

Early one year, the state of Idaho announced it would build a new women's prison. The State Board of Corrections then announced that it would receive bids from Idaho communities. In Chapter 1, we discussed the fact that in the face of value conflict, government "authoritatively allocates values"—in other words, government decides who gets the goods. To some individuals, a prison may not seem like something a community would want. But to communities reeling from a nearly decade-long recession that had plagued many communities throughout Idaho, a prison is a source of stable (recession-proof) jobs. A new prison pumps additional money into a community's economy through construction and maintenance and the buying of supplies, as well as by providing jobs.

The city of Pocatello, Bannock County, had been hit extremely hard by the state's economic downturn. Pocatello had lost hundreds of railroad jobs due to deregulation; a major regional trucking firm relocated to Salt Lake City, Utah; a major mining equipment corporation left town after the downturn in the mining industry; and deregulation also led to the loss of major airline service. The retail sector was hit hard, and major grocery chains and department stores closed shop and left town. Pocatello's population dropped from 46,000 to 40,000 in less than a decade. The locals repeated the not-very-funny joke told in other such distressed communities: "Will the last person leaving Pocatello please turn out the lights?" It was eagerly decided to put in a bid for the prison.

The principles of pluralism and the very political nature of policy formation, discussed earlier in the text, are clearly illustrated in this tale. Pro-development interest groups in Pocatello (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce, the Real Estate Association, the Banker's Association) all strongly supported the city's bid for the prison. These groups all publicly announced their support and worked behind the scenes by writing letters of support to the State Board of Corrections and using political means to gain the support of Bannock County's state elected officials and of the governor of Idaho.

Early in the process, interest group support was strong because the prison offered concentrated benefits (to the community's financial, construction, and real estate sectors) and diffused costs. The interest groups wove stories that portrayed the benefits as diffused through a multiplier/tripple effect in the economy that would benefit the community's economy as a whole. In light of this persuasion, along with clear benefits and vague costs, and given the past economic downturn in Pocatello, citizen opposition to the project was virtually nonexistent. The pro-prison interest group support was highly visible, advancing its position, calling radio talk shows, and writing letters to the newspaper. The group gained strong support, indeed sponsorship, from the city's elected officials. It developed a specific plan to bring the prison to Pocatello. The issue quickly found status on the policy agenda of the Pocatello City Council. They quickly searched for available sites for the proposed prison. With strong interest group support and little, if any, opposition, the city announced that the proposed site for the new prison would be in north Pocatello/Chubbuck. (Chubbuck is a small bedroom community adjacent to Pocatello.) Called the Philbin Road site, this area was, at the time, largely agricultural, and there was plenty of room to build a new correctional facility.

The Philbin Road site had one significant flaw, however. The site, located in the north Pocatello valley, was in a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) "nonattainment" zone. The EPA designates air quality as either meeting minimum air quality standards (an attainment zone) or as not meeting these standards. Opposition arose quickly from outside the community as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) immediately threatened a lawsuit against Idaho if the Philbin Road site was selected. The threatened lawsuit's basis was an assertion that forcing prisoners to live in an area with significant amounts of air pollution would violate the prisoner's rights to a healthy quality of life.

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