

SENATOR-ELECT SCOTT BROWN

Mr. REID. Madam President, I had a good conversation with Senator-elect SCOTT BROWN yesterday. He is coming to Washington today. I look forward to visiting with him. We have a time set for him to come by my office.

In my conversation with him, he seemed very pleasant and excited about coming to Washington, which I am sure he is. We talked about his daughter going to Syracuse and the fact that JOE BIDEN graduated from Syracuse, and he knew that. I look forward to our meeting with him.

THE NIGERIAN TERRORIST

Mr. REID. Madam President, I will speak briefly on the statement of my friend, the senior Senator from Kentucky, about the Nigerian terrorist.

The one thing we need not do is politicize the fight against terrorism. John Brennan did testify yesterday in our classified briefing. It was classified. The things that took place there should be classified. People should not be talking about it. The reason that is the case is that we want people who come to classified briefings to be able to speak freely.

We have had a long history in our country of people who commit crimes on our territory in the United States being tried in the United States, including Richard Reid, the shoe bomber. It isn't as if this is the first time something like this happened. Even though they are proceeding under civil courts, they can always drop back and fall into the category of war criminals if, in fact, that choice is made. Just because they are going forward in this manner today doesn't mean they cannot drop back in some other manner at a subsequent time.

Even though I don't like to discuss what went on in a closed briefing, in a classified setting, I was there from the very beginning to the very end of Mr. Brennan's presentation. I never heard him refuse to answer. In fact, he answered the question that was asked in a number of different ways by my friend, the Republican leader, and another Republican Senator. So if there are any questions about anything that Mr. Brennan had to say, I hope that those questions will be asked directly to him. We have had some open hearings.

My point is that there is a war on terror taking place now. I tried to be as supportive of President Bush during his years as President when this was going on after 9/11. I hope my Republican colleagues will be supportive of President Obama. This is not a partisan issue.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Madam President, this morning, following leader remarks, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for an hour, with Senators allowed to speak therein for

up to 10 minutes each. That time will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees. The Republicans will control the first half; the majority will control the final half. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 45, a joint resolution increasing the statutory limit on the public debt. Currently, we have three amendments pending. We hope we can reach short time agreements so we can schedule votes on these amendments.

MEASURE PLACED ON
CALENDAR—S. 2939

Mr. REID. Madam President, I understand that S. 2939, which was introduced by Senator DEMINT, is at the desk and is due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the title of the bill for a second time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2939) to amend title 31, United States Code to require an audit of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal Reserve banks, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I object to any further proceedings on this bill at this time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard, and the bill will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business for 1 hour, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, during our recent health care debate I heard a number of times from our friends on the other side of the aisle this question: What are Republicans for?

Well, they will wait a long time if they are waiting for the Republican leader, Senator MCCONNELL, to roll into the Senate a wheelbarrow filled with a 2,700-page Republican comprehensive health care bill or, for that matter, a 1,200-page climate change bill or a 900-page immigration bill.

If you have been listening carefully to the Senate debate, you will know

that on health care, as well as on clean energy, debt reduction, and immigration, for example, Republicans have been offering the following alternative to 1,000-page bills: going step by step in the right direction to solve problems in a way that re-earns the trust of the American people.

Comprehensive immigration, comprehensive climate change, and comprehensive health care bills have been well intended, but the first two fell of their own weight, and health care, if enacted, would be a historic mistake for our country and a political kamikaze mission for Democrats.

What has united most Republicans against these three bills has not only been ideology but also that they were comprehensive. As George Will might write: "The Congress. Does. Not. Do. Comprehensive. Well."

Two recent articles help explain the difference between the Democratic comprehensive approach and the Republican step-by-step approach.

The first, which appeared in the new journal, *National Affairs*, and was written by William Schambra of the Hudson Institute, explains the "sheer ambition" of President Obama's legislative agenda as the approach of what Mr. Schambra calls a "policy President."

Mr. Schambra says the President and most of his advisers have been trained at elite universities to govern by launching "a host of enormous initiatives all at once . . . formulating comprehensive policies aimed at giving large social systems—and indeed society itself—more rational and coherent forms of functions."

This is governing by taking big bites of several big apples and trying to swallow them all at once. In addition, according to Mr. Schambra, the most prominent organizational feature of the Obama administration is its reliance on "czars"—more than the Romans, said one blogger—to manage broad areas of policy. In this view, systemic problems of health care, of energy, of education, and of the environment simply can't be solved in pieces.

Analyzing the article, David Broder of the *Washington Post* wrote this:

Historically, that approach has not worked. The progressives failed to gain more than a brief ascendancy and the Carter and Clinton presidencies were marked by striking policy failures.

The reason for these failures, as Broder paraphrased Schambra, is that "this highly rational comprehensive approach fits uncomfortably with the Constitution, which apportions power among so many different players." Broder then adds this:

Democracy and representative government are a lot messier than the progressives and their heirs, including Obama, want to admit.

James Q. Wilson, a scholar, writing in a memorial essay honoring Irving Kristol in the *Wall Street Journal* a few months ago, says the law of unintended consequences is what causes the failure of such comprehensive legislative schemes. Explains Wilson:

Launch a big project and you will almost surely discover that you have created many things you did not intend to create.

Wilson also writes that neoconservatism, as Kristol originally conceived of it in the 1960s, was not an organized ideology or even necessarily conservative, but “a way of thinking about politics rather than a set of principles and rules. . . . It would have been better if we had been called policy skeptics.”

The skepticism of Schambra, Wilson, and Kristol toward grand legislative policy schemes helps to explain how the law of unintended consequences has made being a member of the so-called “party of no” a more responsible choice than being a member of the so-called party of “yes, we can”—if these three recent comprehensive bills on health care, climate change, and immigration are the only choices.

Madam President, it is arrogant to imagine that 100 Senators are wise enough to reform comprehensively a health care system that constitutes 17 percent of the world’s largest economy and affects 300 million Americans of disparate backgrounds and circumstances.

How can we be sure, for example, that one unintended consequence of spending \$2.5 trillion more for health care over 10 years will not be higher costs and more debt? Won’t new taxes be passed along to consumers, raising health insurance premiums and discouraging job growth? Won’t charging insolvent States \$25 billion over 3 years for a Medicaid expansion raise State taxes and college tuitions? Ask any Governor. And how can a Senator be so sure that some provision stuck in a 2,700-page partisan bill in secret meetings and voted on during a snowstorm at 1 a.m. will not come back around and slap him or her in the face, such as trying to explain why Nebraska got a cornhusker kickback to pay for its Medicaid expansion and my State did not?

