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Helen Ingram

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PATTERNS OF POLITICS IN WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

HELEN INGRAM*

While economists and engineers have fairly concrete and explicit criteria for judging water projects as economically justifiable and technically feasible, political scientists have yet to provide comparable insight into the process by which water development becomes politically viable. The basic intention here is to develop a model of the political rationality of water policy, a frame of reference quite different from economics or engineering. It entails looking at things in political terms, i.e., as the activist, seeking to influence public policy, must see them.

A political activist cannot simply make judgments, he must concern himself with constructing support for his decisions. He must take care of his ability to influence, and the consequences of actions and events upon his future ability to influence. He is a finely tuned instrument to measure political rationality, which is the process of balancing support generated for a proposal against opposition aroused by it.¹ For a political activist, a rational decision involves minimal expenditure of the resources he has to influence and maximum return of credit and obligations which strengthen his position in decisions to come.

The model in this paper represents the pattern of politics in water resource development, mapping the way in which water issues are perceived onto the risks and rewards confronted by activists in making decisions. It will link the kinds of activists who have a stake in water policy to the particular arena where political rationality, or the extent of support for a proposal, is tested. Policy making in our political system requires that proposals be consented to or legitimized through established procedures in institutions which have authority. The model will indicate the relationship among activists in the process of creating sufficient support to obtain consent. It will connect this support building relationship to the stakes of activists involved and the setting or political arena in which they operate.

*Staff Political Scientist, National Water Commission; member, University of New Mexico Advisory Council of the Natural Resources Journal; Former Professor of Political Science, University of New Mexico.

1. A. Wildavsky, *The Political Economy of Efficiency: Cost Benefit Analysis, Systems Analysis and Program Budgeting*, in *Political Science and Public Policy*, 78-83 (A. Ranney ed. 1968).

I THE ISSUE²

The point at which to start in tracing a particular pattern of policy making is with the nature of the issue at stake.³ Who stands to gain from the policy process, and who is likely to feel threatened, and how? These perceptions of benefits and costs are the basic forces from which the pattern of policy making emerges.

The key attribute of water as a political issue is its basis in the locality. Both the need for water development, and the possible benefit from water projects are perceived in local terms. This is partly a result of the nature of water resources. Water, like land, has a geographic location. Its supply and quality vary tremendously from place to place. Consequently, water problems are seen as local problems. Areas where water is in short supply have little in common with localities experiencing pollution. Even areas with common problems of scarcity seldom have shared interests. Localities in the same river basin or adjacent basins where diversion is possible fiercely compete for water supply and development funds.

The physical character of water projects contributes to notions of localized stakes. Water projects are geographically situated in a limited area, with few extending over more than a congressional district or at most a state. Whatever the benefit-cost ratio to the nation which an economist may establish for a project, the benefits are heaped upon the small portion of the nation where the project is located. The local economy gets the initial shot in the arm from construction activity. Other benefits including recreation, irrigation, flood control, and even power tend to be greatest in the immediate project area.

As an issue, water has a certain emotional message which appeals powerfully to local sentiment. Water is seen as wealth: A boom is bound to occur if an area has water and can develop it. A locality sees benefits in water beyond any specific uses; it carries a guarantee of a prosperous future. Even when it would seem that an area has more water than it could possibly put to use, it is loath to part with its riches. The reaction of the Northwest to any suggestion of diversion from the Columbia amply demonstrates this. Belief in the

2. The general conceptual model of policy making relied on here was synthesized from a number of different students and diverse approaches to the subject. Principal contributors include Theodore Lowi, Aaron Wildavsky, Charles E. Lindblom, and Charles O. Jones.

