

Robert M.

La Follette School of Public Affairs

at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Working Paper Series

La Follette School Working Paper No. 2008-024

<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers>

The End of an Idea? The Bush Administration and the Exhaustion of the Politicized Presidency

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THE END OF AN IDEA?
THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND THE EXHAUSTION OF THE POLITICIZED
PRESIDENCY

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THE END OF AN IDEA?

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Abstract. Scholars in public administration usually concentrated on the George W. Bush administration's attempt to reform management systems, but the most important component of its management agenda was the extension of the politicized presidency. The case for tighter political control of the federal bureaucracy, revived during the Reagan administration, was pushed to the extreme between 2001-2008. But the strategy of politicization largely failed in these eight years: it undermined the Bush administration's own policy goals as well as its broader project to restore the institution of the Presidency. The profound failure of this strategy is tied to a broader exhaustion of the governance agenda introduced after the election of 1980.

TWO AGENDAS

George W. Bush was heralded as the United States' first "MBA President", and at the time of his inauguration was expected to lead an administration that placed heavy emphasis on the promotion of good management within the vast federal bureaucracy (Pfiffner 2007). Bush, a CNN anchor said in January 2001, would "usher in a new, more corporate era of management" (CNNfn 2001). "President Bush will find his MBA skills invaluable," the President of the Graduate Management Admission Council predicted. "I do not anticipate there will be any fuzzy math in this administration" (Business Wire 2001). The Bush family's "dynastic politics are bottomed less on an ideology than on an assumption of superior management," said a feature article in the *New York Times Magazine*. "If someone has to run things, it should probably be a Bush . . . [Bush] says that good management . . . makes good politics" (Bennet 2001).

Indeed, a case can be made that the Bush administration *did* pursue a strategy aimed at overhauling management practices within federal government. In August 2001, the Office of Management and Budget outlined a "bold strategy for improving management and performance of the federal government" that included detailed proposals for reform of government-wide management laws (Executive Office of the President 2001, 1). In its first year, the administration also sent two major reform bills to Congress -- the Managerial Flexibility Act and the Freedom to Manage Act. It adopted a scorecard to measure the management capabilities of federal agencies, and developed a sophisticated tool for assessing the effectiveness of federal programs (Bruel 2007). Events also compelled the administration to undertake two of the most complex reorganizations of governmental functions in decades -- in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and the restructuring of the seventeen agencies that comprise the federal intelligence community.

Together, these policies constituted the Bush administration's formal reform agenda -- that is, a combination of proposed changes to laws, regulations, and policies that were presented explicitly as measures to improve management within the executive branch. Perhaps because this reform agenda was explicit, and also aimed at easily observed changes to laws and policies, it garnered a considerable amount of attention from scholars in public administration (e.g., Brooks and King; Dull 2006; Gilmour and Lewis 2006a, 2006b; Moynihan 2008; Radin 2006 Thompson 2006).¹ But attention to formal reforms can lead public administration scholars to overlook other forms of administrative change that are more difficult to examine but perhaps more consequential forms of administrative change (Suleiman 2003, 192-3). In the case of the Bush administration there was a coherent second management agenda, whose goals and main elements were rarely made explicit, and which rarely involved formal-legal changes. Though it has attracted considerably less scholarly attention, this second agenda was more important in deciding the fate of the Bush administration.

This second management agenda was also concerned with the performance of the federal bureaucracy. It flowed from a perception that the federal bureaucracy was indifferent or hostile to presidential goals because of the professional and ideological biases of career employees. And so an attempt was made to tighten political control over the bureaucracy -- by expanding the number of political appointees; by giving more weight to loyalty rather than merit in hiring decisions; by transferring untrustworthy bureaucrats out of key positions, or pressuring them to resign; by excluding career officials from decision making; and by centralizing authority over key policy decisions in the White House itself. These are the management techniques of a politicized presidency (Moe 1985; Pfiffner 1985; Durant 1987).

This second agenda was not invented by the Bush administration; arguments for tighter political control of the federal bureaucracy were first revived under Nixon and then Reagan administrations. However the Bush administration pushed the doctrine of politicization more aggressively than its predecessors, and allowed the strategy of politicization to be corrupted for purposes that had little to do with the accomplishment of administration priorities. In the end, this second agenda proved self-defeating: rather than enhancing presidential control over the bureaucracy, politicization actually corroded control and undermined the institution of the Presidency. The end of the Bush administration may mark the demise of the recent experiment with politicization as a method of executive control.