James Q. Wilson also wrote in his essay that respect for the law of unintended consequences “is not an argument for doing nothing, but it is one, in my view, for doing things experimentally. Try your idea out in one place and see what happens before you inflict it on the whole country,” he suggests.

If you will examine the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, you will find that Republican Senators have been following Mr. Wilson’s advice, proposing a step-by-step approach to confronting our Nation’s challenges 173 different times during 2009. May I say that again? During 2009, Republican Senators, 173 different times on the floor of the Senate, have proposed a step-by-step approach toward health care and other of our Nation’s challenges.

On health care, for example, we first suggested setting a clear goal; that is, reducing costs. Then we proposed the first six steps toward achieving that goal: No. 1, allowing small businesses

to pool their resources to purchase health plans; No. 2, reducing junk lawsuits against doctors; No. 3, allowing the purchase of insurance across State lines; No. 4, expanding health savings accounts; No. 5, promoting wellness and prevention; and No. 6, taking steps to reduce waste, fraud, and abuse. We offered these six proposals in complete legislative text. It totaled 182 pages, all 6. The Democratic majority rejected all six of our proposals and ridiculed the approach, in part because our approach was not comprehensive.

Take another example. In July, all 40 Republican Senators announced agreement on 4 steps to produce low-cost, clean energy and create jobs: No. 1, create 100 new nuclear powerplants or at least the environment in which they could be built; No. 2, electrify half our cars and trucks; No. 3, explore offshore for natural gas and oil; and No. 4, double energy research and development for new forms of energy. This step-by-step Republican clean energy plan is an alternative to the Kerry-Boxer national energy tax which would impose an economy-wide cap-and-trade scheme, driving jobs overseas looking for cheap energy and collecting hundreds of billions of dollars each year for a slush fund with which Congress can play.

Here is another example. In 2005, a bipartisan group of us in Congress asked the National Academies to identify the first 10 steps Congress should take to preserve America’s competitive advantage in the world so we could keep growing jobs. The academies appointed a distinguished panel, including now-Secretary Chu, that recommended 20 such steps. Congress enacted two-thirds of them. The America COMPETES Act of 2007, as we call it, was far-reaching legislation, but it was fashioned step by step.

Another example. When I was Governor of Tennessee in the 1980s, my goal was to raise family incomes for what was then the third poorest State. As I went along, I found that the best way to move toward that goal was step by step—some steps smaller, some steps larger—such as changing banking laws, defending right-to-work policies, keeping debt and taxes low, recruiting Japanese industry, and then the auto industry, building four-lane highways so suppliers could get to the auto plants, and then a 10-step better schools program, 1 step of which made Tennessee the first State to pay teachers more for teaching well. I did not try to turn our whole State upside down all at once, but working with leaders in both parties, I did help it change and grow step by step. Within a few years, we were the fastest growing State in family incomes.

According to a recent survey by On Message Inc., 61 percent of Independents, 60 percent of ticket splitters, and 77 percent of Republicans answered yes to the following question: I would rather see Congress take a more thoughtful step-by-step approach focusing on commonsense reforms.

Human experience has always taught that enough small steps in the right direction is one good way to get you where you want to go and also a good way along the way to avoid many unexpected and unpleasant consequences.

Tuesday’s election in Massachusetts is the latest reminder that the American people are tired of risky, comprehensive schemes featuring taxes, debt, and Washington takeovers, as well as lots of hidden and unexpected surprises. It is time to declare that the era of the 1,000-page bill is over or the era of the 2,000-page bill is over or the era of the 2,700-page bill is over. A wise approach would be to set a clear goal, such as reducing health care costs, take a few steps in that direction and then a few more so that we can start solving the country’s problems in a way that reearns the trust of the American people.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article from the Wall Street Journal of Monday, September 21, written by James Q. Wilson, an article by David Broder from the Washington Post of September 24, and an article from the magazine National Affairs written by William Schambra.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 21, 2009]

A LIFE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

(By James Q. Wilson)

Irving Kristol not only helped change the country, he changed lives. He certainly changed mine.

When I was a young faculty member at Harvard, I learned that he, along with Daniel Bell, had just created *The Public Interest*. I wrote him to say how enthused I was to find a magazine that published serious but jargon-free essays in which scholars analyzed public policy. Irving called back to invite me to join him and his wife, Gertrude Himmelfarb, for dinner when I was next in New York City.

I was overwhelmed. The founding editor of an important magazine was inviting an unknown young writer to have dinner with him. I went as soon as I could. It was a nice meal, and Irving asked me to “write something” for the journal. “Write what?” I replied. “I will send you a government report you should discuss,” he suggested. He did, and I wrote about it for the magazine’s second issue. My piece was, at best, pedestrian, but I was hooked.

Reading the magazine became the center of my nonteaching life. I learned what Pat Moynihan, Robert Nisbet, Jacques Barzun, Martin Diamond, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, James Coleman, Peter Drucker and countless others thought about public policy. It was a new world: Thoughtful people with real knowledge were discussing public policy at a time, the mid-1960s, when the federal government was acting as if anything were possible.

These writers were discussants, not pundits. They wrote long essays (happily, free of footnotes) analyzing which policies might work and which would not. They did not utter slogans, they assumed there were intelligent readers out there, and for the most part did not embrace a party line. A magazine that later was said to be the founding

document of the neoconservative movement published work by Robert Solow, James Tobin, Christopher Jencks, Charles Reich, Charles Lindblom and many other conspicuous nonconservatives.

It was the right moment. President Lyndon Johnson was trying to create a new political era by asking the government to do things that not even Franklin Roosevelt had endorsed, and to do it in a period of prosperity. The large majorities his party had in Congress as a result of Johnson's decisive defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964 made it possible to create Medicare and Medicaid and to adopt major federal funding for local school systems. He created the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Johnson himself called what he was doing the creation of a "Great Society."

I was a small part of that world. I chaired a White House task force on crime for the president. It was a distinguished panel but after much effort we made very few useful recommendations. It slowly dawned on me that, important as the rising crime rate was, nobody knew how to make it a lot smaller. We assumed, of course, that the right policy was to eliminate the "root causes" of crime, but scholars disagreed about what many of those causes were and where they did agree they pointed to things, such as abusive families, about which a democratic government can do very little.

