

## Chapter 27

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# Strategies for Coalition Leaders

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How do leaders assemble winning coalitions for the proposals that they put before Congress? How do they anticipate legislators' electoral needs when they design policies, fashion arguments, and choose procedures? How do leaders harness legislators' electoral ambitions to advance their own goals? This chapter examines the strategies available for building coalitions and shows how leaders choose among them. Such strategies are general plans for attracting support, both within Congress and among attentive and inattentive publics.

Building winning coalitions is hard work. Legislators who merely drop bills in the hopper and wait for something to happen are invariably disappointed. Nothing happens in Congress unless someone plans for it and works for it. Someone must define the problems, shape the alternatives, initiate action, mobilize support, arrange compromises, and work to see that Congress passes specific bills. Those who perform these duties I refer to as coalition leaders.

Coalition leaders may be drawn from both inside and outside Congress. They include rank-and-file legislators, committee and subcommittee leaders, party leaders, congressional staff members, the president, presidential staff members, executive branch officials, bureaucrats, and interest group leaders. In this chapter I seek to explain the behavior of the generic leader; I do not try to isolate the differences in the strategies and tactics of various types of coalition leaders. Of course, there are enormous differences between the resources and talents of a president like Lyndon Johnson, the average chairman of a House committee, and a freshman legislator from the minority party. Most of these differences are well known. What are not well known are the ways in which successful leaders of every variety go about anticipating and responding to legislators' electoral needs as they build winning coalitions.

My analysis begins at the point that someone decides to build a coalition for a specific proposal. I do not examine why individuals choose to become coalition leaders in the first place, why they choose to attack specific problems or advance

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specific remedies, or why they invest their scarce time and resources in mobilizing support. These are all interesting and important questions, but they are peripheral to my central argument. As far as my theory is concerned, individuals volunteer, for reasons of their own, to champion or oppose certain causes. Once they have volunteered, the problem for theory is to explain why they adopt specific strategies to advance or retard those causes (this chapter) and why one side wins and the other side loses (Arnold 1990, chapter 6).

The supply of coalition leaders is not uniformly distributed across the range of policy problems and policy solutions. Some policy proposals attract coalition leaders in droves, while others offer few incentives to leaders of any sort (see Kingdon 1984, 23–47; Price 1978). Most coalition leaders have an intense interest in at least one aspect of a policy proposal—perhaps its general costs or benefits, its geographic effects, or its group effects. Proposals with concentrated geographic effects tend to acquire legislators from the affected areas as leaders. Those with concentrated group effects tend to attract bureaucrats, interest group leaders, and some legislators.<sup>1</sup> Proposals that are heavily laden with general costs or benefits offer mixed incentives. Those with general effects that are highly salient tend to attract coalition leaders quite easily, whereas proposals with general effects that are either less visible or long delayed often have few champions. Finally, some individuals become coalition leaders because their current positions demand it. The president, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the chairmen of the House and Senate budget committees, for example, are natural candidates for building coalitions on budgetary matters.

Policies that promise large, early-order benefits tend to attract coalition leaders far more easily than those that promise only later-order benefits. When a policy offers both early-order and later-order benefits, it is generally the former that stimulates activism. The push for new educational programs invariably comes from teachers or school administrators, not students or their parents. The impetus for mass transit, mental health, or welfare programs comes from the professionals who deliver such services, rather than from those who receive the services.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, early-order costs are a greater stimulus to activism than are later-order costs. When the Senate battled over how strong automobile bumpers must be, the coalition leaders had nothing to do with automobiles, safety, or insurance. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) promoted standards that were met more easily by steel bumpers (produced in the great state of West Virginia), while Senator Warren Magnuson (D-WA) held out for a standard that favored aluminum bumpers (produced in the great state of Washington).<sup>3</sup> . . .

Coalition leaders are free to champion whatever policy proposals they choose.<sup>4</sup> Presumably most leaders select proposals that advance their own central interests. Once they have chosen a specific proposal, however, they face but a small set of potentially winning strategies. Success requires them to anticipate legislators' electoral needs, which itself requires them to anticipate the possible reactions of attentive and inattentive publics. These electoral needs place severe constraints on leaders' choices among strategies.

There are no universal strategies, appropriate for any proposal under any conditions. Leaders must tailor general strategies to fit the idiosyncrasies of specific

policy proposals. Leaders can choose from three strategic approaches, each of which anticipates legislators' electoral needs in a different way. *Strategies of persuasion* create, activate, or change the policy preferences of legislators, attentive publics, and inattentive publics. The intent is to shape policy preferences, both inside Congress and among relevant publics, to fit the original proposal. *Procedural strategies* attempt to influence legislators' political calculations by adroit use of legislative rules and procedures. The aim is to structure the legislative situation in a way that decreases the ability of an instigator to rouse inattentive publics or of a challenger to make a campaign issue out of a specific roll-call vote. *Strategies of modification* involve altering the various components of a policy, ranging from the policy instrument to the incidence of costs and benefits. The aim is to mold a policy so that it conforms better with legislators' and citizens' preferences and potential preferences.<sup>5</sup> Each of these general strategies can also be used by opposition leaders who are attempting to block a particular proposal, and both sides can combine strategies in various ways.