THE CASE FOR POLITICIZATION

Enthusiasm for politicization as a method of executive control is hardly new within the US federal government. The first President to articulate a broad suspicion of the federal bureaucracy was Andrew Jackson, who in 1829 announced a policy of "rotation in office" to "destroy the idea of property now so generally connected with official station" (White 1954). Populist distrust of the federal civil service, and consequential enthusiasm for politicization, also persisted within the conservative wing of the Republican Party throughout the twentieth century. It was evident, for example, in McCarthyite attacks on the eastern elite that was believed to dominate the federal bureaucracy in the early years of the post-war era (Fried 1997).

Nevertheless, advocates of politicization fought a rearguard action against progressive reformers for most of the twentieth century. The trend in reform throughout much of the century was to entrench the value that Herbert Kaufman called "neutral competence" -- that is, the capacity of government officials to do the work of government expertly, with no regard for party

loyalties. "The quest for neutral competence," Kaufman said in 1956, "has never waned" (Kaufman 1956, 1060-1).

But the tables began to turn during the Nixon administration. President Richard Nixon became increasingly distrustful of the federal bureaucracy. After the 1972 election, he began a concerted effort to tighten control over political appointees and to use those appointees, in turn, to control the career bureaucracy. The premise, Nixon's personnel chief said in an internal memorandum, was that "you cannot achieve management, policy or program control unless you have established political control." This was the beginning of a coherent, modernized theory of politicized control -- but it was still tinged with illegitimacy, particularly after Nixon's resignation in August 1974 (Aberbach 1991, 4-6).

A body of scholarship produced in the late 1960s and 1970s gave a sheen of academic credibility to this roughly articulated distrust of career bureaucracy. Conservative scholars argued that bureaucrats in the national government should be regarded in the same terms as entrepreneurs in the private sector: as self-interested actors, mainly interested in maximizing their salary and benefits, budgets, and authority. Unless forcefully checked, these scholars argued, bureaucrats would build administrative empires and resist uncomfortable changes in policy. "Budget-maximizing" bureaucrats were considered one of the main causes of overgrown and ineffectual federal government (Tullock 1965; Niskanen 1968). It followed from this that firm measures by political executives to check bureaucratic impulses were justified.

The election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked the advent of a fully articulated doctrine of politicization. Conservative think tanks helped to propagate the new philosophy. It was predicated on the proposition that the federal system was deeply resistant to change -- that it was, as M. Stanton Evans said, "a permanent, self-enclosed system that operates on its own

terms, toward its own ends, according to its own laws" (Hart 1990, 104). The career bureaucracy, a Heritage Foundation report warned the incoming administration, "will lobby vigorously against . . . significant policy change" (Warshaw 1995, 250). The prescription was to choose appointees whose allegiance to the President was beyond dispute and who were prepared to apply a firm hand to their agencies. "Career staff will supply information," a Heritage Foundation report advised, "but they should never become involved in the formulation of agenda-related policy objectives" (Pfiffner 1987, 59).

The Reagan administration took this advice to heart. *New York Times* editorialist Howell Raines said that its approach to appointments evinced "a revolution of attitudes" about proper qualifications: loyalty and determination to rein in bureaucracy were now the paramount concerns (Raines 1981; Nathan 1983, 74). "Personnel is policy", a senior Reagan White House official later said (Hart 1990, 104). As concern for the "ideological commitment" of appointees grew, so too did the number of appointments: by 20 percent during Reagan era. Staffing within the Executive Office of the President grew by a similar proportion, despite the administration's "small government" rhetoric (Pfiffner 1987, 58; Michaels 1995, 273; Warshaw 1995, 250). Terry Moe suggests that the Reagan administration's approach did "much more than continue a historical trend." The administration built a new model of executive control, premised on politicization and centralization, that was "coherent, well integrated, and eminently workable." Future Presidents, Moe predicted, would "build upon the Reagan example" (Moe 1985, 271).

Twelve years later, this is precisely what the administration of newly elected President George W. Bush was encouraged to do. The Heritage Foundation again warned the new administration that the federal bureaucracy remained a "permanent government . . . jealous guarding paychecks, pocketbooks, and power" (Moffit 2001). A January 2001 Heritage

Foundation report worried that the delay in resolving the 2000 election might tempt the President to name fewer political appointees and rely more heavily on career servants. This, the report said, "would be a profound mistake . . . Political appointees, personally loyal to the President and fully committed to his policy agenda, are essential to his success" The selection of appointees should be "based on loyalty first and expertise second, and that the whole governmental apparatus must be managed from this perspective" (Moffit 2001). Such appointees should take responsibility for management decisions rather than delegate them to the bureaucracy, and need greater authority to control bureaucrats, who enjoy a "workplace culture of entitlement."

