the bills, financing the system, and expanding the benefits. PHS, by contrast, seemed more interested in the structure of the medical care delivery system, reforming that system, and avoiding the incentives for higher-cost care produced by third-party payment arrangements such as Medicare. These differences in orientation sometimes boiled up to the level of the HEW secretary. In the battle over the regulations concerning the renal dialysis program, for instance, PHS pushed for and eventually won a substantial system of networks, regulations, and negotiated fees that SSA opposed. Indeed, such squabbles provided one major impetus for the establishment of the Health Care Financing Administration, which was supposed to collect the various health financing activities—Medicare, Medicaid, and peer review—into one agency.

Similar disputes abound within the Department of Transportation. The various modes—highways, rail, aviation, urban transit—each have their own administrations and hence their own advocates within the Department. Some of

¹³See Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. 176.

the battles between the highway and the urban transit people, for instance, have become fairly legendary. As one informant described the meetings between the two over a limited transfer of highway monies to mass transit:

You had to sit down people from the highway administration and the Urban Mass Transit Administration to negotiate the regs. They wouldn't talk to each other for two months. They'd get into meetings and they'd sit across the table from each other and scream at each other. The highway people didn't care one iota about UMTA's problems, and the UMTA people didn't care one iota about the highway people's problems. It took eight months before they got out the regs.

Generally, we expect bureaucrats to defend their turf. When they do not, the event is certainly noticed, and can become very significant. In airline deregulation, for instance, the testimony of the CAB in favor of less regulation was a very important event, as one Hill staffer said:

The committee held three weeks of hearings, the most boring hearings you can imagine. There was airline president after airline president giving all these horror stories and saying that the planes were going to fall from the sky. It was a waste of time. Then the head of the CAB, Robson, came in. He testified that his own agency should have less power than it has now. Wow! An agency administrator himself saying that his own agency ought to be put out of business. It just sent shock waves through the whole system. Shock waves in the industry, shock waves on the Hill.

Under the subsequent chairmanship of Alfred Kahn, buttressed by new members appointed by the Carter administration, the CAB actually implemented a substantial measure of deregulation on its own, without benefit of statutory change. Some of the legislation that was subsequently passed ratified what the CAB had already put into practice. Even the Interstate Commerce Commission opted for some deregulation measures in early 1979—deregulating the movement of fresh fruits and vegetables by rail, deregulating intercity bus transportation for the summer of 1979, giving railroads limited contract authority, and easing entry requirements for trucking. These moves also “sent shock waves” through the system, if my interviews are any indication. The possibility that the ICC might adopt some regulatory reform on its own, without new legislation, was mentioned by only 19 percent of my 1978 transportation respondents as a prominent possibility. That figure had shot up to 74 percent in 1979.

We usually see turf disputes as retarding the possibilities for governmental action. For example, many health respondents believed that the jurisdictional disputes among the congressional health committees and subcommittees often diminished the chances for enactment of important initiatives, and even diminished the chances of a serious hearing of these proposals. Health was divided between the Finance and the Human Resources committees in the Senate, and between Ways and Means and the health subcommittee of Interstate Commerce in the House. Some observers argued that national health insurance proposals

developed during the 1970s were hampered by fights between the principals. As one congressional staffer observed:

First, it's bad enough to have to deal with two committees of Congress. If you think that's bad, dealing with four committees creates real problems. And then the cast of characters involved is even harder to deal with. You have Long, Talmadge, Kennedy, Paul Rogers, Tim Lee Carter, Barber Conable. The egos involved there and the jurisdictional strife are enough to keep the republic busy for 150 years.

Similar comments in the transportation interviews revolved around proposals to develop some sort of integrated trust fund that would combine various modes. Such proposals have run afoul of many things, but prominent among them is the fact that each mode deals with its own congressional committee and its own administrative agency. All of the participants have a stake in preserving current sources of funding and current jurisdictions, which makes the chances of enacting a more integrated approach quite remote.¹⁴

In addition to jurisdictional disputes leading to stalemate, however, there is another impact, both more subtle and probably at least as frequent. Battles over turf, far from leading to stalemate, often actually promote the rise of an item on the governmental agenda. Congressional committee chairs, for instance, compete with one another to claim credit for some initiative that they sense will be popular.¹⁵ In the rush to beat each other to the punch, a subject may become prominent much more quickly than it would in the absence of this competition.