## STRATEGIES OF PERSUASION

Persuasion involves creating, activating, or changing the policy preferences of legislators, attentive publics, and (if necessary) inattentive publics. At times coalition leaders mount large-scale campaigns to shift elite and mass opinion toward a major programmatic initiative, such as national health insurance, energy policy, or the Equal Rights Amendment. Or leaders may confine their efforts to Washington and focus on legislators and the most attentive publics, as they shepherd a proposal through the various stages of the legislative process. Frequently coalition leaders and opposition leaders have but a few minutes to offer alternative interpretations of a surprise floor amendment that would change policy in some field.<sup>6</sup> No matter what the stage in coalition building, leaders seek to persuade legislators that a policy proposal is simultaneously a good idea *and* that it is unlikely to generate electoral problems for them. This deed can be accomplished either by generating favorable opinions among attentive and inattentive publics or by showing legislators that the program is unlikely to generate unfavorable opinions if people happen to hear about it.

An initial task for coalition leaders is to persuade people that a problem is one that government should tackle, and that the federal government should handle it. The easiest way to accomplish this goal is to link the new ends to some already well-established ends, making a new departure look like a logical extension of current policy rather than a dramatic shift in the role of government. Linkage strategies also make persuasion more economical because they build on established opinions rather than creating new opinion from scratch. . . .

The current favorite for linkage strategies is economic growth, productivity, and competitiveness. In fact, coalition leaders use economic productivity to justify some of the same policies that were once tied to national defense, such as education, basic scientific research, and various transportation and other infrastructure programs. The shift reflects both the increased political conflict associated with

national security policy and the rise to prominence of macroeconomic policy. Today anyone who wants to create a tax loophole, change a regulation affecting industry, or establish a new program should first develop an argument about how those changes will lead to economic growth, for nothing sells better in the current political climate. . . .

Linkage strategies become easier to use as the government grows in size and scope. In the beginning, when government performed only a few functions, each new proposal seemed like a major departure from current policy and, thus, required extensive debate. As governmental functions multiplied, it became increasingly easy to find well-established precedents for new proposals. The battles in the 1960s to enact federal aid to education, medical care, and civil rights were long and intense. Once enacted, they became excellent precedents for many more federal initiatives in these and neighboring fields.

The logic of linkage strategies rests, in part, on the tendency of legislators to establish consistent voting histories on recurrent issues (Kingdon 1981, 274–78). When urban issues emerge legislators vote one way, when civil rights issues are on the agenda they divide along different lines, and so on for social welfare, education, agriculture, and dozens of other issues (Clausen 1973). Coalition leaders for new issues attempt to exploit voting histories by attaching the proper labels to their proposals so that legislators will vote in predictable ways. Although voting histories can be taken as evidence that legislators vote ideologically, they also reflect an explicit calculation that voting in favor of (or against) a given type of policy has been good politics in the past and provides a safe course for the future (Kingdon 1981, 277).

Proponents are not the only ones who use linkage strategies. Opponents attempt to derail proposals by linking them with undesirable ends. When public opinion polls revealed that the original Medicare proposal was popular, opponents claimed that it was merely the first step toward socialized medicine; they warned of bureaucrats telling patients whom to see and doctors how to practice medicine (Harris 1966; Kelley 1956; Marmor 1973). Proponents of federal funding for day care centers stressed the needs of single mothers and the problem of persuading welfare mothers to work, while opponents raised the specter of the disintegration of the American family (Steiner 1976, 108). . . . Each side of a controversy attempts to link the proposal in question to some other issue for which the distribution of opinion is both known and favorable to its position.

Linking new policy goals to established goals is not the only way to market proposals. Leaders also marshal arguments to justify the federal government's tackling a new problem. They typically offer arguments showing the extent of the problem, why neither the private sector nor state and local governments can solve it, and how the federal government might ameliorate it. The original advocates of clean air legislation, for example, attempted to show how air pollution adversely affected health, why industry would never, on its own, control it, and why the problem was beyond the capacity of state governments, given the ease with which pollutants cross state boundaries (Jones 1975).

These arguments are most effective if coalition leaders can connect them to recent public events or tragedies that can attract media coverage, dramatize the

need for governmental action, and focus attention on anyone with a proposed solution. Advocates used the Soviet Union's launch of *Sputnik* to dramatize the need for NASA and the National Defense Education Act (Sundquist 1968, 173–80). . . .

Fortuitous events like these do not by themselves produce action. They merely create opportunities for coalition leaders to exploit. Their impact is greatest when proponents have already drafted legislation, held hearings, and prepared the way. A well-timed tragedy then forces an issue to the top of the agenda and creates the proper climate for rapid action. Leaders may even shape some events or affect their timing. . . .

Coalition leaders also seek to persuade legislators that the proposed policy instruments will actually produce the intended effects. This task is easiest for single-stage policies whose causal logic is simple and readily understandable. No one doubts, for example, that federal programs for the construction of roads, bridges, and sewers will actually increase the supply of each. The problems emerge when leaders attempt to market policies involving long, complex causal chains. Consider, for example, how difficult it was for proponents of deregulation to sell their proposals in Congress. Economists, even though united, could not reduce their arguments about the benefits of deregulation to a few simple sentences. . . . Coalition leaders can either conduct long educational campaigns in an attempt to persuade people that complicated programs would work, or they can substitute other policy instruments that are easier to market.