The Heritage Foundation worried needlessly. The Bush administration quickly demonstrated its commitment to the strategy of politicized control refined by the Reagan administration. It, too, increased the number of political appointees -- especially schedule C appointees, the number of which grew by 33 percent between 2001 and 2005 (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform 2006). The White House also took extraordinary steps to ensure loyalty, directly interviewing candidates and providing cabinet officials with short lists of acceptable appointees (Warshaw 2006). One presidential appointee said that the White House seemed determined to cultivate a "Cult of Bush." "This group is all about loyalty," he told Elizabeth Drew, "and the definition of loyalty extends to policy-making, politics, and to the execution of policy" (Drew 2006).

At the same time, the White House centralized authority over key policy decisions, in an effort to counter the "centrifugal forces" inherent in the Washington bureaucracy (Mayer 2004, 624). Open dissent on key policies was not tolerated (Auletta 2004). This gave rise to an environment where substantive policy discussions were rare, and routinely trumped by political considerations (Pfiffner 2007; Rosen 2007). White House officials briefed political appointees

from across government regularly on election strategies and the needs of vulnerable Republican constituencies, in some cases in apparent violation of the Hatch Act (Higham and O' Harrow 2007). (Determining the extent to which the law was violated has proved difficult: the Office of Special Counsel tasked with investigating the possible violations was itself headed by a political appointee under investigation for politicizing his agency (Lewis 2007).)

THE COSTS OF POLITICIZATION

All control systems are imperfect, and bring their own costs. The artistry in management consists in designing control systems that allow the achievement of objectives while keeping "control losses" to a minimum (Merchant and Van der Stede 2007, 11). The control losses usually associated with a strategy of politicization are an understandable result of the decision to bring "outsiders" into government. Outsiders may have "ideological commitment" but they may lack substantive knowledge about the organization and history of federal policies and structures. Inexperience is not an argument against appointment: but it creates a risk that, in a carefully executed strategy of politicization, would be anticipated and managed. The danger, which we will argue was realized during the George W. Bush administration, is that the risk ceases to be acknowledged. This was evident in many of the administration's early political appointments.

The White House often preferred appointees who were young and inexperienced, and lacked backgrounds in the policy areas for which they became responsible, but had strong financial or familial connections to the Republican Party, or had worked on election campaigns (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform 2006, 9). While their expertise was questionable, their loyalty was not. While such appointees have traditionally been given limited responsibility (Lewis 2008, 29), this was not the case with Bush administration.

The inattention to the risks of politicization likely arose because politicization had slipped from strategy to dogma. In the Reagan era, the case for political control was still based on an instrumental logic: for example, the deployment of carefully screened appointees was important because it would advance "the policy agenda of a conservative administration" (Pfiffner 1985, 352). In this sense there was actually an important commonality between supporters and critics of politicization: both camps agreed that one of the key issues was the effectiveness of Presidential supervision (Hart 1990). So long as politicization was considered to be valuable for instrumental reasons, it would be reasonable to expect that a line would be drawn when the risk of failure due to inexperience or incompetence grew unacceptably large. Over time, however, the strategy of politicization was transformed into dogma: that is, it was applied for its own sake, and without regard to potential risks.

The triumph of loyalty over competence was perhaps best captured by Michael Brown, the head of FEMA who lacked significant emergency management experience when he was hired by a former college classmate. Brown typified others in senior leadership positions in FEMA. Instead of emergency management expertise, they had significant campaign experience. Long-term FEMA staff perceived that political appointees were excessively concerned about the politics of emergency management at the expense of agency capacity. One senior career manager at FEMA testified that: "that's what killed us, was that in the senior ranks of FEMA there was nobody that even knew FEMA's history, much less understood the profession and the dynamics and the roles and responsibilities of the states and local governments" (U.S. Senate Committee of Homeland Security and Government Affairs 2006, 14-5).

Shortly after Katrina, an additional political controversy further illustrated the emphasis of loyalty over competence, even among appointed positions that had traditionally emphasized

expertise. A number of US attorneys were forced to resign by Department of Justice (DOJ). In the words of a senior DOJ appointee Kyle Sampson, the need for “loyal Bushies” appeared to be a primary factor. Sampson, a classmate with Vice-President Cheney’s daughter, had become chief of staff for Attorney General Alberto Gonzales by his mid thirties. Sampson and another young lawyer, Monica Goodling, were given far-reaching autonomy in personnel decisions, despite the fact that each lacked significant prosecutorial experience. Goodling was a graduate of an evangelical law school who parlayed a position as opposition researcher for the Republican National Committee into a senior post at the DOJ.