My interviews included many examples of this positive, rather than inhibiting, impact of jurisdictional fragmentation and competition. In the case of airline deregulation, for instance, Senator Edward Kennedy held hearings in his antitrust subcommittee of Judiciary. His claim to jurisdiction was actually a bit shaky, the primary jurisdiction being with Senator Howard Cannon's subcommittee on aviation. Cannon was “absolutely furious,” according to one well-informed observer, and in order to head off Kennedy and protect his own claim to jurisdiction, he held hearings himself. Thus jurisdictional overlap and competition actually promoted, rather than retarded, governmental movement on the issue. Similar events occurred in 1979 on national health insurance. There had been a long-standing rivalry over jurisdiction in health between Kennedy and Senator Russell Long, the chairman of the Finance Committee. Long had some incentive to head off Kennedy and take credit for the movement himself. Once Long scheduled markup sessions, the Carter administration moved its plan

¹⁴Problems involving fragmented committee jurisdictions and bureaucratic infighting are discussed quite frequently in the interviews, but not so frequently as to indicate that they form a major preoccupation of people close to policy making. There are several variables in the code that are relevant to these subjects. The proportion of respondents discussing jurisdictional strife ranges from about a fifth to about a third, a respectable but not strikingly frequent showing. Such problems are coded as somewhat important in 4 of the 23 case studies, not very frequently.

¹⁵On the concept of credit claiming, see David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 52–61.

along more quickly as well. Thus overlapping jurisdictions actually enhanced the chances for serious consideration, as the various players vied with one another for the credit and for the claim to jurisdiction.

This promoting aspect of competition cuts across the legislative and executive branches as well. As bureaucrats see an issue moving on the Hill, for instance, they will often take action first, in order to have some control over the events, rather than simply responding to and implementing legislation that is not of their own making. The threat of legislation to regulate clinical laboratories, for instance, prompted HEW to stiffen their own regulation, which in turn took some of the steam out of the movement for new legislation. One respondent said, "A natural bureaucratic reaction is self-preservation, and one way to do that is to bend with the wind."

So sometimes jurisdictional competition results in stalemate, while at other times it results in greater movement. Under what conditions does each result obtain? The key difference seems to be the perceived or potential popularity of the issue. If the various participants see a current or potential constituency for action out there, or if they see some electoral or publicity mileage in it, competition will enhance the chances of the issue rising on the agenda. If the issue has no such constituency or some opposition, or if it is unpopular, then competition contributes to its downfall. Put another way, competition for jurisdiction simply reinforces the other forces that are already at work. If the complex of political and policy forces are already balanced against an issue, competition for turf will drive the last nail into the coffin. But if that same balance tilts toward the issue, competition will contribute its share to moving the issue along.¹⁶

Finally, many potential agenda items never are the subject of a given policy maker's attention, largely because they fall into someone else's jurisdiction. They may be agenda items somewhere in government, but not where a given official is located. So an item may be ignored with the rationale that it is being taken care of somewhere else. As Tom Lehrer would say, "That's not my department."¹⁷

There are specialized agendas within such larger policy domains as health and transportation. Within health, for instance, there are specialists in direct delivery of medical services, food and drug regulation, and biomedical research. These subjects were never high on the general health policy agenda during the years of my study. Despite the tremendous clamor over recombinant DNA research in the biomedical research community, for instance, the subject was never prominent in more than 8 percent of my health interviews. Similarly, the highest-rated variable in the food and drug area was 9 percent, and no direct

¹⁶Incidentally, competition as an inhibitor and competition as a promoter are mentioned with about equal frequency in the interviews, and coded as important with about equal frequency in the case studies, although the promoter frequency is slightly greater than that for inhibition.

¹⁷This phrase comes from Tom Lehrer's song in which he "quotes" a rocket scientist as saying, "Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down—that's not my department."

delivery item ever rose above 11 percent. These items are on a government agenda in some sense, but the set of people occupied with them is confined to one particular location in the panoply of jurisdictions within larger policy domains, and these subjects do not diffuse very widely into the domains' larger communities.