Coalition leaders can also seek to persuade legislators of a policy's merits by altering legislators' perceptions of the incidence of costs and benefits. This strategy is most obvious for geographic benefits. Proponents carefully calculate where the benefits will be concentrated and then inform those who will receive disproportionate shares of their good fortune. The Pentagon, for example, routinely assembles a list of subcontractors for each major weapons system so that each legislator can know exactly how his district will profit if it goes into production. . . .

Opponents employ complementary strategies. One approach is to identify inequities in the distribution of benefits and then sow seeds of dissension among groups and localities receiving "unjust" shares. If they choose their criteria carefully, opponents can always demonstrate injustices. If tax rates are cut by a fixed percentage, they point out that wealthy taxpayers reap greater dollar savings. . . .

An alternative approach is to identify those who will bear substantial group costs and then attempt to mobilize either those groups or their usual legislative champions. Opponents of the telephone access fee, for example, argued that residential and small business users would pay more so that large corporations could pay less.<sup>7</sup> . . .

Coalition leaders target their appeals to those most likely to support them while trying not to arouse potential opponents. If only a small minority will benefit from a program, proponents may seek to mobilize that minority as quietly as possible so that they do not alarm the even greater numbers who might oppose their efforts. They may attempt to resolve all conflict within a friendly subcommittee or committee so that others do not notice what is happening (Kingdon 1981, 262–65). They may add a small, seemingly innocuous section to a large and popular bill, or they may propose a floor amendment at the last minute, leaving little time for opponents to mobilize their troops.

Opponents of a change may attempt to broaden the scope of conflict in order to mobilize others who have contrary interests at stake (Schattschneider 1960, 1–19). They may attempt to open committee decision making to other points of view. If these interests are already organized, they activate those organizations. If not, opponents appeal to broader inattentive publics by holding hearings or staging other public events for the news media to cover. They may encourage journalists to write about specific proposals by providing them with easy access and free information. These moves may, in turn, encourage proponents to think about yet other groups of beneficiaries that they can mobilize to counteract the efforts of opponents.

In their arguments, proponents tend to magnify benefits and minimize costs. They market proposals as if the resulting programs were not only certain to achieve their intended ends but would also yield many pleasant byproducts, such as stimulating investment, revitalizing cities, decreasing unemployment, increasing tax revenues, curbing crime, and balancing the budget. At the same time, they tend to underestimate the budgetary costs required to implement their proposals. Proponents project tiny short-term costs so that their proposals do not threaten other people's favorite programs. They also tend to underestimate the less tangible costs, ranging from compliance costs for firms to the general losses of liberty associated with an increasingly bureaucratic society. Opponents suffer from the opposite disease. They tend to minimize a program's benefits and magnify its costs.

## PROCEDURAL STRATEGIES

Procedural strategies involve attempts to influence legislators' political calculations by adroit use of legislative rules and procedures. Coalition leaders may erect procedural barriers to protect legislators from strong political winds that otherwise might drive them into the opposition camp. Alternatively, they might structure the legislative situation so that the prevailing winds blow legislators into the very coalitions they are endeavoring to build. Opposition leaders use similar strategies to force legislators to support their views. Frequently, the principal battle is over whose rules shall prevail—those of the proponents or those of the opponents—because each side believes that it can win its substantive points under the proper procedures.

Procedural strategies are used to manipulate the circumstances under which legislators are forced to take public positions.<sup>8</sup> From legislators' point of view, there is a big difference between voting in favor of an amendment that would increase by 5% the salaries of all federal workers and voting in favor of two separate amendments, one of which would increase legislators' own salaries and the other of which would increase the salaries of all other federal workers. The policy effects are identical, but the political effects are not. Legislators know that challengers delight in using votes on legislative salaries against them, whereas an across-the-board increase makes a poor political issue. The aim of all procedural strategies is to structure the legislative situation in a way that either increases or decreases the ability of an instigator to rouse inattentive publics or of a challenger to make a good campaign issue out of a specific roll-call vote.

Coalition leaders may adopt procedural strategies that either strengthen or break the traceability chain for policy effects. Those who seek to impose large, direct, or early-order costs usually search for procedural strategies that break the traceability chain, knowing that legislators' greatest concern is that citizens might trace those costs back to their own individual actions. Those who seek to block the imposition of such costs prefer procedural strategies that strengthen the traceability chain. When the issue is delivering large, early-order benefits, the preferred strategies are reversed; proponents seek to strengthen the traceability chain while opponents seek to break it. Even when effects are not potentially traceable, both coalition and opposition leaders can employ procedures that emphasize (or camouflage) legislators' connections with popular (or unpopular) policy positions.

Weakening the traceability chain is a superb method for protecting legislators from their constituents' wrath for imposing costs on them. According to the incumbent performance rule, citizens punish legislators for undesirable effects only if there are both identifiable governmental actions and visible individual contributions (see chapter 3 of [Arnold 1990]). It follows, then, that coalition leaders who seek to impose large, perceptible costs should either eliminate all identifiable governmental actions that produce those costs or make legislators' individual contributions as nearly invisible as possible.