Definitive evidence on the reason for the firings, and the role of White House, has been limited by the decision of the Bush administration to claim executive privilege to block Congressional investigations. Some of the US Attorneys fired had resisted pressure to limit investigation of private industry (Goldstein and Johnson 2007), were viewed as insufficiently aggressive in pursuing investigations of Democratic officials for possible voter fraud, or had investigated Republican officials (Smith 2007). A statistical analysis of investigations of party officials by US State Attorneys between 2001 and 2006 shows that Democratic officials were seven times as likely to be investigated as Republican officials (Shields and Cragan 2007). In testimony before the Senate, the Gonzales could not point to clear standards for the firings even as he insisted that the removal process involved the “consensus judgment of the senior leadership.” Almost all of the attorneys fired had strong and well-documented performance records, but Gonzales denied they were dismissed for political reasons, and perversely argued characterized investigations into the matter as “attacking the career professionals.”

One long-time DOJ bureaucrat argued that Gonzales had politicized the Department to an unprecedented degree, enabled by aided by young aides “whose inexperience in the processes of

government was surpassed only by their evident disdain for it” (Mauro 2007). While US state attorneys were traditionally regarded as positions above partisan intrigue, they were still political positions. But the investigation into the process of their firing revealed that political loyalty criteria were also applied to DOJ career positions, contrary to civil service law. Goodling, testifying to Congress under the shield of immunity, acknowledged that she “crossed the line” by seeking information about applicants for career positions that would reveal partisan political leanings, such as scanning resumes for campaign work or membership of partisan groups, or asking interviewees questions about their political beliefs (Eggen and Kane 2007; Lipton 2007).

The Bush administration also modified rules about hiring practices for career positions that provided greater political input in selection. An executive order in 2003 provided greater political appointee control over DOJ Honors Program. The programs sought to hire promising young lawyers directly for fast-track federal careers. An investigation found that highly qualified liberal candidates were much more likely to be screened out than those with conservative or neutral backgrounds (DOJ 2008). Two of the three appointees who screened candidates were judged to have violated federal law by using political criteria. One of them, Esther McDonald, was hired by Goodling and was selecting candidates having graduated law school just three years before. She wrote in an email that she voted against candidates who used “leftist commentary and buzz words” such as “environmental justice,” “social justice,” “making policy,” in their application essays. She disapproved of candidates who had worked for liberal organizations and conducted internet searches to find further evidence of their political leanings.

There is evidence that new hiring practices are having a direct effect on the efficacy of specific programs. After changes to hiring practices for the DOJ Honors program, fewer of the new lawyers in the Civil Rights division had civil rights experience, and the average ranking of

law schools of the candidates selected declined (Savage 2006; Zegart 2006). Many senior lawyers who had spent their careers in civil rights were reassigned to other areas, while others simply resigned (Zegart 2006). At the same time, civil rights prosecutions declined sharply (TRAC 2004), and the office largely departed its traditional mission of pursuing cases on behalf of disenfranchised minorities.

After 2004, hiring practices in the selection of immigration judges were also changed. Again, these are career positions legally exempt from partisan criteria. After these changes, about one third of new hires had clear ties to the Republican Party, while half of new appointees lacked any immigration law experience (Goldstein and Eggen 2007). In her testimony to Congress, Goodling acknowledged that immigration judges were among those positions subject to a partisan litmus test (Eggen and Kane 2007).

Similarly politicized processes of selection occurred among the officials sent to rebuild Iraq, with disastrous results. In some ways, Iraq provides a test for the success of the politicized presidency. It was a policy issue that the President clearly cared about. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it was not treated with deliberate neglect or seen as a “turkey farm” where incompetent appointees could be safely stashed away. And given that the Coalitional Provisional Authority (CPA) was not governed by civil service laws, the White House could hire exactly the type of people it wanted. The administration certainly chose loyalists, but these hires were frequently young, inexperienced, and unrealistic. Qualified experts with basic language skills, regional or reconstruction expertise, were blocked or replaced. The CPA failed to achieve the modest goals it set for itself (Chandrasekaran 2006, 288). Perhaps more than any other reason, its failure to reconstruct the state fostered the post-invasion instability.