3. This starting point is implicit in the approach of T. Lowi, *Distribution, Regulation, Redistribution: The Functions of Government*, in *Public Policies and Their Politics*, 27-40 (R. Ripley ed. 1966).

ability of water to create prosperity is so strong that at times, even a preliminary study of a water project can create a local boom. Merchants increase their stock and land values go up. Strong local pressure then exists to go on and build the project.⁴

Where ever water is situated, it is locally thought of as "our" water. The landowner's inclination to claim all the water on his premises created special problems in the arid West where upstream development could leave downstream users high and dry. A complex system of Western water law grew up to cope with this difficulty, but rather than abolishing the proprietary notion of water, the system reinforces it. The rule of prior appropriation declares that the place where water is put to beneficial use first has established a priority over all other areas and alternate uses which come later in time. The holder of the senior right possesses the water. Legislation, compacts and agreements have modified the doctrine of "first in time, first in right", but they have not affected the water ownership belief. As a rule they only reshuffle entitlements without challenging the idea that localities have a title to their water.

Historically, the experience of localities in water development issues has supported the Midas touch notion about water and the appropriateness of the provincial viewpoint on water issues. Water development has in the past very often been the key to growth. It has been so certainly in Southern California and, to a more limited extent, in the Northwest. Once an area has developed its water, it has acted to protect its development with political muscle commensurate to its increased wealth. For example, Southern California, the first to put to beneficial use its water resources in the Colorado River Basin, has opposed or attempted to stall most projects in Arizona and the upper basin states which might conceivably threaten California's water supply. The object lesson to other states is the necessity of self interest and self protection. If the locality does not or cannot pursue its own projects, its interests and rights are bound to be ignored.

In any policy making pattern, the form in which policy problems arise affects the perceptions of stakes in the particular issue and the way the issue is worked on in the policy process.⁵ In water, the policy making process is ignited by a specific project proposal pushed by locally oriented persons or groups with sufficient influence to stimulate public discussion. Typically some local businessman, or

4. Anticipation of boom town prosperity from Echo Park's construction was part of the motive for the vocal and adamant backing for the project forthcoming from Vernal, Utah.

O. Stratton & P. Sirotkin, *The Echo Park Controversy*, (1959).

5. David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom note in *A Strategy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process*, 56 (1963), that when the focus of attention is upon means in policy analysis, there can be no examination of alternate policies to reach agreed objectives.

water user, or some locally based bureaucrat in a water agency, or a group composed of these people, supplies the basic drive for water development. However diverse the desires of initiators may be—water supply, economic growth, recreation, an expanded role for some agency, etc.—they all perceive a stake in having some specific project constructed.

The focus of the policy making process from the very beginning is on a specific project, shortcutting both a general discussion of goals and a consideration of alternative means of achieving chosen goals. This discourages broad national involvement. The narrow form in which the issue is posed fails to stimulate consideration of the value of achieving some aim which has been identified vis-a-vis other goals. The issue is not presented as a demand for clean water, plentiful water, or expansion of the economy in a particular region through water development. The worth of these goals might then be balanced against other demands such as adequate housing, space travel or what not in a political process in which a wide range of interests would perceive a stake.

Project proposals with a fair amount of detail are easily available for locally oriented interests to attach themselves to, especially in the West. Various water agencies have, since the turn of the century, been identifying possible dam sites and studying various water works which might be built. The primary benefits expected from a project proposal may change substantially from the time of initial studies until it is actively considered. A flood control project may ultimately emerge as a facility for recreation. The main lines of the project plan, however, usually remain set over the years. This is partly because of the attachment which localities have to specific proposals which have aroused their expectations, and partly because of the tremendous lead time which project planning requires.

II THE ACTIVISTS

Which persons and groups become the activists, the prime movers in the pattern of policy making, is directly related to how stakes in an issue are perceived. In making the decision to invest time, energy and resources to affect the direction of decisions in a policy area, potential activists must consider the nature and significance of support they will derive from their activity. Some activists have no choice but involvement with particular issues because so many of the demands which the activist must satisfy to maintain his influence and position dictate it. Other activists have considerable leeway in deter-

mining their involvement. Still others can look for erosion of their support if they become engaged in policy making on an issue.

