

Political scientist James Button of the University of Florida agreed with Walker that political science has lagged behind sociology with regard to developing theoretical frameworks that can be used for analyzing the development of protest movements and especially for studying the impact and outcomes of such movements. Button's research on community-level changes in small Southern towns has contrasted the effects of traditional and nontraditional strategies of political participation, and he indicated he had found better theoretical insights in recent social movements studies by sociologists than in the existing political science literature.

Audience members suggested that political science's best recent work on protest had taken place in the comparative field rather than in the American politics literature, but both Button and Walker responded that even in that broader context, political science had concentrated its energy too narrowly on studying traditional but not less traditional political action, and had focused too exclusively on studying some forms of participation—e.g., voting—while neglecting the study of nonparticipation, even non-voting. Panel members noted that the Schattschneider tradition, like much sociological literature but unlike much political science, focused more on conflict than on consensus, and sociologist Jenkins pointed out that many scholars of social movements in his discipline do not accept the liberal democratic ideal that many see as a pervasive presence in much political science scholarship. Paul Burstein noted that sociologists generally disdain the study of political institutions, such as Congress, and Jenkins agreed, noting the widespread lack of interest in that discipline with the role of political parties. Roundtable participants all agreed that while sociology has displayed far too little interest in the social roles of traditional political institutions, political science has been equally remiss in failing to devote sufficient attention to grass-roots political activism and nontraditional forms of participation and mobilization.

Both audience members and the roundtable participants agreed that the session, which easily and productively could

have gone on for another hour or more, represented a valuable opportunity for just the sort of cross-disciplinary exchange of views that all would like to increase. Several participants expressed particular hope that further similar sessions could be arranged in the future, and interest was expressed in seeking the funds and institutional support necessary for convening a special multi-disciplinary conference on social protest movements at which several dozen or so scholars would be able to expand upon the dialogue that was begun in New Orleans. □

The Future of the Congressional Budget Process

James A. Thurber
American University

Are we better off today than we were before passage of the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974? How do we judge success and failure of the budget process? What can ten years of budgeting under the act tell us about the future of the congressional budget process? Each of the roundtable participants on "The Future of the Congressional Budget Process," John Ellwood of Dartmouth College, Louis Fisher of the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, Allen Schick of the American Enterprise Institute and the University of Maryland, College Park, and Aaron Wildavsky of the University of California at Berkeley offered varying perspectives on these questions.

Ten years after the Budget Act's implementation, few of its original objectives have been met. Budget and appropriations deadlines have been missed. Continuing resolutions and supplemental appropriations are commonplace. There is little control over budget deficits with the country facing a \$200 billion federal deficit and pushing a \$2 trillion debt limit in the next fiscal year. Spending has risen to an all-time high percentage of the Gross National Product. There is more "backdoor" spending (spending that skirts the Appropriations committees)

today than a decade ago. The budget process seems to be too complex and to dominate the congressional calendar to the detriment of authorizations and oversight. In ten years of implementation, no two years of the process created by the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 have been the same.

Taking all of this evidence into account, Louis Fisher argued that the Budget Act "has been an abject failure." John Ellwood, Allen Schick, and Aaron Wildavsky presented arguments to the contrary. Even given the record of missed deadlines, large deficits, backdoors, deadlock, continuing resolutions and so on, they asserted that the Budget Act has succeeded, although not as the authors of the Act had envisioned. A good budget process should allow Congress to control, manage, and plan public spending and taxation, should it want to do so, and according to Ellwood and Schick it has.

Fisher questioned the defenders of the Budget Act and argued to "let us avoid defending a statute without reference to its benefits and record of performance." Fisher asserted that it is not necessary, or possible, to place the whole blame on the Budget Act. Nor is it necessary to absolve the Budget Act of all responsibility. The Budget Act did make a difference. Initially it did speed up appropriations bills. Absolving the Budget Act leads to contradictory results, according to Fisher. Some try to have it both ways: arguing (1) that the Budget Act is not responsible for the deficits, late appropriations, and other problems because those consequences flow from forces outside the Budget Act, and (2) do not repeal or change the Budget Act because that will jeopardize the single best hope for budget control.

The authors and promoters of the Budget Act had a vast number of goals: to complete appropriations and budget decisions in a timely fashion, to control budget deficits, to limit the growth of federal spending, to improve the way priorities get set among different types of spending, to set congressional fiscal policy, to improve the information and knowledge for budget decisions, to establish a procedure to overcome presidential impoundments, and to compete

more effectively with the president and executive branch in the budget arena. It is hard to claim that the process has been a total success using these objectives as measures of success. However, Ellwood suggested that we judge success and failure of the act using three more realistic and neutral measures: (1) has it allowed or even helped the Congress work its will?; (2) does it provide public officials with enough information so that they know the probable consequences of their decisions?; and (3) does it provide citizens with enough information so that they can hold their representatives accountable should they choose to do so? Ellwood and Schick answered yes to all three questions.

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The provisions of the Budget Act have not prevented the Congress from working its will, although it has not always worked as originally designed. According to Ellwood, "the Act's 'elastic clause' has allowed the process to meet new situations and demands. Thus, when Congress sought to reduce domestic spending it became obvious that a mechanism for each chamber to gain control over committees with jurisdiction over entitlements, appropriated entitlements, and permanents would be required. The 'elastic clause' facilitated the shift of the reconciliation process from the second to the first resolution to take care of this problem."

