

Judy Layzer

11.007 Day 14 Notes: **Congressional Decision Making**

During the first half of the semester, we focused on why there is so much deep disagreement among participants in public policy disputes: Although they use the same words to describe their goals, they actually mean very different things by words like equity, liberty, efficiency, and security. Symbolic language disguises very different values.

We also talked about how people with different values define problems differently in hopes of recruiting allies. They use symbolic language, like metaphors and synecdoche; they use numbers; they tell causal stories with villains, victims, heroes, and crises.

At the same time, they are softening up solutions within the expert community and among the general public, recognizing that it takes a long time for ideas to take hold. They work towards a tipping point, when an idea seems comfortable for people.

Finally, they wait for a window of opportunity to open, at which point they get their most talented policy entrepreneurs to link their preferred solution to the problem, as they have defined it.

CONGRESSIONAL DECISION MAKING

Let's move from how advocates work to create the context for public policy dispute resolution to how those disputes actually get resolved—or, said differently, how public policy decisions get made.

We'll start with Congress, since Congress generally decides on the goals of public policy and creates its broad outlines.

What, according to Arnold, is business-as-usual in Congress?

What is Arnold trying to explain?

What's Arnold's very general argument?

How does his model work, in more detail?

--What assumption does he make about legislators? About citizens? About legislative leaders?

--What is the logical progression of his argument? How does it move from citizens' policy preferences to legislators' behavior to coalition leaders' strategies?

What are the implications of his model of legislative decision making for policy decisions? What sorts of patterns are we likely to see?

CASE: TAX POLICY

How did coalition leaders manage the tax reform of 1985 so that they got a bill that really did reform the tax code?

--Think about how leaders used persuasion, modifications, and procedures.