A range of different levels of involvement exists. The more relevant the issue is to the activist, the more likely it will be that the activist will engage himself with the initiation and formulation of policy. When the issue area is of less immediate concern, the activist will confine his efforts to building support for and legitimizing various policy decisions. The sort of involvement which an activist settles upon depends, at least in some part, upon his judgement of his efficacy. All else being equal, political actors will concentrate on issues where they can expect to have some impact upon the policy outcome. This means they make an overall assessment of the pattern of policy making in an area and how they might relate to other participants in it.⁶

Since the basis for water as an issue is in the locality, persons and groups which are locally oriented and sensitive to local pressures are the activists on water development. It has already been observed that the genesis of water proposals is in the locality. Local interests provide the initiating energy for water development.⁷ Typical of grass-roots support for water proposals is the Central Arizona Project Association which was a driving force in the long term battle to construct an aquaduct and other works to bring water to Phoenix and Tucson areas. It describes itself as "an association of agricultural, business, professional, and industrial people whose purpose is to obtain supplemental water for Arizona's agricultural economy."⁸

State water agencies have a role in selecting which project proposals are put on the active agenda for federal authorization. These agencies are sensitive to local sentiment. Their organization is indicative of the orientation. In New Mexico, for example, eight of the nine members of the Interstate Stream Commission, which administers interstate compacts and considers federal water projects, are appointed by the Governor to represent major irrigation districts and different sections of the state.⁹

Government agencies which participate in formulating project

6. Kenneth J. Gergen has developed a three dimensional model of activism or leverage in public policy which includes the relevance of the issue, the sense of personal efficacy and resources at various stages of the policy process.

Assessing the Leverage Points in the Process of Policy Formation, in *The Study of Policy Formation*, 165 (R. Bauer & K. Gergen ed. 1968).

7. Wengert, *The Politics of River Basin Development*, L. & Contemporary Problems, 258, 263 particularly (1957).

8. D. Mann, *The Politics of Water in Arizona*, 131 (1963).

9. N.M., State Engineer, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report 1962-64*, vii (1964).

proposals and have the assignment for building and operating projects are responsive to the local drive which is basic to policy making in water. According to Arthur Maass, one of the first steps which the Army Corps of Engineers takes in a preliminary examination of a project proposal is to hold a public hearing during which the Corps is informed about desires of various persons and groups, the interests which would be benefited and the local cooperation that may be expected.¹⁰ Similar concern with localities is obvious in the project planning done by the Bureau of Reclamation. It is also reflected in the personnel and structure of the agency. Bureau officials are often native to the seventeen Western states in which the Bureau operates.¹¹ Bureau personnel are reputed to be "Homesteaders" with a tendency to stay in one place for long periods of time, become part of the community and share in local interests. The national headquarters of the Bureau of Reclamation was in Denver until the 1940's, and the engineering and hydrology sections are still centered there.

The political environment of many Congressmen favors activism on water issues. Congressmen, particularly House members, are tied closely to localities. The areas they represent are relatively small and homogeneous, and any forceful grass roots movement behind a water project is dangerous for the Congressman to ignore. Congressmen themselves are recruited in such a way as to orient them toward the locality. Lifetime, or long term residents of the state or Congressional district are favored in the electoral process.¹² Further, many Congressmen see their role as "locals" who read local newspapers, recruit their staff from the home district and look at issues in terms of local impact.¹³ Such Congressmen see their job as furthering the interests of their constituency, including pushing along water projects which the local people believe will benefit them.

In contrast, the President, persons and groups within the institution of the Presidency, and top executives within the Administration face little which compels involvement in water issues. Exerting time and energy on such matters is a risky undertaking. The President has a nationwide constituency and must be wary of local controversies which add little to his support and threaten to sap his power resources. He has many demands upon his attention, and his re-

10. A. Maass, *Muddy Waters: The Army Engineers and the Nations Rivers*, 24 (1951).

11. Stratton and Sirotkin, *supra* note 4, at 11-12.

12. Samuel P. Huntington notes in *Congressional Response to the Twentieth Century*, in *The Congress and America's Future*, 13 (D. Truman ed. 1965), that in 1963, 70 percent of Congressional leaders were still living in the place of their birth.

13. H. Price, *The Electoral Arena*, *id.* at 50.

sponsibilities are greater than his power. He must be frugal in investing his influence.¹⁴ Consequently, he usually remains aloof from water politics.