The view that we know less than we thought we knew about how to change the human condition came, in time, to be called neoconservatism. Many of the writers, myself included, disliked the term because we did not think we were conservative, neo or paleo. (I voted for John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey and worked in the latter's presidential campaign.) It would have been better if we had been called policy skeptics; that is, people who thought it was hard, though not impossible, to make useful and important changes in public policy.

Whatever the authors were called, their best essays reflected one general view: Let us use social science to analyze an existing policy to see if it works at a reasonable cost. This meant that these writings were backward looking in a world when liberals were relentlessly forward looking. If you look carefully at what has been done rather than announce boldly what ought to be done, you will be called, I suppose, a conservative. We were lucky, I imagine, not to be called reactionaries.

Irving Kristol smiled through all of this. He did not care what we were called and he gave to one of his published collections of essays the title, "Neoconservatism: the Autobiography of an Idea." He explained why that tendency differs from traditional conservatism: Neoconservatism is not an ideology, but a "persuasion." That is, it is a way of thinking about politics rather than a set of principles and rules. If neoconservatism does have any principle, it is this one: the law of unintended consequences. Launch a big project and you will almost surely discover that you have created many things you did not intend to create.

This is not an argument for doing nothing, but it is one, in my view, for doing things experimentally. Try your idea out in one place and see what happens before you inflict it on the whole country.

I recall when Nathan Glazer and I spoke at a conference on neoconservatism organized by The Partisan Review. Nat and I made all of these points about caution, experimentation and unintended consequences only to be told by one of the Review's editors that this was not enough: To be serious about politics, one had to have an organized ideology. Well, the Review certainly did.

In time I think The Public Interest began to speak more in one voice and the number of liberals who wrote for it declined. Every magazine acquires a character just as every human has a personality. That character was sharpened and reinforced by the cultural revolution of the late 1960s, which required of liberal skeptics that they become not merely critics of ill-advised policies but defenders of the nation to which those policies might apply.

Irving Kristol's talents were remarkable: He did for The Public Interest what he had earlier done for Commentary, the Reporter and Encounter—find good people and induce them to say important things even when it did not improve the revenues of the magazine. The Public Interest always relied on financial support from a few friends and rarely sold more than 12,000 copies. That didn't bother Irving at all: What counts is who reads it, not how many read it. And for 40 years a lot of important people did read it.

I was upset when the magazine ceased being published in the spring of 2005. With others I struggled to find a new home. There were some good possibilities for a new venture, but in time Irving said no, "Forty years is enough." And now for Irving, 89 years is enough—he died Friday of lung cancer. Losing him is like losing your favorite uncle: A wise and cheerful man who knew so much about so many things and would always help you out.

[From the Washington Post, Sept. 24, 2009]

MR. POLICY HITS A WALL

(By David S. Broder)

A new publication came across my desk this week containing an essay that offers as good an insight into President Obama's approach to government as anything I have read—and is particularly useful in understanding the struggle over health-care reform.

The publication is called National Affairs, and its advisory board is made up of noted conservative academics from James W. Ceaser to James Q. Wilson. The article that caught my eye, "Obama and the Policy Approach," was written by William Schambra, director of the Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal.

Schambra, like many others, was struck by the "sheer ambition" of Obama's legislative agenda and by his penchant for centralizing authority under a strong White House staff replete with many issue "czars."

Schambra sees this as evidence that "Obama is emphatically a 'policy approach' president. For him, governing means not just addressing discrete challenges as they arise, but formulating comprehensive policies aimed at giving large social systems—and indeed society itself—more rational and coherent forms and functions. In this view, the long-term, systemic problems of health care, education, and the environment cannot be solved in small pieces. They must be taken on in whole."

He traces the roots of this approach to the progressive movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when rapid social and economic change created a politics dominated by interest-group struggles. The progressives believed that the cure lay in applying the new wisdom of the social sciences to the art of government, an approach in which facts would heal the clash of ideologies and narrow constituencies.

Obama—a highly intelligent product of elite universities—is far from the first Democratic president to subscribe to this approach. Jimmy Carter, and especially Bill Clinton, attempted to govern this way. But Obama has made it even more explicit, regularly proclaiming his determination to rely

on rational analysis, rather than narrow decisions, on everything from missile defense to Afghanistan—and all the big issues at home.

"In one policy area after another," Schambra writes, "from transportation to science, urban policy to auto policy, Obama's formulation is virtually identical: Selfishness or ideological rigidity has led us to look at the problem in isolated pieces . . . we must put aside parochialism to take the long systemic view; and when we finally formulate a uniform national policy supported by empirical and objective data rather than shallow, insular opinion, we will arrive at solutions that are not only more effective but less costly as well. This is the mantra of the policy presidency."

[From National Affairs]

OBAMA AND THE POLICY APPROACH

(By William Schambra)

Nine months into his tenure, the patterns of President Barack Obama's style of governing are becoming clear. Obama had no executive experience when he took the presidential oath last winter—but he did come in with a particular idea of what politics and government are for, and how they ought to work. It is a view grounded in Progressive politics, and shared by a number of Democratic chief executives in recent decades. But Obama has articulated it, and his administration has embodied it, more fully than most.

Perhaps the most distinctive political characteristic of the Obama administration thus far is the sheer ambition of its early legislative agenda, which seeks to move a host of enormous initiatives all at once. The administration's most prominent organizational feature, meanwhile, is its reliance on issue "czars" to manage broad areas of policy. By the end of his first summer in office, Obama had named some 35 such policy superintendents—"more czars than the Romans," as one blogger quipped—overseeing matters ranging from health-care reform, energy, and regulation to stimulus accountability, corporate executive compensation, cyber security, and the Great Lakes.

Both his ambition and his unique style of issue management show that Obama is emphatically a "policy approach" president. For him, governing means not just addressing discrete challenges as they arise, but formulating comprehensive policies aimed at giving large social systems—and indeed society itself—more rational and coherent forms and functions. In this view, the long-term, systemic problems of health care, education, and the environment cannot be solved in small pieces. They must be taken on in whole, lest the unattended elements react against and undo the carefully orchestrated policy measures.