Many of those recruited to work at the CPA did so on the basis of some combination of personal contacts with high-level officials and/or demonstrated political loyalty to the Republican Party. Chandrasekaran (2006, 91) describes the process:

A well-connected Republican made a call on behalf of a friend or trusted colleague. Others were personally recruited by President Bush. The White House also wanted a new team to replace Garner's staff [the predecessor to CPA head Paul Bremer], which was viewed as suspect because it had been drawn from the State Department and other federal agencies without any screening for political loyalties. The rest of the CPA staff was assembled with the same attention to allegiance. The gatekeeper was James O' Beirne, the White House liaison at the Pentagon. He took charge of personnel recruitment, dispatching queries for resumes to the offices of Republican congressmen, conservative think tanks and GOP activities. 'The criterion for sending people over there was that they had to have the right political credentials,' said Frederick Smith, who served as the deputy director of the CPA's Washington Office."

Staffers were asked if they voted for George Bush, or where they stood on abortion policies. Those whose allegiance to the President was uncertain were not selected. When Bremer asked for a list of aides, O'Beirne came up with one made up of applicants to the conservative Heritage Foundation. Some of these aides, who lacked any experience in financial management, were put in charge of Iraq's \$13 billion budget. The person put in charge of reestablishing Iraq's stock market was a 24 year old with a background in real estate.

Selection practices were often marked by the personal involvement of senior political officials in order to elevate preferred candidates, or to block the selection of candidates whose

loyalty was questionable. This was especially true of State Department officials. Thomas Warrick, a State Department official who directed the Future of Iraq planning process in the State Department was removed by Secretary Rumsfeld, reportedly on the orders of Vice-President Cheney. Frederick M. Burkle Jr. was initially put in charge of health care for the CPA. He had an MD and a masters degree in public health, had worked for the US Agency for International Development, taught on disaster response, and had experience in Iraq and Somalia. He was replaced, he was told, because the White House wanted a loyalist. His replacement, James K. Haveman, lacked a medical degree, and the majority of his overseas experience was as Director of International Aid, a faith based relief organization that provided relief and promoted Christianity. He had worked for the former Governor of Michigan, who recommended him to Paul Wolfowitz in the Department of Defense. At a time when Iraqi hospitals were in severe disrepair and Iraqis lacked basic medications, Haveman's signature initiatives included an anti-smoking campaign, and trying to limit access to prescription medicines, privatize services, and add user fees (Chandrasekaran 2006).

THE ASSAULT ON RATIONALITY

In a sense, the policy of control-by-politicization constituted a direct challenge to the *possibility* of neutral competence. Neutral competence, as Kaufman described, implied the possibility of making key policy or management decisions according to "objective standards" embodied in expert knowledge. Such competence is therefore underpinned by what Bertelli and Lynn (2003, 262) identify as one of the basic criteria for responsible administration: rationality, by which they mean "habitual resort to reason to ensure transparent justifications for managerial

action.” Frederickson (1996, 266) notes that “from the beginning of the field, rationality has been central to public administration.”ⁱⁱ

Proponents of politicization essentially challenged the proposition that objective standards exist (Kaufman 1956, 1060). This challenge is most persuasive at the highest levels of policy formulation and general management, and least persuasive in those areas where scientific knowledge is most highly developed. Historically, there has relatively fewer political appointees placed in agencies that demand technical and professional knowledge (Lewis 2008).

If the Bush administration's strategy of politicization has limited to matters of high policy and management, it might have been more defensible. But it was not. The strategy also extended to the suppression or manipulation of scientific knowledge produced by federal agencies (Lambright 2008). Sometimes this consisted of attempts to regulate media access to government scientists, and deter scientists from speaking publicly about their work. (For example, a NASA expert on climate change was censored by a political appointee who warned of “dire consequences” if he spoke to reporters (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform 2007).) Sometimes, however, political appointees (including White House staff) went further, attempting to alter the actual content of scientific knowledge produced by federal agencies.

These assaults on the most highly specialized components of the federal bureaucracy were often undertaken on behalf of constituencies whose support was critical to the conservative movement, such as industry lobbies or the religious right (2005). But these attempts at manipulation of scientific knowledge often proved both ineffective and counter-productive, largely because it was easily detected by external constituencies, and because it transgressed the

widely accepted belief that the norms of neutral competence and rationality should be respected at least within these specialized parts of the federal bureaucracy.

White House involvement in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statements on climate change illustrates the effort to manage science. In one case the White House Council on Environmental Quality edited a chapter on climate change in an EPA report to such a degree that the EPA administrator Christine Todd Whitman decided to eliminate it. The same office vetoed the section of another report that dealt with climate change effects on air quality, and made at least 181 changes to the *Strategic Plan for the Climate Change Science Program*, the administration's guide for federal research (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform 2007). The substance of these edits was to downplay evidence on climate change and the role of human activity in contributing to climate change, and to suggest that there was not consensus on the science, in some cases referring to a discredited industry-funded paper.