The Bureau of the Budget has a tentative stake in affecting decisions on water projects. As a staff arm of the Presidency, the support for the Bureau of the Budget comes mainly from the Chief Executive, and it consequently shares some of his perceptions of the risks in involvement in water policy. It also partakes of the urban, social welfare biases of the Presidency which puts water projects for irrigation and reclamation on low priority. Economists in the Budget Bureau believe in economic feasibility as a test of water projects. Low benefit-cost ratios render projects unjustifiable in the eyes of the Budget Bureau, and it feels some stake in preventing authorization of such projects. However, given the lack of immediate interest and proximate position to the formulation of proposals, Budget often does not have sufficient stake to make active efforts to maximize its influence. Without clear support from the President, Budget frequently does not exert itself on projects it might wish to oppose.

The Secretary of the Interior shares some of the President's problems. Attempts to exercise strong leadership on the Secretary's part usually arouse criticism from local representatives whose locality fails to get the Secretary's endorsement for projects. If these discontented local representatives have much influence in Congress, the Secretary's opinions will probably not carry much weight in ultimate policy. Further, strong initiatives by the Secretary of the Interior in water development is likely to bear a price in terms of intra-department controversy between the Secretary and the locally supported Bureau of Reclamation, and other Interior agencies, with different orientations, but also concerned with water development. The Secretary may minimize his risk by standing aloof from initiation and formulation of proposals and withholding involvement until localities and agencies have worked out their differences.

III

THE POLITICAL ARENA

The real testing of political rationality, or the degree of support which a proposal engenders, takes place at a locus of decision or political arena. Where this center of activity is located within or among political institutions is related to the kind of access that the activists in an issue have to the governmental machinery. Activists whose basis of support is the locality will focus their energy upon the

14. R. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*, (1960).

political institutions where local viewpoints are given particular weight. The arena is also a function of the sort of authority needed to make decisions. If the issue requires the commitment of resources, including money, greater than local or state governments can comfortably command, national political institutions will have to be invoked in policy making.

Whatever the political arena identified with an issue area, there are important implications for the pattern of politics. The formal and informal rules for decision making in various political institutions operate differentially in distributing influence. The influence of certain interests is favored in some branches while it is minimized in others. Urban interests, for example, have a greater impact in the decisions made by the Presidency as a rule than they do in Congress.

On water issues, locally oriented political activists have excellent access at points on all levels of government. State water agencies are focal points in deciding which water projects in the state will be pushed for federal authorization. Because water projects frequently require long term planning and construction under considerable technical expertise, water agencies within the national administration become active in planning and negotiations on water proposals. As has already been indicated, local pressures find an easy mark in the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation. However, because water development projects are expensive, and even if the money is borrowed and will be substantially reimbursed, the borrowing capacity required is very great, Congress, which retains a hold on the purse strings of the federal treasury, must eventually give its consent. The legislative process provides points of access for federal and state agencies involved in water and other relevant interests as well. Congress provides a fairly complete framework for testing the political rationality of a project.

Of the political arenas in national government in which policy is made, the legislature is best adapted to the demands of geographic minorities. Local support can be the basis for constructing broad backing more easily in Congress than in any other branch of the national government. The local orientation of Congressmen has already been mentioned. The method of representation, particularly in the Senate, favors areas concerned with water development. For example, the eight Rocky Mountain states in which many reclamation projects are located have sixteen of the one-hundred Senators while they contain less than four percent of the population. The committee system, the informal rules of specialization and seniority all favor the local representative in decision making. It is to be ex-

pected, then, that the impact of Congress upon water projects is particularly marked.

The work of Congress is parcelled out in subject matter packets and given to the various committees of the House and the Senate. On most issues, the real work is done in committee. The Public Works Committees and the Interior and Insular Affairs Committees possess most of the jurisdiction over water matters. The make up of these committees tends to be biased toward the representatives who will benefit most from involvement in the subjects assigned to these committees. More than one half of the membership of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs has come from the seventeen Western States during the period between 1947 and 1968.¹⁵ Committee consent need not come from a cross section of Congress, but from a collection of representatives who generally share constituency concern with water development.