One method of masking legislators' individual contributions is to delegate responsibility for making unpleasant decisions to the president, bureaucrats, regulatory commissioners, judges, or state and local officials. Congress may pass across-the-board budgetary cuts but leave it to the president or agency administrators to allocate the cuts among specific programs. Legislators thereby appear frugal while avoiding any association with specific reductions. Sometimes legislators know precisely what the executive will decide, but the process of delegation insulates them from political retribution. . . .

A second method of masking legislators' individual responsibility is secrecy. Committees frequently work behind closed doors so that outsiders are uncertain about how to apportion responsibility. Although closed committee meetings went out of style after the reforms of 1970 and 1973, they are coming back again. They are particularly useful when committees are drafting tax bills or other controversial measures.<sup>9</sup> Several years ago, the Senate Finance Committee, besieged by lobbyists, fled to a small, private chamber to write a \$50 billion tax increase.<sup>10</sup> . . .

Eliminating identifiable governmental actions—those essential elements of retrospective voting—is also a relatively easy task. One method is to combine various proposals into a single omnibus bill so that legislators vote on an entire package rather than on each of the individual pieces. Such bills allow representatives to hide from their constituents. Legislators establish a series of nebulous positions on amorphous-sounding bills like the Clean Air Amendments of 1970, the Education Amendments of 1980, or the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1980, but they need never answer for the costs that specific provisions impose on particular groups or localities. Citizens affected by these provisions have a difficult time punishing their representatives, especially when legislators profess sympathy for their causes. Congress has relied increasingly on omnibus bills in the last few years, including budget resolutions, reconciliation bills, and continuing resolu-

tions.<sup>11</sup> These omnibus bills are especially valuable in the fields of taxation, spending, budgetary policy, and Social Security. . . .

The principal tactical devices in the House for protecting omnibus bills from being split into their component parts are closed rules, which prohibit amendments, and restrictive rules, which allow only certain limited amendments.<sup>12</sup> The closed rule was once used routinely for tax bills and only occasionally for other bills. After the reforms of the early 1970s, the closed rule became less popular (Rudder 1977, 119). It has now largely been replaced by the restrictive rule, which limits the number, type, and content of amendments. Restrictive rules grew from 12% of all rules in 1977 to 45% in 1987.<sup>13</sup> They are essential for keeping large and complicated omnibus bills from unraveling.

These various methods—delegation to the executive, secrecy, and the creation of a single omnibus bill—can also be used in combination, in which case they become even more powerful. . . .

Legislators have been most creative in avoiding identifiable governmental actions when they endeavor to increase their own compensation (actually to restore what inflation has eroded).<sup>14</sup> Most legislators are reluctant to vote for a bill that would straightforwardly increase their salaries because they fear electoral retribution. So there is an endless search for a mechanism that avoids an identifiable action. In 1975 legislators appeared to have found a politically safe method when they voted to link their own salaries with those of other federal workers, who already received automatic cost-of-living adjustments. Unfortunately, their pay raises still required an annual appropriation, which legislators could no more support than they could support the pay raises themselves. In four of the next five years, Congress voted to block the increased appropriations. Legislators then devised a scheme that provided for automatic appropriations to match their automatic cost-of-living raises.<sup>15</sup> This mechanism has now delivered several automatic raises (Weaver 1988, 129–30).

While coalition leaders work to weaken or break the traceability chain, opposition leaders do everything in their power to strengthen it. This counterstrategy is obvious in the case of legislators' compensation. Whenever proponents of salary increases thought they had found a safe mechanism, opponents responded by creating a new identifiable governmental action for which legislators had to stand up and be counted. Under the scheme currently in force, salary increases are automatic unless they are blocked within 30 days; so proponents and opponents now scramble to control the agenda during that period. In 1987 opponents did manage to obtain a vote on a motion disapproving the salary increase, but proponents delayed the vote for a day beyond the statutory limit (by adjourning the House just when opponents were about to pounce). When the House reconvened legislators voted enthusiastically against their own salary increases, knowing that it was too late to stop them.<sup>16</sup> . . .

Conflict over substance can quickly evolve into conflict over procedures. When the House was battling over the contents of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, which eliminated \$35 billion in domestic spending, the key vote was on which rule should govern floor consideration. Conservatives wanted a single up-or-down vote on the entire package so that legislators would



have to stand up and be counted as either for or against the president's economic program. Liberals wanted separate votes in six programmatic areas so that legislators would have to go on record as either for or against cuts in Social Security, school lunches, energy programs, and the like. Both sides agreed that a majority of legislators would not agree to programmatic cuts if specific reductions could be traced back to their own individual actions. Several months of conflict over what programs to reduce and how much to reduce them boiled down to a single procedural vote (Sinclair 1983, 190–213). Once the conservatives prevailed on the procedural point (by four votes), the substantive battle was over (for complete details see chapter 7 [of Arnold 1990]).

