

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 unassailable 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

send the money out to allow people to do auto loans and mortgage loans. That simply did not happen. There is plenty of finger-pointing going on as to why that did not happen, but the bottom line is that consumers were left to battle the credit crunch alone, and they felt abandoned in their fight. What did Washington expect when it gave away practically free money? From the get-go, the TARP rule book was simply tossed out the window. Since then, TARP has morphed in so many ways that most people cannot even remember, cannot even think about its original purpose.

The American people have unquestionably lost faith in the \$700-billion taxpayer-funded boondoggle. They expected it to get the economy up and lending. Now they feel duped, and I do not blame them. Instead of jump-starting lending in the economy, what this has turned into is a revolving slush fund for unrelated spending projects. It just goes on and on.

Let me run through a sample of what TARP has been used to fund:

No. 1, buy General Motors. Who knew that the U.S. Government would spend about \$50 billion of TARP buying not only an ownership interest in General Motors but a controlling interest? Back home in Nebraska, when I have talked to Nebraska citizens about this, I say to them: If I had come out during my campaign and suggested that the President of the United States would literally over a weekend have the ability to buy General Motors without any kind of congressional approval, no one—no one—would have believed me. Yet that is exactly what happened.

No. 2, there is a plan called cash for caulkers. We all know about that plan.

No. 3, the House passed a second stimulus—\$150 billion in TARP to fund more unrelated spending. Let me give a few examples: \$800 million for Amtrak; \$65 million for housing vouchers; \$500 million for summer youth employment; \$300 million for a college work study program.

No. 4, the doc fix—\$¼ trillion in TARP that will never be paid back, an immediate loss to the taxpayers.

No. 5, off-budget highway funding.

I could go on and on. The list just does not end. The projects being funded out of this now new slush fund do not seem to have an ending point. Some of these projects might be quite meritorious. One might look at them and say: Gosh, in the normal budgetary process, I would want to be a part of voting for those projects. I might support some of them in the normal budgeting process but not through some no accountability slush fund.

TARP has spiraled out of control, and it needs to end today—immediately. TARP was never intended to finance a wide array of spending programs where the taxpayer literally was going to be the loser. We must find a way to pay for government spending, not try to disguise it in TARP.

I am asking my colleagues to adopt the Thune amendment and end the no-

accountability TARP slush fund. This amendment would immediately stop the Treasury Department from spending more from the TARP funds. It would repeal the administration's ill-advised extension of TARP through October 2010. It would require TARP repayments to reduce our national debt. There would be no clever statutory interpretations to get around the debt reduction requirement. A payment comes in, the debt ceiling goes down. No more reckless spending. No more Russian roulette with taxpayers' money. Not only is this common sense, but it is good fiscal sense, and it is the right thing to do.

One thing is absolutely obvious: Taxpayers are asking us to work together to get deficit spending under control, to find solutions to problems that trouble this great Nation. This amendment, in my judgment, is absolutely the first step, a good start to get a handle on out-of-control spending, to start restoring faith with the American people. If TARP is ended, we show the American people that we are listening and that Congress is, in fact, serious about protecting taxpayers' money.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TARP

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, a speaker on the floor earlier—Senator JOHANNIS of Nebraska—was talking about TARP, and many of us recall this was a program started under the previous administration. President Bush and his Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Paulson, came to us, along with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, and basically told us America's economy and perhaps the global economy was on the edge of an abyss; that we could see what looked like an economic downturn turn into not only a recession but worse if we didn't act and act quickly.

The proposal they made was to go after what they called toxic assets, and so they created a program called the Toxic Assets Relief Program—TARP. They asked for some \$80 billion—an enormous sum of money—in order to go to financial institutions that were teetering on the brink of collapse and save them, in the hopes that in doing so, they could stabilize our economy.

Even though I took a few economics courses in college and have followed the course of American business, at least as a casual observer, it was hard to argue against their request because my fear was that failure to do anything would, in fact, bring this economy

down, costing us dramatic numbers of jobs and failures in the business community. So I voted for TARP. It seemed like one of the few things we could do that might have some chance of stabilizing the economy.

Of course, it is not the most popular program in America. The idea of taking hundreds of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to give to banks and investment operations that have failed—literally to the point of failure—seemed to be a rescue effort for a group that doesn't usually garner much sympathy, in terms of the activities they are engaged in day to day. The money went to a large share of these banks and financial institutions, and the net result is, virtually all of them were saved from collapse—all but Lehman Brothers, which had failed before this request.

So the economy moved forward. Then the bankers repaid the effort of the American taxpayers by announcing—many of them—they now felt times were so good for them they could start declaring bonuses for their officers and their employees—bonuses.

In the real world of 40-hour work weeks and day-to-day grind, most people see a bonus as a reward for good performance or successful performance. Many of these financial institutions were literally the victims of their own greed and their own malice and their own poor planning. Then, after taxpayers rescued them with TARP money, they wanted to turn around and reward themselves for good conduct. It grated on the American people and this Senator as well.

TARP, which was initiated to keep these banks from failing, is one which few of us would step up and say: Well, let's try that again. That was a great idea. I, frankly, think it was probably a necessary thing to do at the moment, but it is not a model I wish to recreate, certainly when you look at the reaction of the banks after we helped them. But the Senator from Nebraska comes to the floor and basically says: Let's liquidate and end this program. On its face, that sounds like a good idea but for one thing: Now some of these banks and financial institutions are paying us back with interest. We had hoped they all would. Maybe most of them will. The taxpayers deserve that.

Money that is coming back in is not like found money. We anticipated a payback. But it is money which creates an opportunity. Now the Senator from Nebraska would have us basically eliminate that program and the money coming in could not be spent for other purposes. I think that is a mistake. We spent up to \$800 billion to rescue Wall Street. As the cliché goes, it is time for us to consider spending that money to rescue Main Street. For instance, if we took a substantial portion of the TARP money coming back from the big banks, and the interest coming back from the big banks, and redirected it to community banks expressly for the purpose of providing credit for small