In addition to the importance of specialized agendas within policy domains, some items are not high on the agendas of health or transportation specialists, even though they could easily be in some conceptual sense, because they have their primary location elsewhere in the executive branch or congressional committee structure. Transportation respondents could have talked about energy, for instance, long before the crisis brought about by the 1979 gas lines, but they did not. When asked why not, they often responded by saying that energy was the province of the Department of Energy or of other committees of the Congress than their own. One high-level Department of Transportation bureaucrat told me, when asked in 1978 why energy was not high on a transportation agenda, "I don't know the answer to that. I've been wondering about it myself. There was quite a bit of concentration on it in the Department of Transportation before the Energy Department was created. Now there's some inclination to think that this other operation is supposed to be worrying about that, so we don't have to do as much with it." Similarly, protecting the environment is more the province of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) than of the health bureaucracy, despite the clear impact of pollution on health. Indeed, only 4 percent of my health interviews included prominent discussion of pollution that was not prompted by my questions. The tremendous government involvement in health in the form of the veterans' health system also was mentioned very little. As one respondent said, "It's an entirely different universe."

CONSENSUS BUILDING IN THE POLITICAL STREAM

In the policy stream, we discovered in Chapter 6, consensus is built largely through the processes of persuasion and diffusion. If an idea survives scrutiny according to a set of criteria for survival, it diffuses within the policy community.

There is also consensus building in the political stream. However, the processes which set bandwagons in motion are radically different in the two streams. In contrast to the policy stream's emphasis on persuasion, the political stream's consensus building is governed by bargaining.¹⁸ Here, coalitions are being built through the granting of concessions in return for support of the coalition, or as actual or potential coalition members make bargains. Joining the coalition occurs not because one has simply been persuaded of the virtue of that course of action, but because one fears that failure to join would result in

¹⁸For a thorough discussion of bargaining, see Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), Chapters 12 and 13.

exclusion from the benefits of participation. The proposals have already been discussed and honed in the political stream. The actors are now trying to reach toward a winning coalition. Thus the discussion is more likely to be, "You give me my provision, and I'll give you yours," rather than, "Let me convince you of the virtue of my provision."

Let us be clear once again that the processes are different from the participants, and that we are discussing processes here. In fact, policy specialists do not have a monopoly on persuasion; nor do politicians have a monopoly on bargaining. One often observes politicians persuading and specialists bargaining. We are making this distinction between the two different types of coalition building to draw attention to the differences between the processes in the political and policy streams, not to argue that one process is the exclusive preserve of one type of actor.

Illustrations of these bargaining processes, and their contrast to persuasion processes, abound in the interviews and case studies. In the transportation field, for example, a bargain developed between highway and mass transit advocates that resulted in benefits to both. As interstate highways were being built, urban legislators became increasingly unhappy, both because freeways were distorting land use in the urban areas and because a substantial program was underway which benefited small town and rural areas and not cities. They first pressed for raiding the highway trust fund for mass transit, and found considerable resistance—to say the least—to that idea. The controversy over that tack receded, however, because of a not-so-tacit understanding that the highway advocates would support mass transit appropriations from general funds if mass transit advocates would leave the highway trust fund alone. Each had its funds, and while there were still disagreements around the edges, a powerful coalition was built to their mutual benefit. They had not persuaded one another so much as they had generated a logrolling exchange.

Attempts to build support for national health insurance during the Carter administration provide another illustration of such coalition-building processes through bargaining. The arguments, facts, and proposals had really been aired for many years. Building the administration's proposal thus involved not only persuasion, but assiduous attention to giving people their pet provisions in return for support. One source close to administration thinking said that by inserting maternal and child health benefits and more low-income aid into their proposal, they could attract some liberal support, which would be convenient in terms of denying Senator Kennedy his undisputed claim to liberal adherents. Of course, this strategic consideration was not the only reason for including these provisions. The administration had always made clear their interest in a package of benefits broader than simple catastrophic insurance. Nor did their strategy succeed in the end. But the case does illustrate the bargaining process well.

In the political stream, if one does not pay sufficient attention to coalition building through bargaining, one pays a major price, as the Carter administration discovered. Many health respondents who were well-acquainted with both the issues and the political realities roundly criticized the administration's handling of hospital cost containment. Administration officials told me that they

had consulted with important people on the Hill and elsewhere prior to sending up the proposal. But the recipients of the consultation drew a distinction between being told of administration plans or floating proposals, on the one hand, and genuine consultation on the other. As one congressional committee staffer portrayed the difference between hospital cost containment and food and drug reform:

On the cost containment thing, what the administration meant by consultation was briefing us on what they wanted to do. So our attitude was, "Okay, if that's the way you want to do it, screw you. Go away and write your own bill, and then we'll do with it what we want to do." And we won. On the drug bill, they agreed to let us put it together on the Hill, and we wouldn't go with a bill unless we were satisfied with it, in the sense that we liked the bill in substance and thought it would pass. Because of the way we went through it, everybody's name is on the bill, and we have a real chance of passing it.