Even when the policy effects are minimal, leaders can advance or retard their causes by the way they frame issues and design amendments. Positions matter, even when they are not directly connected to perceptible effects. One of the easiest ways to scuttle a bill is to devise several embarrassing amendments. Many proposals that might slip by if there were no recorded votes falter when legislators must stand up and be counted. Congress once rejected by voice vote an amendment that would have prohibited the Legal Services Corporation from using any funds to defend or protect homosexuality. Moments later, when Representative Larry McDonald (D-GA) demanded a recorded vote, legislators adopted the same amendment, 290 to 113.<sup>17</sup> . . .

When coalition leaders are dealing with group and geographic benefits, they employ an opposite approach. Rather than attempting to break the traceability chain, they do everything they can to accentuate the benefits and to strengthen the traceability chain. They allow other legislators to cosponsor legislation so that everyone can claim authorship. They arrange frequent roll-call votes so that legislators can go firmly on record in favor of these benefactions. They welcome "clarifying" or other friendly amendments. Coalition leaders arrange for legislators to have a marvelous time building records that they can proudly display to their constituents and contributors to show the strength of their connection to these positive effects.

Whether dealing with costs or benefits, legislators must agree to be bound by coalition leaders' procedural strategies. Legislators are not victims, they are coconspirators. Coalition leaders cannot force House members to be bound by a closed rule or a restrictive rule; they must first persuade a majority of them to accept such a rule.<sup>18</sup> Coalition leaders cannot force legislators to delegate authority to the president or bureaucrats; they must agree to do so. Opposition leaders cannot force House members to face lots of embarrassing amendments, for a simple majority could demand a closed rule. When coalition leaders propose restrictive rules, and when legislators accept those rules, it must be because the rules serve their joint purposes.<sup>19</sup>

## STRATEGIES OF MODIFICATION

Strategies of modification involve altering the various components of a policy, ranging from the policy instrument to the incidence of costs and benefits. The aim

is to mold a policy so that it conforms better to legislators' and citizens' preferences and potential preferences. Although coalition leaders can modify their proposals in dozens of ways, they can accept only a limited number of changes and still have a bill that serves their own central interests. They have every incentive to choose their modifications carefully so that they manage to strengthen a program's supporting coalition without sacrificing whatever it was that persuaded them to build a coalition in the first place.

One of the most productive approaches is to modify a proposal in ways designed to attract additional coalition leaders, who can then work to persuade others to join the cause. Whenever a program's initial coalition leaders come from outside Congress, they have no choice but to convince several legislators to join the team. Building coalitions is too complex for outsiders alone. They particularly need to acquire members of the appropriate House and Senate committees and make them enthusiastic about a program—enthusiastic enough to invest their scarce resources in its future. . . .

Proponents may also modify their proposals to dissuade potential opposition leaders from actively working against them. It is far cheaper to buy off a few lieutenants before they start their work than it is to ward off the legions that they would otherwise mobilize. Committee chairmen often accommodate the needs of their ranking minority members so that they can present a united front both in committee and on the floor. Bureaucrats sometimes allocate disproportionate geographic benefits to opposition leaders, intending either to convert them or at least to mute their opposition. Those who awarded model cities grants, for example, were especially generous with those committee and party leaders who had previously opposed the program's funding (Arnold 1979, 179–92). Coalition leaders may also sow seeds of disunity among interest group leaders. Robert Strauss helped to enact the Trade Act of 1979 by including substantial rewards for steel and textile workers; these rewards helped to split the AFL-CIO and thereby forced it to remain neutral.<sup>20</sup>

Coalition leaders often begin with plans to enact comprehensive programs or to institute fundamental reforms in some policy area. Wouldn't it be nice, they ask, to enact national health insurance, to reform the welfare system, to dismantle some regulatory commission, to redesign the tax system, or to expand assistance to college students so that everyone could afford college? Ordinarily coalition leaders must scale back such ambitious plans. Large new expenditure programs are particularly troublesome, for they quickly bump against the perpetual shortage of governmental funds. It makes little difference whether the budget is in surplus or deficit, because new claims on the federal treasury are potential threats to current claimants, to those who wish to expand current programs, and to those who wish to enact their own grandiose schemes.

Legislators are often willing to take a few small steps toward some distant goal, but they are usually reluctant to attempt the whole distance in a single leap. Small steps are less risky than grand leaps. The strategic response to their fears is to scale back policy proposals so that they appear cautious, limited, and experimental. Proponents of complete deregulation of financial institutions decide to push for modest reforms, to be phased in gradually. Advocates of national health

insurance settle for less ambitious programs—first Medicare and Medicaid, then some form of catastrophic insurance, and so on. Even during the heyday of the Great Society, the Johnson administration sent Congress a lot of small, limited programs that individually appeared to cost little.<sup>21</sup> Coalition leaders hope that modifications to their proposals are temporary and that Congress will later expand limited programs into the comprehensive ones they originally wanted.<sup>22</sup>