In other cases, EPA decisions ignored the advice of its staff, cost-benefit analyses and empirical evidence in order to weaken clean air regulation (Specter 2006). EPA staff were also pressured not to make findings that protected endangered species (Mooney 2005). The Deputy Assistant of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Julie MacDonald, altered and ordered the altering of findings made by staff scientists.

Election administration is another policy area where the Bush administration has ignored evidence and the advice of career staff. In this case, the policy goal closely coincides with partisan advantage. Republicans have argued that voter fraud is prevalent, pushing for stricter identification laws, which tends to negatively affect participation among minorities, who are less likely to vote Republican.ⁱⁱⁱ A Republican volunteer from the Florida 2000 recount was put in

charge of a voting rights unit in the Justice Department, and overturned career staff recommendations to reject a Georgia voter identification law viewed as discriminatory (and subsequently struck down in federal court). The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) also altered the findings of a report it had commissioned, adjusting the view of researchers that “there is widespread but not unanimous agreement that there is little polling place fraud,” to “there is a great deal of debate on the pervasiveness of fraud.” The final report also removed references to evidence of voter intimidation, instead saying that this too was a topic of debate. EAC appointees also blocked the release of another report that found that voter identification laws can reduce turnout and disproportionately effect minorities (Urbina 2007).

The White House has also proven willing to ignore expert advice if it conflicted with the goals of social conservatives. One such goal has been to eliminate policies that are argued to condone sexual activity, especially among young people. The administration opposed vaccinating young women against the human papillomavirus, the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States, and the primary cause of cervical cancer (Specter 2006). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also denied permission to provide Plan B (the morning-after pill) as an over-the-counter medicine, arguing that there was not evidence on how this affected the behavior of young women. In doing so, appointees took the unprecedented step of contradicting the advice of both the career staff that normally make such decisions, and their scientific advisory committee. Despite little evidence of success, the administration has provided significant resources to abstinence education in the US. It has also pushed abstinence in anti-AIDS funding for Africa at the expense of condom distribution. The official formerly in charge of anti-Aids programs described the policy as “outrageous and stupid. From a public health point

of view, it's irresponsible...None of this thinking is encumbered by facts. We're talking ideology” (Kohn 2005, 1A).

A Bush administration Surgeon General, Richard Carmona, testified that his public pronouncements on emergency contraception and sex education, and a host of other policies such as stem cell research were modified or censored by the White House. Reports from his office on global health issues, prisoner health care, and secondhand smoke were blocked when they failed to align with the political goals of the White House (Harris 2007). Dr. Carmona said that on numerous health issues, policy positions were established without reference to scientific considerations. While Surgeon Generals are political appointees, the basis for their credibility is scientific expertise.

On some occasions, the distortion of scientific evidence seemed unnecessary. In refusing to pursue a needle exchange program, the Bush administration was following the precedent of the Clinton administration. But while the Clinton administration reluctantly acknowledged that their policy decision was at odds with the science, the Bush administration pointed to evidence that it claimed opposed the programs. On closer inspection, the researchers whose work was quoted either did not oppose needle exchange programs or supported it. The only exception was a non-peer reviewed work by a social conservative group (Washington Post 2005).

Corporate interests also had a disproportionate impact on decisions. This preference for private entities was strengthened by the fact that Bush appointees had often come directly from working with the industry they were charged with regulating. For example, the chief counsel of the Food and Drug Administration, Dan Troy, had devoted his career to suing the agency to limit its regulatory reach. Philip Cooney, the White House official who edited EPA reports to undermine claims of global warming had formerly spent 15 years at the American Petroleum

Institute, where he focused on directing government climate change policy to be consistent with the industry's strategic interest (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform 2007, 17). When he resigned from the Bush administration in 2005, he was hired by ExxonMobil. President Bush strengthened the hand of such appointees by requiring each regulatory agency to have an office, headed by political appointee, who would review the costs and benefits of proposed rules.

Favoritism toward corporate interests was perhaps predictable in regulatory agencies, but also occurred in more surprising places, such as Iraq. Pfiffner (2007) has noted many of the failures in Iraq, including an unwillingness to restore civil order after the invasion, the disbanding of the armed forces, and the broad deBaathification of the bureaucracy. These fateful decisions were taken with little consultation and at odds with expert advice. One additional factor that contributed to the failure of the CPA was a quixotic pursuit of free market institutions even as Iraq was falling apart. When asked what his top priority shortly after he arrived in Iraq, Paul Bremer pointed to economic reform, including privatizing state entities and helping to “wean people from the idea the state supports everything” (Chandrasekaran 2006, 61). The CPA eliminated tariffs on foreign goods, and cut taxes, reducing the top rate from 45 to 15 percent.