Specialization is an accepted folkway in both the House and the Senate.¹⁶ Since all Congressmen cannot be active on every issue, there is a tendency for Congressmen to become experts in particular areas. Other Congressmen accept the recommendations of these specialists in policy areas where they are reputed to have expertise. Locally oriented Congressional activists on water issues have the presumption that the specialists should make the decisions on their side when they have regularly invested time and energy on water matters.

In Congress, localities with senior representatives can exercise influence in policy formulation disproportionate to their population. The members who are returned time after time, eventually become the committee chairmen and the committee leaders. Chairmen have impressive powers. The fact that they are in excellent position to further constituency interests is exhibited by Congressman Aspinall, Chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, who has managed to have large numbers of reclamation projects situated in his Western slope district in Colorado, and Senator Anderson, once Senate Interior Committee Chairman and Subcommittee Chairman on Irrigation and Power, who has done as much for New Mexico by putting its entitlement to Colorado River Basin water to use through federal projects. Ranking majority and minority members have lesser but still considerable power to act for their constituencies.

15. Data compiled from *Congressional Directories*, 80th Congress, 1947-48 through the 90th Congress, 1967-68.

16. D. Matthews, *U.S. Senators and Their World*, 95-96 (1960). C. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It*, 123-126 (1963).

IV CONSENT BUILDING RELATIONS

In our constitutional political system, a proposal in order to become policy must be legitimated through the formal action of the political institutions which have authority to make decisions. Such action involves establishing relationships among the people and groups with power in these political institutions in such a way as to create consent. These relations vary according to the locus of decision and the formal and informal rules for decision making in the institutions at the locus. For example, consent may be created in the Administration by a directive from the Chief Executive where he has clear authority and influence to act. The relationship here is one of command. Of course, in many circumstances and on many issues, the President lacks such authority and influence, and consent-building relations are more bargaining and persuasion. When the locus of decision is Congress and Congressional Committees, majority coalitions built up by bargaining relationships are required for consent.

The establishment of consent-building relations for specific issues will also depend upon the nature of the issues and the actors involved. For instance, where the issue is one on which many persons and groups from a wide range of interests feel a stake, then the consent-building relationships will be the cooperation on the basis of mutual interests in large coalitions. In such cases, the policy making process pits giant armies against each other in a struggle for the majority.

The central imperative which structures the relations among actors in water policy is that local support for a project must somehow be projected into national consent. Activists must relate to one another and to others who have influence in the Congressional arena in such a way as to broaden their basis of support. Such relationships are affected by the fact that advocates of projects in different localities have little perception of shared interest except the common ambition for authorization of various projects. Representatives of areas without the prospect of projects have no immediate incentive to join coalitions backing water development.

The relations at the basis of the combinations built to achieve consent for water development is mutual noninterference. This is pork barrel in the purest sense, for a pork barrel is a container of unrelated items. This is not a coalition forged on the basis of shared interest but a combination in which members have little in common.¹⁷ Mutual accommodation is one aspect of noninterference

17. Lowi, *supra* note 3, at 30.

and, where it aids in consent building, project proposals which have no connection other than offering local backing are strung together for mutual support. Another aspect of noninterference is absence of any sort of ends-means analysis. The inclusion of a particular project in a package depends upon its effect on the balance of support and opposition to the package, not the relationship of the project to any aims or goals established for water development in general or for the particular collection of projects.

In a pattern of consent building through noninterference, the drive for authorization of a project must come from the locality and local activists. Commitment and unity within the locality is practically a prerequisite to broadening support. A united stand by the Congressional delegation from the state in which a project is located is usually a necessity. Representatives from both parties and all factions in a state, ordinarily respond to the imperatives of the political process by joining forces.