The "policy approach" Obama seems to be embracing was best articulated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his classic essay "Policy vs. Program in the 1970s," published in the Summer 1970 issue of The Public Interest. "A policy approach to government," Moynihan wrote, begins "by seeking to encompass the largest possible range of phenomena and concerns." This means, to begin with, that "everything relates to everything," and therefore that "there are no social interests about which the national government does not have some policy or other." But these policies cannot simply consist of discrete interventions meant to address particular concerns. Public problems, arising in intricate social systems, are just too complex for that. Instead, policy should aim to give the system as a whole the proper shape, and then the elaborate array of programs, rules, incentives, pressures, and intentions will better fall into place.

Writ large, this approach suggests that government exists not to attend to the various problems in the life of a society, but to take up society itself as a problem—and improve it. The consequent expansion of the reach of government, proponents of this view contend, is not driven by anything as crude as presidential ambition or “socialist” ideology. It is simply a realistic and pragmatic response to the inexorable demands of the web of social reality.

To address social problems this way, the policymaker must put himself outside the circle of those whom he governs, and, informed especially by social science, see beyond their narrow clashing interests. This presents a problem in the politics of a democracy, of course, since most citizens (and the self-interested politicians they elect) either are baffled by or deliberately ignore social complexity and interrelatedness. The resulting truncated policies, reflecting unenlightened popular prejudices or arbitrary ideologies, tend to make a hash of the underlying network of causes and effects. The practitioner of the policy approach must gently chide these citizens and politicians for their short-sightedness. He must insist that they put away their childish things, and get down to the hard and serious work of attending to the complicated causes of society's problems. And he must recruit to his administration a cadre of experts who can detect those causes—experts professionally trained in the natural or social sciences, which alone enable us to fully grasp social complexity and to design appropriate interventions.

Hence policy czars, mandated to follow the causal threads wherever they may lead, passing freely across the anachronistic and arbitrary boundaries of executive departments without undue concern for political turf. Hence Obama's ill-concealed frustration with what he so often calls the “tired old arguments” that compose our day-to-day politics. Hence also the immense ambition of his first-year agenda—and the immense obstacles and complications he will no doubt face as he moves forward.

THE SCIENCE OF GOVERNMENT

The ideal of the policy presidency is deeply rooted in the enduring American Progressive movement, and particularly in its understanding of the social sciences. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, new economic and technological developments—factory production, mass markets, railroads, the telegraph and telephone—shattered the old boundaries of what historian Robert Wiebe aptly called our “island communities.” Instead, we seemed to be increasingly intertwined, our existence affected by distant developments whose ramifications arrived unbidden in our lives through steel rail and copper wire.

That growing interdependence, writes Thomas Haskell in *The Emergence of Professional Social Science*, meant that the “effective cause of any event or condition . . . became more contingent and more difficult to trace.” Everyday common sense now failed to explain the world, which seemed to be shaped instead by “long chains of causation that stretched off into a murky distance.” Human behavior was no longer directed by autonomous moral choice, but rather by “a host of determinants external to the conscious mind.” For the early Progressives, this brought into question the ideal of the free, self-governing, and personally responsible human being and citizen. And it led to the elevation of those equipped with sciences of society that promised to trace the chains of causation into the murk—those who appreciated, as sociologist Lester Frank Ward put it, that “every fact and every phe-

nomenon is indissolubly linked to every other.”

The professional social scientist—the economist, sociologist, psychologist, and political scientist—now had a critical role to play in society because, as Haskell points out, “it was largely through his explanatory prowess that men might learn to understand their complex situation, and largely through his predictive ability that men might cooperatively control society's future.” As the prominent Progressive (and founder of the New Republic) Herbert Croly put it, “in the more complex, the more fluid, and the more highly energized, equipped, and differentiated society of today,” the “cohesive element” would be “the completest social record,” which could be assembled only by social-science experts “using social knowledge in the interest of valid social purposes.”

This conviction became the basis for the Progressive political movement in early 20th-century America. The politics of that era seemed dangerously corrupt and tumultuous, with politicians either despoiling the public for personal and constituent enrichment or roiling public opinion with radically divisive new ideologies like socialism. In tones resembling Obama's rhetoric today, the Progressives condemned such behavior as short-sighted, parochial, and irresponsible. These reckless political practices, they argued, ignored growing social interdependencies that demanded empirically grounded, objective, far-sighted decisions focused on the larger national interest.

Progressivism's solution was to shift the administration of public affairs out of the hands of citizens and politicians still in the thrall of fragmented (and therefore dysfunctional) views of social reality, and into the hands of a new professional class steeped in the social sciences. They alone could formulate coherent intellectual maps of an interrelated world, and interventions sophisticated enough to bend the causal chains in the desired direction. In Croly's words, Progressivism believed that a “better future would derive from the beneficent activities of expert social engineers who would bring to the service of social ideals all the technical resources which research could discover and ingenuity could devise.”

Progressive doctrine—particularly as extended and elaborated in President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society—thus demanded the centralization of political power in the American presidency and its bureaucratic apparatus, organized according to the rational and orderly doctrines of scientific management and public administration. Progressive reformers throughout the 20th century came to denigrate the wisdom and relevance of the American Constitution, which frustrated centralization and coordination by dispersing governing power across the states and over the branches of government. Once thought essential to American freedom, these institutions now came to be seen as impediments to coherent national governance.

The apogee of social science's influence in American public life came with Johnson's Great Society and its vast proliferation of professionally designed programs to address housing, poverty, education, urban affairs, and other public problems. “There was a prevailing faith that social science could diagnose the causes of human problems and develop sound and effective public policy cures,” note Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrodt in their history of the 1960s.

This brought on what Moynihan (in the first issue of *The Public Interest*, in 1965) called “the professionalization of reform.” The expert class had become persuaded that our supply of social-science knowledge had

accreted to the point that we now had reasonable assurance of bending society and economy to our will, he argued. And the project of reform was attracting larger segments of the middle class—who, benefiting from expanding higher education, were introduced to the allure of the “independence of judgment, esoteric knowledge, and immunity to outside criticism that characterize professionals.” Public policy now tended to respond not to social movements, but rather to the concerns of the professionals—not only because of their superior expertise, but also because they were reaching a critical mass within the institutions of government and the economy.

Political scientist Samuel Beer summarized the increasingly autonomous role played by experts in the Great Society and subsequent administrations as “the technocratic takeover.” As he put it, with all major contemporary policy problems, “it has been, in very great measure, people in government service, or closely associated with it, acting on the basis of their specialized and technical knowledge, who first perceived the problem, conceived the program, initially urged it on the president and Congress, went on to help lobby it through to enactment, and then saw to its administration.”