Such reforms were probably illegal under the Hague Convention, which requires occupying powers to respect the laws of the occupied country. They were also unrealistic, displacing attention from more pressing problems. This was illustrated when the CPA tried to reduce gas subsidies, food rations and farm subsidies, and replace them with cash payments through debit cards. The plan was shelved when the military objected because they lacked the resources to manage food riots. Privatization stalled because the national industries were in such bad shape that they could not attract private investors without major initial investments.

The pursuit of market reforms not only ignored the major difficulties facing Iraq, but made them worse. Many Iraqis had lost their jobs after the invasion and estimates of unemployment were as high as 40 percent (Chandrasekaran 2006, 116). Job creation programs were not outlined – there would be no direct efforts by the CPA to foster employment. Instead, supply-side approaches were relied on, on the assumption that privatization, reduced subsidies, low taxes and business-friendly laws would lead to prosperity. Despite the unemployment, low security, a power vacuum, and increasing skepticism toward the government, the CPA argued that the reach of the state should be reduced. This created a vacuum of authority, encouraging the rise of armed militias that offered social services and a form of security.

THE EXHAUSTION OF AN IDEA

By the end of 2008, the United States' conservative movement was in disarray. The President's foreign and economic policies were largely discredited, and his personal standing had collapsed: In a Gallup Poll conducted in November 2008, only 29 percent of respondents approved of his performance as President. Popular support for the Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, also slumped as the financial crisis of 2008 worsened. After the election of Barack Obama, many conservative commentators concluded that the movement that coalesced and came to power after the 1980 presidential election was finally "splintering at its foundation" (Cohen 2008). The conservative movement, said E.J. Dionne Jr., had "lost its sense of solidarity and purpose" (Dionne Jr. 2008). "What we are experiencing now," said Gideon Rachman, "is the bust that has followed the 30-year bull run in conservative ideas that began with the Thatcher-Reagan revolution of 1979-1980" (Rachman 2008).

Of course, it was the collapse of conservative orthodoxy about economic policy that captured headlines in late 2008: a Republican administration was seen to be nationalizing some financial institutions, and subsidizing others; abandoning a monetary policy fixated on inflation control; and expanding the regulatory reach of the federal government. But there were arguably other aspects of the post-Reagan approach to governance that had also failed. We have argued here that the doctrine of control-by-politicization was one of these aspects.

This philosophy has been criticized on a number of grounds. It is not clear that bureaucrats are as untrustworthy and disloyal as the politicized presidency supposed. Even if bureaucrats are more liberal than the political masters they serve, the limited empirical evidence suggests that bureaucrats recognize the legitimate constitutional authority of elected officials, and are willing to relegate individual preferences (Golden 2000; Wood and Waterman 1994). This norm of obedience is most likely to collapse if political appointees treat bureaucrats with overt hostility and distrust, or dismantle programs that enjoy broad public support, or behave in violation of the law (Golden 2000; O' Leary 2006; Wood and Waterman 1994).

The politicized presidency failed the Bush administration in two main ways. First, politicization undermined the capacity of the president to implement policy priorities. Some previous work has made this point about the Reagan years (Durant 1987). But the central role of politicization to large scale and very public policy failures such as the response to Katrina and the occupation of Iraq is unprecedented in recent Presidential history. These high profile failures may have been ones that lodged in the collective memory of the public, but there is evidence that they were not exceptional. Lewis (2008) finds that programs led by political appointees under the Bush administration were evaluated as performing less well relative to those run by career managers.

Unlike the aftermath of Reagan era, that these politicized policy failures, in turn, exerted a significant electoral price. Over the course of the Bush years, Republicans went from controlling Congress and the Presidency to a repudiation that saw them lose control of each. It could be argued that the failure of this politicization doctrine was more damaging to the Bush administration, and the McCain campaign, than the financial crisis itself. Well before the crisis worsened in Fall 2008, the Bush administration was in disrepute. As early as May 2006, the Gallup Poll reported that President Bush's job approval was "down to a record-low level for his administration . . . public support for his handling of a variety of issues is washing out, along with perceptions of his leadership qualities" (Saad 2006). Another 2006 poll found that the term most frequently associated with the President was "incompetent." Satisfaction with how government was being run also dropped to record lows, closely mirroring the precipitous decline of President Bush's approval ratings, which by April 2008, were the lowest in Gallup Poll's history. While the public may never care directly about management issues, they do pay attention when there is evidence of corruption, as in the DOJ firings, and especially when big policies publicly fail. Both Katrina and Iraq significantly undercut the political support for the President and his party. The financial crisis might be dismissed as an unanticipated shock, but as this paper has shown, these earlier disasters were easily connected to the managerial philosophy of the administration itself.