Of Bandwagons and Tipping, Again

We talked in Chapter 6 of the explosive diffusion of ideas within policy communities. A good idea catches on, snowballing as it picks up adherents. Sometimes a bad idea does the same. We can also observe explosive growth in coalitions in the political stream, but driven by very different dynamics. Here, a bargaining process is at work; potential coalition supporters are enticed into support by promises of some benefit, and others climb aboard the bandwagon out of fear that they will be left without their share of the benefits, in the event that something should pass.

Initially, participants stake out their positions somewhat rigidly, refusing to compromise on their principles. On national health insurance, for instance, Senator Kennedy and his organized labor compatriots steadfastly held out for a plan of comprehensive insurance, with a rich package of benefits, full coverage of the population, and no deductibles. Years after it was apparent that such an approach would not be viable, they held to it. As one congressional staffer close to the action told me, "You stake out a position, because if you don't, you won't have anything to compromise with." Kennedy tried in 1973-74 with Wilbur Mills to pass a more modest program, but labor insistence on the whole comprehensive proposal derailed the attempt. As one observer said, "You need something to the left of center sometimes, to get people to move over."

The time comes when rigid adherence to one's original position would cost one dearly. These times are the real opportunities for passage, the policy windows that we will discuss in the next chapter, when compromise is in the air. At these times, participants of all types conclude that the bandwagon is rolling, and that they should be active in shaping the outcome. Advocates of change push hard for their proposals. Even enemies of change introduce their own proposals in an attempt to bend the outcomes as much as they can to their own purposes. Informed observers describe such events with phrases like "wanting to be in the game," "trying to be dealt in," and "jumping on before it's too late." Consensus is built, sometimes very rapidly, by cutting in many and diverse interests.

The progress of national health insurance during the 1970s provides a convincing illustration. Up until the first years of the Carter administration, Kennedy and labor had indeed held fast to their comprehensive proposal. At that point, seeing the new administration and a Democratic Congress as their opportunity, they made what many respondents called a dramatic move. As one of them told me, "We decided not to posture any longer" with the comprehensive proposal. They decided instead to back a less ambitious plan that would provide a place for private insurance companies and keep large portions of the cost off the federal budget. As one savvy observer described the change, "Kennedy wants to be in the ball game. If there's going to be a table with people sitting around it and everyone dealing out the goodies, Kennedy wants to be sitting at that table."

Once an issue seems to be moving, everybody with an interest in the subject leaps in, out of fear that they will be left out. In the national health insurance case, Senator Russell Long, chairman of the Finance Committee, introduced several of his own proposals, including one that would provide for catastrophic insurance only, and even held markup sessions on the subject. Many reasons for his action were advanced by knowledgeable informants, but among them was his desire to play a part in the outcome, in the event that the steamroller was moving. As one put it, "He wanted to introduce this as a way to trot it out in case there was any bigger threat that was coming along. This is his way to take the steam out of a comprehensive plan whenever it looked like it might get serious." Even the American Medical Association weighed in with their own proposal. At the time of Kennedy-Mills in the early 1970s, the AMA threw something together in such a big hurry that one source close to the AMA told me, "Our original bill was a laugh—I'll freely admit it." But as another informant put it, "They have to put these bills up just to be able to be in the game in case something is going to happen." So we might distinguish between genuine advocates and pseudoadvocates. The pseudoadvocates, such as the AMA in the case of national health insurance, are not genuinely interested in pushing the cause. They advocate their own plans in the event, likely or unlikely, that an issue of concern to them becomes a serious threat to their interests.

CONCLUSION

Independently of the problems and policy streams, the political stream flows along according to its own dynamics and its own rules. It is composed of such factors as swings of national mood, election results, changes of administration, changes of ideological or partisan distributions in Congress, and interest group pressure campaigns.

Politicians and other participants believe they can sense both a national mood and changes in that mood. The national mood does not necessarily reside in the mass public, but instead is perceived in the attitudes of various more active sectors of the public. Politicians sense the mood from various communications that come to them, including mail, visits, trips home, newspaper cover-

age, and conversation with constituents. Nonelected officials take their reading of the national mood from politicians. Perceptions of the national mood affect governmental agendas, both by promoting items that fit with that mood and by inhibiting attention to items that do not.