Although it often makes sense to push for incremental rather than comprehensive reforms, “thinking small” is not always appropriate. One risk is that by solving the most egregious problem, one removes the political pressure for solving the broader problem. Establishing Medicare may have addressed the most serious problem in the financing of health care, but it also eliminated the most potent argument for national health insurance. Over the past two decades senior citizens have pushed hard to improve Medicare benefits for themselves, but they have had little interest in pushing for a broadened program that would include other classes of citizens. A second risk is that incremental reforms, especially of tax and regulatory systems, cannot deliver enough benefits to make them worth the trouble. For two decades proponents of tax reform attempted to cleanse the tax system one loophole at a time. They failed miserably. Eliminating a single provision could neither make the system noticeably more equitable nor generate much revenue, yet each loophole had its passionate defenders. It took comprehensive reform to make the benefits of tax reform worth the pain (see chapter 8 [of Arnold 1990]). It may well be that one can create small programs and watch them grow incrementally, but one cannot reduce or reform these programs with anything less than a comprehensive attack.<sup>23</sup>

Coalition leaders must somehow deal with the problem of costs. Costs are what inspire people to oppose changes in policy, and coalition leaders need to allocate costs carefully in order to minimize opposition. Concentrating all costs on a small minority of groups or localities, and thus leaving the majority unburdened, may seem like a winning strategy. Unfortunately, concentration inspires the victims to work actively against the policies, and determined minorities can frequently overpower majorities in a legislative arena noted for its many choke points (including the senatorial filibuster). Dispersing costs widely is often the safer strategy, for it minimizes the intensity of opposition. . . .

A second solution to the problem of costs is to compensate some of the victims for the group or geographic costs they would otherwise incur. . . .

A third solution to the problem of costs is to make them as nearly invisible as possible. Most expenditure programs are financed through general taxation so that a decision to establish a new expenditure program does not directly increase anyone’s taxes. The financial costs of these expenditure programs are essentially general costs. The two large programs that have dedicated taxes—Social Security and Medicare—have more visible costs, but these programs were cleverly designed so that only half of their costs are apparent to most voters. Workers see the portion of the payroll tax that is deducted from their own wages, but not the half paid on their behalf by their employers. The politics of Social Security would undoubtedly be much more contentious if the entire payroll tax (currently 15%) were deducted from each worker’s paycheck. Conflict would be especially high if

workers paid these taxes directly (in quarterly payments, say, like property taxes) rather than through automatic withholding.

Perhaps the most common way to keep the costs of a program relatively invisible is to use the tax code rather than the budget for delivering benefits. Most changes in the tax code are written in technical language and are relatively obscure to all except those who will use them, whereas all direct subsidies are listed prominently in the federal budget. Perhaps that is why tax deductions and tax credits have been the favorite devices for delivering benefits to corporations and wealthy groups in society. . . .

Finally, coalition leaders may modify the incidence of group or geographic benefits in order to attract additional supporters. When allocating benefits leaders face a dilemma similar to the one they face when allocating costs. Concentrating benefits by group or geographic areas may produce some very intense supporters, but too much concentration yields too few supporters to constitute a majority. Dispersing benefits more widely helps to attract additional supporters, but excessive dispersion may make the individual shares so small that both legislators and the affected publics become indifferent to a program's continued existence. Coalition leaders need to find an acceptable middle position between placing all their chips on one small group or locality and spreading their chips uniformly across all members of society.

Modifying the incidence of geographic benefits is one of the most direct methods for enticing reluctant legislators to support an expenditure program.<sup>24</sup> It gives legislators a pleasing answer to the age-old question, "What's in it for me?" When promoting proposed programs, coalition leaders have only a few geographic strategies available, since they do not yet have any specific benefits to promise individual legislators. All they can do is try to affect legislators' general expectations by modifying a program's character. First, they can enlarge a program's geographic scope so that more localities will be eligible for benefits and, as a consequence, more legislators will see opportunities for acquiring shares for their districts. Eligibility requirements for an urban program can be redefined so that even the most rural district will have at least one large town that qualifies for benefits. Second, they can multiply the number of shares to be allocated so that the probability of an individual legislator obtaining a share will increase. Legislators can better afford to remain indifferent when only a few shares will be distributed than when there are several hundred. The principal limitation on these two strategies is the size of a program's budget. Unless proponents can increase a program's proposed budget at the same rate they increase the number of shares to be allocated, the value of each share will decline and so too will each legislator's willingness to support the proposal.

Once a program is passed, the problem shifts from shaping legislators' expectations to satisfying those expectations. Most geographic benefits are allocated by bureaucrats, and the evidence shows that they are extraordinarily attentive to legislators' needs (Arnold 1979, 46-47). Bureaucrats are careful to disperse geographic benefits widely across all eligible areas so that most legislators have a stake in a program's continuance. Bureaucrats may also concentrate extra benefits on those who are especially crucial to a program's supporting coalition, including

coalition leaders, opposition leaders, and members of the appropriate committees. If a program's supporting coalition continues to appear weak, they may further expand a program's geographic scope. This is essentially the story behind the expansion of urban renewal and the Economic Development Administration until each provided benefits to nearly all congressional districts.

Excessive expansion of a program's geographic scope can undermine its entire supporting coalition. Eventually legislators come to realize that their individual shares are too tiny to give them a real interest in its continuance. . . .

## BUILDING COALITIONS

How do coalition leaders choose among these various strategies? On what do their choices depend? In ordinary circumstances strategies of persuasion are best, both because they are more effective at building long-term support and because they do not require coalition leaders to modify their most preferred policies. Coalition leaders usually seek to enact policies that can survive future battles over budgetary priorities, appropriations, and reauthorizations, and the best insurance of clear sailing ahead is to convince both legislators and citizens of a program's basic merits.