Arizona's behavior on the Central Arizona Project illustrates the compulsion toward a strong unity which local supporters feel. In both the major newspapers of Tucson and Phoenix, the Central Arizona Project was a prominent feature of news analysis, the editorial pages, and letters to the editor from 1965 until the project was authorized in 1968. Substantially all of the coverage was in favor of the project, and whatever doubts were expressed through the press about need and justification brought stiff reactions by the press.¹⁸ Congressman Morris K. Udall, Democrat from Arizona, commenting on the feeling of his constituency on the Central Arizona Project, said that this was an intensely Arizonan issue. The project had come over the years to have great symbolic value, and the pressure for its authorization was sizable. On this issue, Udall said, he could call on the expertise in Arizona from every agency and group on any level.¹⁹ The three Arizona Congressmen representing both political parties worked closely in gathering support for the Central Arizona Project and regularly sent out joint press releases.

Local support, even when it is united, and even when localities combine behind a package of projects, is not sufficient to create Congressional majorities absent the consent of representatives from areas without a stake. Relationships of noninterference must extend beyond the locally based activists. Such an extension is promoted by the Congressional folkways of courtesy, reciprocity, and bargaining. Congressmen and Senators are not supposed, according to the in-

18. Survey of news on C.A.P., Tucson Star and Phoenix Republic, 1965-68.

19. Interview with Morris K. Udall, May 26, 1969.

formal rules, to throw road blocks in each others way, especially when they have little at stake. Caring for future influence implies avoiding making unnecessary enemies. In fact, courtesy dictates that members of Congress help each other out when they can. Congressmen are expected by their colleagues to be reasonable and willing to bargain.²⁰ These folkways are especially operative where issues do not divide Congressmen along party lines.

Locally based activists employ a number of majority-building arguments to acquire the consent of persons and groups with little at stake. Support is procured by magnifying the need and benefits of water projects. It is claimed that projects will foster all sorts of goals, grandiose or particular, even if these goals may be contradictory. Accomplishments of projects are predicted to be water supply for industrial and culinary use, flood control, recreation, pollution abatement, fish and wildlife enhancement, and power generation among other things. Economic and social advantage is promised to all groups, even if their interests conflict. Reclamationists, recreationists, businessmen and developers, builders, power users, urban and rural water consumers, Indians and other minority groups, may all be appealed to.

Crisis in terms of water scarcity or floods is exploited to create consent.²¹ Backers of projects claim that an emergency situation exists. Projects are said to be essential to economic survival. Without water development, the rhetoric goes, the land will return to desert or wash away, as the case may be. At the very least, it is asserted that continued economic growth of a locality hinges upon the particular development being promoted. For example, for twenty years, dire predictions of imminent drought were made for Tucson and Phoenix if the Central Arizona Project were not authorized.

In an effort to broaden support, expert testimony from economists, geologists, hydrologists, etc. is collected and cited as firm technical justification for projects. Projects are proclaimed to have passed expert's tests even if there is little agreement among experts on the soundness of these tests. Whatever its limitations as a scientific test, cost-benefit analysis can be manipulated with flexibility to aid in building support. Two projects may be joined so that both qualify, when one, standing alone could not. Costs and benefits may be juggled, or the categories may be so extended that almost any project qualifies.²² As Herbert Marshall puts it, "one of the principal uses of

20. Matthews, *supra* note 16, at Chapter V. Clapp, *supra* note 16, at Chapter I.

21. Hart, *Crisis, Community, and Consent in Water Politics*, XXII L. & Contemporary Problems, 510-535 (1957).

22. Wildavsky, *supra* note 1, at 64.

benefit-cost analysis is to clothe politically desirable projects in the fig leaf of economic respectability."²³ Given the leeway which the tool affords activists, it is no wonder that even though the limitations of the test are acknowledged privately, it is faithfully employed and cited.

To facilitate the creation of consent, a project or combination of projects are presented as self-sustaining or money-making. Reimbursement has traditionally been a part of reclamation projects. As repayment has, for numerous reasons, become more and more difficult, the time span in which the government's construction costs must be recovered has been continually extended—repayment periods have been lengthened and development periods have been added on to repayment periods.²⁴ Also, increasing amounts of non-reimbursable benefits have been claimed. The facade of repayment, however, has been maintained. Power generation is often cited as a profit making feature of projects. To show a profit, a low government interest rate on power facilities construction funds is often charged, while a high price for power sales must be anticipated.