But the Bush administration failed in another way. The President and his key advisors professed an interest in rebuilding the Presidency as an institution (Mayer 2008). As John Yoo, an appointee in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, observed in 2006, the President "has long intended to make reinvigorating the presidency a priority" (Yoo 2006). The President manifestly failed in this respect as well: the controversies over mismanagement and

corruption of scientific decision-making left the Presidency in its poorest condition in years. Public confidence in the Presidency as an institution, the Gallup Poll reported in June 2008, was at its lowest point since Gallup began measurement in 1992. The politicized presidency not only weakened the institution of the presidency by eroding its legitimacy, but it failed to institutionalize many of the new powers it sought, and invited other political institutions to more closely police its activities (Roberts 2008).

Damage was done to the executive branch in other ways. Another cost of politicization is manifested in fewer opportunities to influence policy and declining morale and among the career bureaucracy, making it harder to recruit and retain highly skilled employees (Volcker 1988; Lewis 2008). A 2007 survey found that employee satisfaction and engagement had declined in twenty out of thirty agencies in the preceding three years (Partnership for Public Service 2007). The decline in morale is sharpest where politicization has been most intense (Leonnig 2008). Unfortunately this decline in work satisfaction is occurring just as federal agencies are seeking to improve recruitment and retention in response to the retirement of the "baby boom generation" from the federal workforce.

Presidents, Terry Moe argued in 1994, "politicize and centralize because it is advantageous for them to do so. They will stop when their incentives change" (Moe 1994, 19). In fact, life is not so neatly ordered: ideas, as much as incentives, drive behavior. But by the end of 2008 the idea that control could be enhanced through politicization appeared to have exhausted itself, and the costs of efforts to exert such control have become more apparent. This makes possible the resurgence of other ideas about the best way of exercising Presidential leadership. In its early days, the Obama administration appeared to make a determined effort to avoid shows of excessive partisanship. The most obvious signal of its attitude was the President-

elect's decision to retain a Bush appointee, Robert Gates, as Secretary of Defense. The appointment of a Nobel Prize winner as Secretary of Energy also symbolized a renewed emphasis on science in the White House.

Of course, we should be wary about inferring too much from the early days of an administration. In 2001, after all, we thought that President Bush would be the MBA President. Moreover, the conditions that prompted enthusiasm for the politicized presidency three decades ago are still with us today. The federal bureaucracy is not significantly smaller, and the pressure on Presidents to deliver on their expansive promises is arguably more intense. Politicization may be on the wane; or it might just be in remission, as we remind ourselves about the weaknesses of other approaches to presidential control.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Our statements about the preoccupations of public administration scholars is based on a content analysis of articles about the Bush administration published in *Public Administration Review* between 2001 and 2008 relative to the Clinton and Reagan administrations in previous issues. There has been significantly less research on the Bush administration (seven articles on Bush, compared to nine on Reagan and 33 on Clinton). This remains true even if we limit the analysis to the equivalent point in the Clinton and Reagan administrations (23 and 12 articles published respectively). There are also fewer articles on the politicization (four articles on Bush, seventeen on Reagan, and five on Clinton). Further details of the analysis are available from the authors.

ⁱⁱ An example of Frederickson's point comes from an older definition of rationality for public action that Bertelli and Lynn point to: "systematizing the process of securing and sifting relevant information so that the factors involved in arriving at a policy decision can be stated and the consequences of alternatives can get analyzed and balanced" (from Leiserson and Morstein Marx (1959, 46). More recent empirical work underlines the centrality of rationality to providing legitimacy to decision processes and outcomes. DeHart-Davis (advance access, 8) finds that public employees rate the effectiveness of a policy based on whether it incorporates logical means-end relationships, noting: "The appearance of rationality is particularly important for bureaucracies, for whom means and ends are the 'technology' used to carry out abstract activities."

ⁱⁱⁱ To this end, the DOJ increased its pursuit of voter fraud cases, largely against Democrats. An analysis of the prosecutions shows little evidence of widespread fraud, and many of the prosecutions have resulted from immigrants or felons who were confused about their voting status (Lipton and Urbina 2007).