Governmental officials judge the degree of consensus among organized political forces. If there is widespread agreement among those forces, officials either try to go along with them, or at least know what they are up against. If there is conflict among those forces, officials judge the balance of the strengths among them. Strength is perceived partly in terms of frequency or intensity of communications, and partly in terms of the various groups' resources. Often the balance of organized forces mitigates against change, as beneficiaries of current programs attempt to protect their current interests. Change is aided by a constituency in favor of it, and hampered by the absence of such a constituency or by the active opposition of organized interests. However, the balance of organized forces does not always determine outcomes. Indeed, powerful interests are sometimes overcome, and change occurs despite their opposition.

In government, turnover has powerful effects on agendas. A change of administration, a substantial turnover of congressional seats, or a change of top personnel in an administrative agency all change agendas substantially. Agendas are also affected by jurisdictional boundaries. Competition for turf does not necessarily produce stalemate. Indeed, if a popular issue is involved, competition promotes rather than retards action. Another jurisdictional effect is the neglect of some potential agenda items because they are supposedly being handled elsewhere in government. Some subjects are very prominent on specialized agendas without being prominent on more general agendas.

Consensus building in the political arena, in contrast to consensus building among policy specialists, takes place through a bargaining process rather than by persuasion. Once participants sense that there is some movement, they leap in to protect their interests. This entry into the game, sometimes sudden entry, contributes to sharp agenda change, both because various interests receive some benefit from their participation, and because a generalized image of movement is created.

The Political Stream in the Larger Scheme of Things

The political stream is an important promoter or inhibitor of high agenda status. All of the important actors in the system, not just the politicians, judge whether the balance of forces in the political stream favors action. They also judge whether the general public would at least tolerate the directions pursued at the elite level. Without that tolerance, the potential for retribution at the polls is likely to torpedo the idea in Congress.

We have been equating the various political forces—national mood, organized interests, election repercussions, the orientations of elected officials—with each other, and arguing that participants somehow total them up and arrive at a balance, or a notion of the preponderance of pressure in the political

stream. But as we have seen repeatedly, the forces are not equal in practice. In particular, the complex of national mood and elections seems to create extremely powerful impacts on policy agendas, impacts capable of overwhelming the balance of organized forces. They bowled over the regulated transportation industries in the case of deregulation, for instance, and the taxpayers' "smaller government" mood similarly resulted in President Reagan's early budget victories over the organized interests that benefit from federal programs.

Once again, however, our distinction between the agenda and the alternatives is useful. This mood-elections combination has particularly powerful impacts on the agenda. It can force some subjects high on the agenda, and can also make it virtually impossible for government to pay serious attention to others. But once the item is on the agenda, the organized forces enter the picture, trying as best they can to bend the outcomes to their advantage, either by affecting the final compromises over the alternatives to be considered or, in some cases, by defeating proposals altogether. Impact on the agenda, again, is different from control over the alternatives or over the outcomes.

CHAPTER 8

The Policy Window, and Joining the Streams

When you lobby for something, what you have to do is put together your coalition, you have to gear up, you have to get your political forces in line, and then you sit there and wait for the fortuitous event. For example, people who were trying to do something about regulation of railroads tried to ride the environment for a while, but that wave didn't wash them in to shore. So they grabbed their surfboards and they tried to ride something else, but that didn't do the job. The Penn Central collapse was the big wave that brought them in. As I see it, people who are trying to advocate change are like surfers waiting for the big wave. You get out there, you have to be ready to go, you have to be ready to paddle. If you're not ready to paddle when the big wave comes along, you're not going to ride it in.

—An analyst for an interest group

The policy window is an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems. Indeed, as the quotation above illustrates, advocates lie in wait in and around government with their solutions at hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the political stream they can use to their advantage. Sometimes, the window opens quite predictably. The scheduled renewal of a program, for instance, creates an opportunity for many participants to push their pet project or concern. At other times, it happens quite unpredictably. Policy entrepreneurs must be prepared, their pet proposal at the ready, their special problem well-documented, lest the opportunity pass them by.

We have just finished a series of chapters that considered separately the various streams flowing through the system. The separate streams come together at critical times. A problem is recognized, a solution is developed and available in the policy community, a political change makes it the right time for policy change, and potential constraints are not severe. This chapter deals with the processes by which the separate streams are joined. We begin by discussing what policy windows are and why they open, and then proceed to describe the coupling of the streams that takes place. Policy entrepreneurs play a major part