The professionalization of reform and technocratic takeover went beyond government boundaries, however. As Hugh Heclo, Lester Salamon, and other scholars have observed, much of the expansion of federal programs in the Great Society and beyond involved not adding more federal bureaucrats, but rather subsidizing third-party providers at lower levels of government and throughout the non-profit sector. These institutions, too, took on a professional cast, as they recruited experts to design, execute, evaluate, and report on the federal programs for which they were responsible. They also inevitably became advocates for sustained government support for their services. Private charitable foundations, which had previously been mainstays of support for non-profit service providers, now chose instead to join them in pushing for increased government funding of services. Philanthropy was then left free to fund experimental projects that would blaze trails for yet more government programs.

Over time, “issue networks” (to use Heclo's term) began to develop, linking government bureaucrats, congressional staff, non-profit administrators, foundation program officers, and policy advocates around a shared interest in specific policy areas. Though they didn't always agree on policy particulars, Heclo maintains, they shared a “common language for discussing the issues, a shared grammar for identifying the major points of contention, a mutually familiar rhetoric of argumentation.” These networks would provide quiet but self-sustaining momentum for federal programs, even in the face of hostile presidents.

Frank Baumgartner and Christine Mahoney have argued that as new government initiatives were established, “the programs and spending associated with them generated new interests themselves, as affected constituencies, service providers, and others entered into long-term relations with the government officials responsible for these new programs.” As Michael Greve explains, even the Reagan administration eventually gave up trying to make a dent in federal support for liberal advocacy groups, concluding that “defending was a fight it could not win without mounting an extraordinary effort,” and that “government funding of advocacy groups had become too deeply engrained in the structure of American government.”

Thus, the policy approach to governing, and especially to the executive branch, came

to take hold on the left and in Washington policy circles. It has played a role in the work of every recent administration—whether as implicit *modus operandi* or as exasperating foil—but not until President Obama has it had a genuine, life-long true believer in the Oval Office.

THE POLICY PRESIDENT

Obama's early life primed him for this way of thinking about politics. The circumstances of his family and his globally peripatetic youth acquainted him with a variety of strong traditional cultures—Kenyan, Kansan, Indonesian—that had not yet been entirely pulverized by modern cosmopolitanism. Obama's first book, *Dreams from My Father*, is in part his account of trying on several of the tightly woven cultural garments that his background made accessible to him. As he often puts it himself, this experience endowed him with a remarkable capacity to appreciate the most diverse moral and cultural beliefs, coolly and objectively assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Because he was in but never entirely of several cultures, he was left with a wistful sense that he would always somehow be on the outside looking in.

But his cosmopolitan childhood ensured that Obama would not be burdened by a crippling illusion so common in the traditional community: that its way is the right way, and that it can autonomously shape its common life accordingly, free of the sprawling chains of social causality. From his earliest days—helped by the guidance and example of his mother, who held a Ph.D. in anthropology—Obama understood and easily glided through the network of interdependency that, as the Progressives had predicted, was eroding traditional communities and pulling us all together in vast systems of relationship.

When a Chicago non-profit accepted his application for a job as a community organizer, Obama put on the garment of a Chicagoan. That he was not born and reared in one of the strong and often insular ethnic neighborhoods of the city of broad shoulders was not particularly relevant. He was not there to help a local neighborhood rebuild a coherent sense of community that would enable it to solve its own problems according to its own values. Rather, he was there to help local residents understand the larger networks of power and influence that determined their lives, and which alone could provide the resources and knowledge to alleviate their poverty. What the South Side of Chicago needed was not an illusory sense of community efficacy, but rather the clout to force the importation of professional expertise—in the form of city-paid employment specialists at a new job center, and hazardous waste-removal workers to clean up asbestos at the Altgeld Gardens housing complex.

After his legal education, Obama found his way into the “issue networks” that had come to dominate Chicago politics—the non-profits, advocacy coalitions, and foundations committed to ever more extensive and sophisticated interventions by trained professionals into the lives of Chicago's distressed neighborhoods. In all major American cities today, as the Manhattan Institute's Steven Malanga observes, this constellation of forces—along with the municipal and educational unions—has replaced the traditional urban political machine; it is the new engine driving the perpetual expansion of municipal services and budgets. In addition to ongoing work with local advocacy groups, Obama served on the boards of two major foundations that are leading national proponents for the development and expansion of government services.

The mode of thought inculcated by this sort of work is reflected in the final report of

the Chicago Annenberg Challenge—a massive local school-reform project (co-founded by the former Weather Underground radical William Ayers) that Obama chaired. The report suggests that the effort fell well short of expectations precisely because it left too much discretion to the untutored leaders of local schools. It would have been better to “provide guidance for local initiatives in the form of well-researched and well-thought-out maps for change,” the report maintained, which would “present sound theories and principles that might enhance the effectiveness of local thinking and action.” It was too much to expect everyday citizens to understand the complex forces affecting their schools without substantial, theoretically informed intervention by the professionals.

Obama's chief complaint as a new U.S. senator was that Washington's discourse seemed to be dominated by the bitter, tired, ideologically driven politics that had characterized the pre-Progressive era. Most Americans, he insisted in his second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, exhibited a “pragmatic, non-ideological attitude” and were “weary of the dead zone that politics has become, in which narrow interests vie for advantage and ideological minorities seek to impose their own versions of absolute truth.”

Obama preferred an approach to public policy that would make greater use of objective evidence, scientific facts, and expert counsel. For example, he suggests in the book, we could take on the health-care problem by “having a nonpartisan group like the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine determine what a basic, high-quality health-care plan should look like and how much it should cost,” examining “which existing health-care programs deliver the best care in the most cost-effective manner.” In other words, the beginning of reform lies in the formulations of professional expertise.

During Obama's presidential campaign, journalists were clearly impressed by his willingness to consult and rely on the policy professionals. But the candidate's adamancy about seeking out proven experts came as no surprise to Obama advisor Cass Sunstein, who observed that “in his empiricism, his curiosity, his insistence on nuance, and his lack of dogmatism, Obama is indeed a sort of anti-Bush” from whom we will see “a rigorously evidence-based government.”

In January, the Boston Globe reported with hometown pride that the newly elected president had turned particularly to Harvard University for key administration officials. It seemed only natural, since Obama was “a preternaturally self-confident product of the meritocracy” and had a “reputation as a seeker of the expertise and intellect that Harvard prides itself on attracting.”