All of the roundtable participants agreed that the Act provides good information. A major virtue of the Act was that it created the Congressional Budget Office, the Budget Committees, and procedures that provide decisionmakers with enough information so that they know the consequences of their actions. For example, the requirement that members vote on budget spending and revenue aggregates, five-year cost estimates and tax expenditures, and other multi-year projections all contribute to better knowl-

edge about the probable consequences of their decisions. The process also provides information for voters. "If voters have not reacted to this information by throwing the rascals out," according to Ellwood, "it could be because, while objecting to deficits in principal, they support existing and even increased funding levels on a program basis so long as their taxes do not have to be raised. Moreover they appear willing to live with \$200 billion deficits as long as they can not associate those deficits with a poor economic performance in the short run."

"I think the public wants results, not procedures and mechanisms that obscure accountability."

—Louis Fisher

Fisher addressed the question of the potential consequences of the failure to pass a budget resolution, "members fear that a failure to pass a budget resolution would be interpreted by the public as an abdication of congressional responsibility and control. I think this wildly overstates the public's knowledge of or interest in the passage of budget resolutions—and by that I mean the 'elite' public. I think the public wants results, not procedures and mechanisms that obscure accountability."

Schick argued that the Budget Act has responded remarkably to the major changes in the congressional environment since 1974. The Act has not been amended since 1974, but Schick asserted that in practice, "the Budget Act has been amended, reamended, and reamended in every year since 1975." He suggested that "a budget process is a way of organizing work. It does not lead to any particular decisions. When you have a summit conference with your spouse and you decide to have a budget process, you are simply establishing a way of running something called a household or establishing a relationship between the two of you. If you get divorced, the budget process will respond to that trauma in your household and the new relationship between the

two of you. That is all a budget process is." Schick declared that, "nothing has to stop, if the budget process stops. If a budget resolution is not enacted, Congress can still proceed forward with taxes, authorizations, and spending bills." Schick suggested that the budget process has been different each of its ten years of implementation because Congress has a self-correcting capacity. "Next year we will have a different version of the process and the year after another, and another after that. Self-correction means that we are not at the end of the line for the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act." He urged political scientists to study congressional self-correction in the budget process.

Have we learned something from the past ten years so that future years will be better? Fisher answered with a question, "How many years can we continue saying: Well, the results this year are not acceptable, but we'll tackle things in a big way next year. Next year never comes. By sustaining \$200 billion deficits in relatively good times, what will we do in an economic slowdown or downturn? Raise taxes? Cut social welfare programs? We are exhausting our options for countercyclical policy."

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The roundtable participants questioned the quick fixes to the budget process. Fisher argued that, "as we continue to play make-believe about the virtues of the Budget Act, it will be more and more tempting to adopt 'reforms' that I think most of us would regard as offering little relief: biennial budgeting, balanced-budget requirements, and the item veto." Wildavsky questioned the utility of the item veto, "in European social democracies the executive has much stronger weapons than the item veto. Today they spend more than we do. All the item veto will do is raise the size of

the logroll. If you have a spending president, he will use the item veto to increase spending. If you have a cutting president, Congress will simply increase the size of the roll to overcome the veto." Wildavsky supported balanced budget spending limits as a way to decrease the deficit and presented a defense of President Reagan's ability to bring about fundamental change in the budget.

"All the item veto will do is raise the size of the logroll." —Aaron Wildavsky

Fisher concluded that we cannot begin to discover a solution to the problems of the budget process until we admit it has failed. "While it does no good to say that the problem is the problem, admitting that the present solution is not a solution is a necessary first step in developing better controls," Fisher noted. Is it irresponsible to criticize the existing process without having an alternative in mind? Fisher suggested that, "we did not think that way in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The system existing at that time was considered fundamentally flawed and in need of change. We did not look for excuses, justifications, or rationalizations, which has been our habit in recent years."

The roundtable closed with a brief discussion about whether we are better off going back to the pre-1974 decentralized budgeting process. Most of the participants argued that we are better off with the Act. Wildavsky reminded the audience that "to agree on everything is going to cause delay, heartburn, hostility, anger, contempt and all the other things that are written about in today's papers about the budget process. My understanding is this: in the past quarter of a century and with increasing speed, we have witnessed the polarization of political elites in this country and to a lesser degree, a polarization of political attitudes in the country as a whole." This polarization causes disruption and delay in the budgetary process. The roundtable concluded with the fact that it is the fundamental change in Congress and in

American politics as a whole that is the major challenge to the future of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act, not flaws in the Act itself. □

R. Taylor Cole Honored on 80th Birthday

Colleagues and former students gathered at a dinner honoring R. Taylor Cole, President of the Association in 1959, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, on Friday evening during the annual meeting in New Orleans.

Allan Kornberg, chair of the political science department at Duke University, which sponsored the dinner, presided over the dinner ceremonies. Among those attending were Gabriel Almond (APSA President in 1966), Samuel Barnes, Lucian Pye, and Emmette S. Redford (APSA President in 1961).

Thomas E. Mann, Executive Director of APSA, read a resolution of recognition that was unanimously passed by the APSA Council:

Message to Professor R. Taylor Cole

Dear Taylor:

The officers and Council of the American Political Science Association send you our



R. Taylor Cole at the dinner in his honor at the annual meeting.