Although strategies of persuasion may be best in the long term, they are often very costly in the short term. Convincing legislators and citizens that the federal government should provide federal aid to education, or that it should regulate the sources of air and water pollution, or that it should regulate the design of automobiles for safety and energy efficiency (and creating opinions that were strong enough to overpower the many groups opposed to such policies)—all this took many years of effort and the combined talents of legislators, presidents, and the leaders of various public and private interest groups. Moreover, strategies of persuasion may be inappropriate for some policies. It is generally very difficult to convince people that they should favor policies that would impose large and direct costs on them in the short term, even for things that will in the longer term greatly benefit them. Perhaps during war or some other major crisis it can be done, but it is far easier to adopt procedural strategies or strategies of modification when large, early-order costs are involved. It is also very difficult to convince people that scarce governmental resources should be lavished on the rich and powerful. Apparently coalition leaders never even considered appropriating \$5 to \$7 billion to protect the stockholders of savings banks in 1981, for it would have been difficult to defend direct subsidies to this group just weeks after Congress had decimated several social welfare programs. It was far easier to provide the benefits as inconspicuously as possible through a complicated change in the tax code.

Procedural strategies are most attractive when legislators decide to impose costs on either attentive or inattentive publics. Delegating such tasks to the executive, or fashioning policies in secret that are then packaged in omnibus bills and protected by restrictive rules, helps to break the traceability chain and protect legislators from the wrath of their constituents and contributors. . . .

Strategies of modification allow leaders to target the publics that will benefit or suffer as a result of a policy, so they are especially useful for acquiring the sup-

port of particular legislators or groups. They are unsurpassed early in the coalition-building process, either for acquiring additional coalition leaders or for silencing potential opposition leaders. They are also excellent general strategies for dealing with programs that provide bundles of group or geographic benefits. Most tax bills are passed by carefully modifying the group benefits until the bill appeals to a majority of legislators. Most grant programs are passed by carefully manipulating the geographic benefits.

Coalition leaders need not choose a single strategy to advance their cause. These three general strategies (and all their variants) complement one another nicely. Leaders may begin by holding hearings to dramatize the need for a new program and to shape elite and mass opinion on the subject, they may then make small modifications to meet the objections of several groups who see their interests threatened, and they may eventually structure the legislative situation in a way designed to protect legislators from either attentive or inattentive publics who might be displeased with the final outcome. A typical bill may have to be modified several times as it passes through all the stages in the legislative process, each time moving further away from coalition leaders' original proposal.<sup>25</sup>

Coalition leaders differ widely in their abilities to employ the various strategies. Committee chairmen are often in a good position to influence the opinions of attentive publics by carefully orchestrating congressional hearings on a new subject. Presidents enjoy an advantage both for influencing inattentive publics and for mobilizing public opinion for comprehensive reforms. Procedural strategies, largely beyond the control of presidents, require the cooperation of both committee and party leaders. Presidents and interest group leaders may be able to modify proposals before they start their travels through Congress, but once they are launched on their way the legislative committees are in charge.

How large a coalition do leaders seek to build? Do they aim for a minimum winning coalition, or do they seek to build a grand coalition that includes all legislators (Arnold 1979, 43–44, 52; Mayhew 1974a, 111–14; Riker 1962)? All else equal, leaders prefer large coalitions because they provide the best insurance for the future. Each proposal must survive a long series of majoritarian tests—in committees and subcommittees, in House and Senate, and in authorization, appropriations, and budget bills. Large majorities help to insure that a bill clears these hurdles with ease. Moreover, large majorities are often required to overcome filibusters, presidential vetoes, and other obstructions that determined minorities may erect. Finally, once programs are passed and implemented, they need annual appropriations and occasional reauthorizations. Again, oversized majorities protect programs in the long run against defections, the retirement or defeat of habitual supporters, or changes in the mood of Congress.

But all else may not be equal. The real question is how much coalition leaders must sacrifice to gain solid majorities. When the marginal costs of attracting members are small, leaders can easily afford to build large coalitions. As these marginal costs increase, however, they tend to become content with more modest majorities. Marginal costs are easiest to calculate when strategies of modification are employed. Although coalition leaders are reluctant to make major modifications in their proposals once their majorities achieve minimum

size, they are often eager to accommodate legislators who request only modest changes (Drew 1979, 158).