Small wonder, then, that as president, Obama's explanation for today's economic crisis reflects a distinctively Progressive tone, with a call to renounce short-term and selfish private indulgence in the name of empirically based, objective analysis of the long-term, system-wide view. There has “been a tendency to score political points instead of rolling up sleeves to solve real problems,” he suggested in his “New Foundation” speech at Georgetown University in April. The problems we face, he continued, “are all working off each other to feed a vicious economic downturn,” so “we've had no choice but to attack on all fronts of our economic crisis at once.”

To address these challenges, Obama insists, we must come up with comprehensive policies that account for the entire sweep of interconnected social and economic factors contributing to the problem, and whose coordination will contribute to its solution. Echoing Moynihan's understanding of the implications of the policy approach, Obama

suggests that tackling only isolated pieces of the problem, or trying to solve only one problem at a time, will merely introduce further distortions into what should be treated as a unified and coordinated system. A comprehensive policy approach will enable us to take maximum advantage of natural- and social-science expertise, displacing expensive or ineffective local practices by spreading system-wide those programs that have proven to be more effective and less expensive, as documented by thorough research and experimentation.

Approaching the problems of the health-care system individually and incrementally, Obama insisted in a speech in July, “is precisely [the] kind of small thinking that has led us into the current predicament.” The inefficiencies and shortcomings of health-care financing will be done away with only if an extensive system is built that assigns and regulates roles for all the players, including federal and state health programs, medical personnel, hospitals, insurance companies, and all American citizens. Once this new universal network of relationships is established, science and technology—comparative effectiveness research, electronic medical records—can make their contributions. And once all Americans receive the treatments judged most effective according to rigorously empirical measurement, the nation's health care will be delivered everywhere as it is today at the Mayo Clinic.

Likewise, Obama and his allies insist that our national approach to energy and the environment must be based on the recognition that we are embedded in an intricate system of ecological linkages. In Obama's view, we have recklessly spewed carbon into the atmosphere because of poor decisions about housing, transportation, and electricity use—ignoring the web that ties them all together. Here, too, the answer is a system of energy supply that brings to bear the latest scientific research: A proposed “cap-and-trade” program will establish standards for measuring and regulating the emission of carbon; and a nationally interlinked web for energy transmission will carry renewable energy from wherever it is produced to wherever it is needed, no matter the distance.

Our education system, too, is chaotic and disorganized, according to Obama. Too many states and localities are going in too many different directions, and Washington “has been trapped in the same stale debates that have paralyzed progress and perpetuated our educational decline,” as he put it to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Again, the president argues, the solution is a more uniform application of expert guidance and direction. “It's time to give all Americans a complete and competitive education from the cradle up through a career,” he said in March. And that trajectory should be enabled by one overarching system, because “it's time to move beyond the idea that we need several different programs to address several different problems—we need one comprehensive policy that addresses our comprehensive challenges.”

In one policy area after another—from transportation to science, urban policy to auto policy—Obama's formulation is virtually identical: selfishness or ideological rigidity has led us to look at the problem in isolated pieces rather than as an all-encompassing system; we must put aside parochialism to take the long systemic view; and when we finally formulate a uniform national policy supported by empirical and objective data rather than shallow, insular opinion, we will arrive at solutions that are not only more effective but less costly as well. This is the mantra of the policy presidency.

And overseeing each of these policy areas will be a “czar,” attuned to the big picture.

This key presidential aide—almost invariably a policy expert rather than a political figure—will coordinate the activities of the various departments through which the intricate policy web is woven, and focus the latest expert advice and counsel on his particular segment of the problem of the whole.

POLITICS AND POLICY

How will the Obama policy-approach presidency fare? We can find a clue in the unrest stirred by his growing list of “czars.” Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, Obama’s fellow Democrat, objects to this new structure, complaining that the czars “rarely testify before congressional committees and often shield the information and decision-making process behind the assertion of executive privilege.” Indeed, he argues, “the rapid and easy accumulation of power by the White House staff can threaten the constitutional system of checks and balances.” Liberal law professor Bruce Ackerman suggests that “we need to seriously consider requiring Senate approval of senior White House staff positions.”

These cavils are unlikely to prompt serious action, but they do remind us of the persistence of our constitutional system of checks and balances and of a Senate jealous of its prerogatives. And that points to a central vulnerability of the policy-approach presidency. To be successful by its own definition, each of its policies must necessarily be rational, coherent, and all-encompassing, whether the issue is health care, energy, or education. And yet, as the early Progressives knew all too well, critical elements of the constitutional system—the executive cabinet, federal decentralization, the separation of powers, and the extended commercial republic—serve to shred and fragment policy proposals as they make their way from the minds of their expert designers through departmental bureaucracy and legislative committees (not to mention their hearings in the court of public opinion). Once enacted, the execution of policy is similarly trammelled by our political system’s fragmented dispersal of administrative authority. The result is often policy that is irrational, incoherent, and partial. Policies not designed to take account of that reality usually turn to mush in practice.

This failure to heed the realities of our politics often first presents itself in the form of an overly ambitious agenda that ignores the nature of the legislative process. Pressed to take on too much at once in pursuit of holistic reform, the system overheats quickly and easily. President Jimmy Carter discovered the risks of this approach when, as political scientist James Ceaser reminds us, he pursued his own version of a policy presidency. “Imbued with a technocratic perspective toward problem solving,” Ceaser writes, “Carter seemed to view the task of governing in terms of the management of complex and interrelated policies.” Or, as Carter speechwriter James Fallows noted toward the end of Carter’s administration, he “thinks he ‘leads’ by choosing the correct policy,” and so he came to hold “explicit, thorough positions on every issue under the sun.”

The Carter administration therefore generated a flood of elaborate and complex proposals covering energy, housing, welfare reform, income policy, families, neighborhoods, and urban affairs, among other issues. To take urban affairs as an example, Carter’s call for “A New Partnership” insisted that we “must carefully plan the total range of Federal, State, and local actions” in urban areas. To accomplish this, the partnership laid out, as urban planner Charles Orlebeke put it, an “elaborate edifice” of seven governing principles, four goals, ten policies,

and 38 strategies for implementation. Carter promised to “work with, encourage, support and stimulate every other level of government plus the private sector and neighborhood groups—all at the same time with equal fervor.” This is precisely the sort of expansive and encompassing programming demanded by a genuinely comprehensive policy approach.