Conflict must be avoided or contained if relations of mutual non-interference are to be the basis of building support. A number of tools are employed in water politics to prevent clashes and confrontations. Routinization of the authorization process renders decisions pertaining to the acceptance and priority of a particular project somewhat automatic. Reclamation projects, for example, are routed through a series of hurdles which must be successfully negotiated before Congress is able to authorize them. A reconnaissance study establishes the probable feasibility of the project before Congress authorizes a full scale feasibility study. Once a project is studied and found feasible by the Bureau of Reclamation, it ordinarily must receive a recommendation from the Bureau of the Budget. All these requirements establish a kind of pipeline of projects coming up to Congress in a fashion and order which avoids conflict. A project's mere reaching the end of this series of hurdles provides an indicator of the strength of local backing, since real drive is required to so move a project along.

At various junctures along the pipeline, projects are required to meet technical tests of engineering and economics in order to move forward. The usefulness of one of these tests, cost-benefit analysis, as a tool to build support has already been alluded to. It can also be employed to avoid conflict. The technique provides routine criteria

23. H. Marshall, *Politics and Efficiency in Water Development*, in *Water Research* 294 (A. Kneese & S. Smith ed. 1965).

24. Stratton and Sirotkin, *supra* note 4, at 9-10.

for turning down projects, with public interest explanations which can be employed with localities.²⁵ Projects which manage to come before Congress are bolstered with technical justifications that discourage opposition.

Conflict is encountered at successive levels as a project moves toward authorization. Local unity is projected into agreements among localities within a portion of a basin, and this in turn becomes basin wide, then evolves into regional consent. Differences are settled at the level closest to the locality. To do otherwise would serve to widen the conflict. A primary value among actors expressing area interests is to avoid a stalemate. Stalemates block the process of building positive national response to water projects.²⁶

Conflict is avoided in Congress by not discussing broad questions of priorities and ultimate goals. These questions are likely to be divisive and conflict generating. Questions of whether a basin should be developed and for what purposes are avoided in favor of the details of number of projects, sizes and amounts to be spent. Conflicts which develop between localities over respective development and priority rights to particular water are dealt with by adding projects and benefits.

Where efforts must be made to contain a high degree of controversy, packages of projects can become very large. The Colorado River Basin Bill is a good illustration. The basin is quite fragmented partly because water supply is below compact allotment and far below claimed need. In efforts to unite the basin, numerous projects and benefits were tacked on the basic Central Arizona Project. At one point the bill contained a study of importation of water from the Columbia and two hydroelectric dams in the Grand Canyon. This package united the basin, but at the same time created such opposition from Northwesterners and conservationists that the package could not generate Congressional consent.

When the source of conflict is not locally based activists—who can be handled by the distribution of a project or a benefit which does not threaten any important source of support—then the conflict must be isolated and excluded from the policy making process if consent is to be achieved. It has already been indicated that the pattern of initiation and formulation of water development proposals is not receptive to activists whose perceptions are oriented more broadly than the locality and whose aims are not focused on construction of specific projects. Involvement, if it occurs, is a negative reaction triggered by perception of costs which will be inflicted by

25. Wildavsky, *supra* note 1.

26. Wengert, *supra* note 7, at 263.

the project proposed. If locally based activists cannot offset this cost, they claim it is unreal or irrelevant.

Conservationist and preservationist challenges to water development projects are often the sort which cannot be met by the "add-on" process through which locally based conflict is usually handled. Therefore attempts are made to exclude their interests. Conservation motivated conflict is labelled as alien interference with the local prerogative to put its own water to use. Since conservation organizations often have a national rather than local basis and organization, they are said to be out of touch with the locality and unable to judge benefits and costs. Claims are made that conservationists lack the knowledge and expertise to judge projects that are bolstered by economic and other justifications. The authorization process is pictured as a technical matter which should not be swayed by the "emotional" viewpoints of conservationists. Finally, the informal norms of Congress are invoked on the side of local activists, and conservationists are accused of being intransigent and unwilling to bargain. Since they are impossible to accommodate, it is justifiable to exclude their interests.