## NOTES

1. Price notes that legislators shun policies with concentrated group effects when conflict is high and public salience is low. See Price (1978).
2. The issue is not merely one of concentrated effects, for surely students, welfare recipients, and mental patients have a great deal at stake. Nor is the issue simply one of organization, though it is true that groups organize more easily around early-order effects. The best explanation is that the incidence of early-order effects is far more certain than that of later-order effects. Those who deliver services can be fairly certain how they will profit from new infusions of money, and that knowledge encourages activism. Those who will eventually receive these services cannot know in advance exactly how they will profit, particularly as individuals. Even if students, welfare recipients, or mental patients as a class are certain to profit, today's individuals may well be replaced by others by the time a program begins delivering services.
3. Judy Sarasohn, "Titans Tangle in Senate Bumper Standards Dispute," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 37 (14 July 1979):1409-10.
4. Of course, there are constraints. Elected politicians do not champion proposals that they could not otherwise support, staff members cannot advance proposals without the approval of their superiors, and leaders of interest groups need to retain the support of their own members. My point is simply that most coalition leaders begin with a blank slate, rather than having to choose among paired or otherwise restricted alternatives.
5. These three approaches do not exhaust all the strategies available to coalition leaders, although they do exhaust the ones that rely most directly on the electoral connection. *Exchange strategies*, a fourth approach, involve the trading of support across different policy areas. The aim is to persuade legislators to vote against their true interests (incurring, if necessary, modest electoral costs) in exchange for leaders' or other legislators' assistance on matters of greater importance to these legislators (including matters that pay handsome electoral dividends). *Replacement strategies* involve replacing current legislators with those holding more congenial views. This is a long-term strategy adopted only when others have failed. Opponents of abortion and proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment are currently pursuing such strategies. On exchange strategies, see Arnold (1979, 47-50, 210-14).
6. For an excellent analysis of how leaders go about shaping legislators' interpretations of policy proposals, see Smith (1984).
7. Steven Pressman, "Panel Approves Phone Bill Despite AT&T Lobby Drive," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 41 (29 October 1983):2241.
8. There is a growing literature that uses formal theory to understand the consequences of various congressional procedures. This literature explores, among other things, the ways in which rules contribute to stable legislative outcomes, the effects of closed and restrictive rules on the power of agenda setters, and the consequences of restrictive procedures for considering conference reports. For a superb review of this literature, see Krehbiel (1988). I am more interested in explaining the *content* of legislation, and for that task I have focused on a different class of procedural strategies—those that adjust the context of congressional decision making in anticipation of the ways in which legislators will be held accountable by their constituents.

9. The House Ways and Means Committee and many of the subcommittees of the House Appropriations Committee now routinely close their markup sessions to reporters, lobbyists, and the public. See Jacqueline Calmes, "Few Complaints Are Voiced as Doors Close on Capitol Hill," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 45 (23 May 1987):1059-60.
10. Pamela Fessler, "Senate Panel Votes Tax Boosts," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 42 (17 March 1984):599.
11. Dale Tate, "Use of Omnibus Bills Burgeons Despite Members' Misgivings," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 40 (25 September 1982):2379-83; and Martin Tolchin, "In the Face of Controversy, Packaging," *New York Times* (21 February 1983):B6.
12. On the strategic use of congressional procedures, see Oleszek (1989); Bach (1981a, 1981b); and Bach and Smith (1988).
13. Janet Hook, "GOP Chafes under Restrictive House Rules," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 45 (10 October 1987):2449-52; and Oleszek (1989, 128).
14. On the politics of congressional pay, see Weaver (1988, 118-45).
15. Irwin B. Arief, "Congress Votes Itself New Pay, Benefits," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 39 (3 October 1981):1892.
16. Jacqueline Calmes, "Pay Hike for Members of Congress Takes Effect," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 45 (7 February 1987):219-20.
17. Nadine Cohodas, "House Passes State, Justice Appropriations Bill," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 38 (26 July 1980):2139.
18. Although the Senate does not allow closed rules, and senators can therefore introduce as many amendments as they like, it does operate on the basis of unanimous consent agreements. Once adopted, these agreements can constrain both the number and content of floor amendments. See Oleszek (1989, 177-238); Krehbiel (1986); and Smith and Flathman (1989).
19. House members do defeat some restrictive rules, but the occasions are rare. Between January 1981 and August 1985 the House rejected exactly six rules. See Andy Plattner, "Rules under Chairman Pepper Looks Out for the Democrats," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 43 (24 August 1985):1674.
20. Bob Livernash, "Congress Faces Hard Choices on Trade Liberalization Pact," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 37 (14 April 1979):678-83.
21. Even Medicare, the most expensive of the Great Society programs, was projected to be relatively affordable. See Sundquist (1968, 320) and Marmor (1973, 67). The projections were a bit optimistic. Whereas in 1967 Medicare cost only \$2.7 billion, which was less than 2% of federal spending, two decades later it totaled \$72 billion, or more than 7% of federal spending. See U.S., Office of Management and Budget (1987, Table 3.3).
22. Sometimes Congress does expand programs to fit the original design. Social Security is a sterling example. After a long series of incremental additions spread over four decades, the original designers achieved almost everything they intended. See Dertnick (1979, 295-377). These incremental changes transformed Social Security from a \$781 million program in 1950, which consumed less than 2% of the federal budget and less than 0.3% of GNP, to a \$199 billion program in 1986, which consumed 20% of the federal budget and nearly 5% of GNP. See Office of Management and Budget (1987, Tables 1.2 and 3.1).
23. On the difference between creating new policies and rationalizing old policies, see Brown (1983).
24. For further analysis of how leaders modify the incidence of geographic benefits, see Arnold (1979, 46-47).
25. Most bills still reflect coalition leaders' preferences far more than they do the preferences of other participants. See Rundquist and Strom (1987).