The administration’s “complex and ambitious program seemed to confuse the public and ultimately to paralyze the operation of government,” Ceaser notes, leaving it little to show for all its technocratic bustle. By contrast, Carter’s successor Ronald Reagan deliberately limited his proposals to Congress to one or two top priority items at a time, having learned precisely this lesson from Carter’s failures.

Obama has taken his stand with the comprehensive approach, noting repeatedly that while there are “some who believe we can only handle one challenge at a time,” in fact “we don’t have the luxury of choosing between getting our economy moving now and rebuilding it over the long term.” Outdoing Carter, Obama doesn’t just view each separate area of public concern as a realm for the development of a comprehensive policy. He insists that, following the intractable interconnectedness of the pieces of his recovery plan, all the areas of concern must be covered immediately, simultaneously, and in a coordinated fashion. The comprehensive policies themselves must all fit into a larger comprehensive policy. Only thereby will they cohere into a uniform and truly comprehensive “new foundation” for the revival of the economy.

But as Obama’s proposals begin their journeys through the requisite institutional hoops, they will inevitably begin to lose their coherence and uniformity. A policy czar may entertain a single, overarching vision, but the various and often conflicting cabinet secretaries under his supervision, along with their vast attendant bureaucracies, may have very different interpretations of that vision and of how it is to be implemented. And congressional bargaining is never kind to fragile policy gems containing numerous carefully interconnected parts that must all be preserved intact in order to work.

The Obama agenda is particularly vulnerable to congressional distortions of executive intentions, owing to what might be an over-corrective reaction to the lessons of President Bill Clinton’s health-care reform proposal—which died without a congressional vote in 1994. The Clinton administration, too, embraced a version of the policy approach, believing that health-care reform could be accomplished only by addressing all the pieces within a coherent and unified system. Clinton, too, argued that the nation’s economic recovery from the recession of the early 1990s depended on it. His Task Force on Health Care Reform brought together more than 500 experts from all relevant federal departments, legislative staffs, governors’ offices, and universities to produce a massive, 1,000-page proposal. It covered every conceivable aspect of health care—down to establishing limits on the number of specialists that medical schools could produce.

In Boomerang, her account of the Clinton reform plan, Harvard sociologist Theda Skocpol suggests that since the task force “made such a gargantuan effort to come up with a truly comprehensive plan for reform—a plan thought at the time to be both technically and politically workable—there was a natural tendency for administration planners to see their proposal as a logical achievement to be ‘explained.’” That is, the planners could not bring themselves to dicker with Congress over the specifics, because

they were convinced that all the pieces had to fit together in order for the policy to succeed. Yet as the New York Times’s Matt Bai has observed, “Ever jealous of its prerogative, Congress took a long look, yawned and kicked the whole plan to the gutter, where it soon washed away for good—along with much of Clinton’s ambition for his presidency.”

On the surface, Obama seems to have absorbed the moral of that failure. He has begun the process of revamping health care and environmental policy by proclaiming general principles that any plan must feature, while leaving the specifics of the programs to Congress. But it remains to be seen whether a Congress reflecting a vast array of contending geographic and economic interests can produce the sort of internally consistent and comprehensive proposal that the policy approach considers essential for success. Obama has articulated criteria for measuring the value of a plan that are out of line with his decision to leave the plan’s construction to Congress.

In reality, the Clinton and Obama models are not all that different. Sooner or later, one way or another, the exquisite workings of policy experts must be subjected to the brute judgment of elected officials, who have not lost their quaint (if inefficient) attachments to the varied desires, needs, and interests of their constituents. The sheer intellectual coherence of a plan does not protect it from the need to justify itself to the American constitutional system. The policy approach has not overcome democratic politics, and so remains a profoundly problematic way to try to govern our democracy.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE POLITICAL

Progressivism was initially attracted to social science precisely because it would permit us to avoid or transcend political conflict grounded in irresolvable economic and moral differences. Meticulous empirical research that assembled all available data about a given problem would, Progressives believed, provide a solid, indisputable, shared ground for subsequent deliberation. Indeed, social-science data would be so compelling that the solution to the problem would likely emerge from its own scientifically rigorous description. It’s not just that facts would be more important than values: Facts would suggest the most plausible values. Or, as the American pragmatists believed, what works best to help us grasp and shape reality becomes the moral good.

We find traces of this thinking in The Audacity of Hope. “I understand that facts alone can’t always settle our political disputes,” Obama concedes, but “the absence of even rough agreement on the facts puts every opinion on equal footing and therefore eliminates the basis for thoughtful compromise.” He insists, however, that “sometimes there are more accurate and less accurate answers; sometimes there are facts that cannot be spun, just as an argument about whether it’s raining can usually be settled by stepping outside.” Clearly, Obama’s heavy reliance on policy expertise is designed not just to produce more accurate answers, though that is surely a critical goal. It also aims to quell the shrill exchange of equal (because equally baseless) opinions that, in his view, has come to characterize American politics. Where available—and Obama intends to multiply the situations where they are available—pure non-political facts will provide the grounds for the resolution of policy questions, fulfilling Progressivism’s faith in the natural and social sciences.

But what then to say about the increasing use of social-science data by conservative scholars, who seem to use it to provoke and

sustain, rather than to ameliorate, partisan conflict with Progressive reformers? Some liberals simply insist that what conservative scholars produce is inferior or false social science, because it is produced in service of ideology rather than objective truth. Eric Wanner, former president of the liberal Russell Sage Foundation, insists that “the AEIs and the Heritages of the world represent the inversion of the Progressive faith that social science should shape social policy.” In his Paradox of American Democracy, John Judis complains that conservative think-tank scholars “did not seek to be above class, party, and ideology” like earlier, disinterested social scientists, but rather “were openly pro-business and conservative.” They thereby “rejected the very idea of a dispassionate and disinterested elite that could focus on the national interest.”

But the notion that there is true and false social science relies on our ability to locate a fixed and universally accepted standard according to which we can say that some conclusions are beyond dispute because they are empirically true. Certainly that was the initial Progressive vision for social science. Yet the policy and social sciences have come nowhere close to such a standard in assessing society. In 1979, Edward Banfield wrote that the “persistent efforts of reformers to do away with politics and to put social science and other expertise in its place are not to be accounted for by the existence of a body of knowledge about how to solve social problems,” because no such body exists. Indeed, he continued, “there are few social science theories or findings that could be of much help to a policy maker.”