V

THE POLICY

The content of a policy is directly related to the process from which it evolves. Who is helped and who is hurt by an allocation of values reflects the perceptions and power resources of the various activists engaged in policy making. The water policy which evolves from the pattern of politics described above is consistent with the pattern. Water policy is plural, and responsive to a wide range of local demands. It has many internal contradictions and inconsistencies. It is not reflective of any dominant values about water development. Rather, goals are adjusted according to various specific projects which are included in policy. This kind of policy reinforces the local view of water. It is a bundle of benefits distributed to the localities who have demanded their turn at water development and their fair share of water.

VI

LEVERAGE POINTS FOR CHANGE

Water policy is currently undergoing a rash of criticism. In the view of many economists and engineers, the kind of decisions made by the government regarding water policies are frequently and disturbingly irrational. According to the criteria employed by the water expert, many projects are authorized and funded with flimsy sup-

port, while at the same time water policy is not responsive to economic and physical facts which these same experts see as obvious and imperative. Water policy is also condemned for not responding to social and environmental forces. Water development has a strong impact on society—where people move, how they live and work. It has an equally powerful effect on plants and wildlife. Yet little attempt is made in water policy to fulfill social or environmental goals.²⁷

Criticism of water policy has stimulated a review of the policy making process looking toward concrete proposals for reform. The Water Resources Council, for example, is working on establishment of national objectives for water resource development, and a system of accounts for evaluating water projects in relation to these over-all aims.²⁸ Other investigations such as the National Water Commission are just getting underway. Whatever proposals for reform are made and adopted, their effectiveness hinges on the changes made in the pattern of politics as it has been set out here.

The basic assumption of this article is that the pattern of politics in water is politically rational. Such pattern is the appropriate response to the risks and rewards presented by the issue. To effectively alter water policy and the pattern through which it is made, the stakes in the issue must be altered. At bottom, this means changing people's perceptions. Water must be viewed in other than local terms. This presents a gargantuan task to political leadership and education. In the tight circle which the pattern of politics traces from perceptions to policy there is little incentive for involved activists to take up such a job.

Within the policy making pattern there are certain weaknesses which may lead to instabilities and opportunities to alter the pattern. One potential leverage point for change is the distance which sometimes separates expectations and policy. In the process of achieving local unity, various persons and groups come to expect direct and impressive benefits from water development. In increasingly diversified localities, not everyone is likely to be satisfied with the outcome. Municipal and industrial users in reclamation projects, for example, consistently pay more and get less. Repeated disappointments could lead to changed perceptions.

Another potential leverage point results from the inherent weak-

27. A particularly interesting criticism along this line was made by Senator Henry M. Jackson, Chairman of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee in an address *Resource Management: Choices and Consequences*, made before the Western Water Congress, April 8, 1969.

28. Task Force Report to the Water Resources Council, *Procedures for Evaluation of Water and Related Land Resource Projects*, June 1969.

ness of the consent-building relations in water. Mutual noninterference is not the proper relation to overcome substantial opposition if conflict cannot be avoided. It is reasonable to anticipate more conflict regarding water development in the future. Interests representing competing uses of funds are bound to challenge water development more frequently as budgets get tighter. The strength of preservationists and conservationists has been waxing. They are likely to challenge many traditional water projects. The difficulty that some water development proposals are now experiencing is illustrated by the fact that after it was taken up in earnest, it took three Congresses and over five years to pass the Central Arizona Project. If the existing pattern of politics gets chronically bogged down in creating consent, dissatisfaction could lead to changed perceptions and an altered pattern.

Changes in perceptions of water may now be occurring in response to happenings and events outside the pattern. We are experiencing a real deterioration of environment. The use of land, air and water and the connection of all three have become salient to persons and groups who have not had a previous stake in water development. At the point where the natural world makes water a national issue, a different pattern of politics may well emerge.