Ten years later, Ronald Brunner noted in *Policy Sciences* that it was difficult to assess the usefulness of the policy movement, because its “various parts tend to differ in their judgments of the relevant standards, data, and inferences to be drawn from them, whenever their judgments are made explicit”; nonetheless, the policy approach’s “results typically have fallen short of the aspirations for rational, objective analysis.” Positivist social science had “assumed that if the behavioral equivalents of Newton’s laws could be discovered, they would provide a basis for rational and objective policy. Rationality would be served because the consequences of policy alternatives could be predicted with precision and accuracy,” while the “valid system of generalizations would reduce controversy in the policy arena.” But still, according to Brunner, “after roughly four decades of behavioral research, positivists have not yet discovered universal covering laws that predict human behavior with accuracy and precision.”

In short, policy science cannot be depended upon to dampen or eliminate conflicting points of view because it is itself riven by deep divisions over how best to develop, analyze, implement, and evaluate public policy. And these divisions cannot be explained away by a conservative conspiracy to dilute genuine, objective social science with a spurious, ideologically driven imitation. Social science begins from one place or another in society, and can do great good that way. But it cannot step outside the circle of our social life; no human activity can.

The Obama administration will of course insist that its policy plans are rooted in unassailably objective research. But there may well be equally compelling research supporting contrary conclusions, and the debate between them cannot be resolved by insisting that true science supports only one kind of conclusion. Often the origins of the dispute have to do with people’s sense of the most important questions to ask, the most critical goals to set, or the highest ends of society. These are generally determined by

those outmoded, yet stubborn, values—not social science.

President Obama knows, however, that whatever the state of the policy approach’s epistemological foundations, it is vital to making the case for his political project. For example, he can insist that he is undertaking only reluctantly, and certainly without selfish ambition or ulterior motive, a massive and ambitious expansion of government into major segments of the American economy because it has been shown necessary. “I don’t want to run GM,” Obama told reporters as he initiated a government takeover of the company. The decision was not driven by personal choice, he seemed to suggest. It was simply what a thoroughgoing and effective policy approach demands. As Ceaser points out, “to speak of a policy for any given area of activity already implies that that area is a matter for legitimate superintendence by government.” Only an unsophisticated rube would mistake the pristinely objective dictates of the policy approach for “socialism.”

But the mention of unsophisticated rubes points to a final possible problem for President Obama’s policy approach, this one related to America’s commitment to democratic self-government. Obama’s technocratic rhetoric is meant to be soothing and reassuring to an American public fed up with intractable ideological division: Many of our problems will resolve themselves once we have collected the facts about them, because facts can ground and shape our political discussions, deflating ideological claims and leaving behind rational and objective answers in place of tired old debates. But in spite of several decades of data production by social science, American politics has proven itself to be remarkably resistant to the pacifying effects of facts. It has continued to be driven, as James Madison predicted, by the proliferation and clash of diverse “opinions, passions and interests.”

Indeed, as Madison put it, “as long as the reason of man continues to be fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed.” It may be that, in the end, the proponents of the policy approach disagree with Madison’s premise that reason is fallible. But if that is their view, they can hardly claim much empirical evidence for it.

Though Madison believed the most common source of different opinions to be property, he also understood that Americans were likely as well to divide along religious and moral lines, reflecting convictions about ultimate questions of good and evil that cannot be resolved through scientific reason. This does not mean they take in only part of the picture, but that they disagree about what is best for the whole, for reasons that run deep. These disagreements, although they do not always lend themselves to scientific analysis and technical solution, speak to genuine human yearnings and concerns. They are often rooted in many centuries of experience and wisdom, and can hardly be dismissed as irrelevant to the life of a liberal society—let alone as illegitimate subjects for political debate.

This leads to the most troublesome implication of Obama’s policy approach, which revealed itself in what might have been the chief blunder of his presidential campaign: his offhand remark that some Americans continue to “cling” to guns and religion in the face of adversity. The comment betrayed Obama’s debt to the Progressive view that such parochial values are poor substitutes for a sophisticated understanding of the larger networks of causality that determine the lives of everyday Americans. In light of such an understanding, the old debates that grip American politics may well look rather ridiculous.

The policy approach begins from the assumption that those old disagreements are

fundamentally an error, or a function of a temporary lack of information. It begins, in other words, from the contention that democracy is an illegitimate, or at least a highly inadequate, way to govern a society. This is a deeply anti-political way of thinking, grounded in a gross exaggeration of the capacity of human knowledge and reason. American politics as we have known it appreciates the fact that fallible men and women cannot command the whole—and so must somehow manage the interactions and the tensions among parts. Social science—however sophisticated it might now be—has come nowhere near disproving that premise. Unless it does, social science will always best serve politics by helping to address the particular problems that bedevil society as they arise, rather than treating society itself as one large problem to be solved.

This is not because society is not in fact an intricate web as the early Progressives asserted, but precisely because it is—a web far too intricate to be reliably manipulated. We are not capable of weaving our society anew from fresh whole modern cloth—and so we should instead make the most of the great social garment we have inherited, in its rich if always unkempt splendor, mending what is torn and improving what we can.

Our constitutional system is constructed on this understanding of the limits of reason and of the goals of politics. Every effort to impose the policy approach upon it has so far ended in failure and disappointment, and done much lasting harm. President Obama is now attempting the most ambitious such effort in at least 40 years. He brings considerable talent and charm to the attempt—but the obstacles to its success remain as firm and deeply rooted as ever.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

THE NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. JOHANNES. Madam President, I rise today to speak in support of a pending amendment. This amendment is called the Erasing Our National Debt Through Accountability and Responsibility Plan. I wish to start out today by saying I am very proud to be a cosponsor of what I consider to be a very commonsense amendment.

The Troubled Asset Relief Program, known as TARP, was enacted in the fall of 2008 for the U.S. Treasury to buy toxic assets, primarily mortgage-backed securities. It was sold to Congress as having a sole purpose of getting bad assets out of the market. It was sold as an idea of stabilizing the economy. At the time this was sold, this was it. This is what we told people this was going to do. Supposedly, it was going to be a one-time, very narrowly focused program during a time of the worst economic crisis we had seen in decades. Lawmakers at that time were warned that if we do not act now, if we do not take this action, the failure to act is going to be devastating. Yet Washington, after it got approval of this plan, almost immediately threw out the original game plan. Money was not used to buy those troubled assets. Instead, it was given to large banks with very few strings attached. The government hoped banks would generate small business loans, and would