

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105
A CASE FOR GOVERNMENT**

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. Why study the American political system?
- B. An argument in favor of national government
- C. The class web site

II. GOVERNMENT IN A FREE SOCIETY:

- A. Perhaps the most important debate in Washington and throughout the country is the proper role of government in society
 - 1. Is it too big? too remote? too impersonal? too inefficient?
 - 2. Has the government been living beyond its (our) means?
 - 3. Just how corrupt is the political system?
 - 4. How can “our” problems best be solved? By individuals, neighborhoods, churches, associations, communities? state and local governments?
 - 5. What about “privatizing” government responsibilities by turning them over to companies and corporations?
- B. What would you include on your list of legitimate national government activities or functions?
 - 1. National defense?
 - 2. Maintenance of law and order?
 - 3. Air traffic safety?
 - 4. Automobile safety?
 - 5. Protection of the environment
 - 6. Education or should this be left to the states?
 - 7. The war against crime?
 - 8. The war against drugs? which drugs? cocaine? marijuana? Tobacco? caffeine, alcohol?
 - 9. The elimination of pornography?
 - 10. Enforcement of seatbelt and helmet laws?
 - 11. Control of television program content?
 - 12. Promulgation of national dress codes?
- C. Each person would probably cross off one or more of these possibilities.
 - 1. But hardly anyone would eliminate them all.
 - 2. So a key question is what should government do and not do.

III. THE NATURE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION:

- A. The problem of the **commons** and **rational (free) behavior**: individuals acting rationally in their own interests can and frequently do bring ruin on the community

and hence on themselves.

1. Example to be discussed in class: “Tragedy of the Commons”
- B. The problem of public goods;
 1. What would happen if Congress passed a law making support for the military voluntary, much as contributions to charities are voluntary?
- C. The problem of the **market place**
 1. Free riders and freedom
 2. Should the government leave environmental protection
- D. **Major proposition:** To escape the (inevitable?) problem of the destruction of the commons and free riders some form of coercion is necessary.
 1. This is a possible justification for government

Proposition:
Statement offered for your consideration
in order to be discussed and debated. It’s
not to be taken as a fact!

- E. Problems that only individuals organized into social groups can solve.
 1. **Major proposition:** many 21st century problems can only be solved by collective action
 2. **proposition:** the list of such problems is greater than conventional political wisdom suggests.
 - F. Next time we will look at the necessity of government in society from a different point of view.
- IV. DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL CAPACITY:
- A. **Major proposition:** the preceding three propositions are tacitly accepted to one degree or another by nearly every American, whether they realize it or not.
 - B. Hence, the key questions are only:
 1. Which problems should be included on the list?
 2. What political structures are necessary?
 - C. In asking about political structures one raises questions of democracy and capacity:
 1. How can government be **controlled and efficient** at the same time?
 - D. Discussions of reform, then, might keep these issues in mind.
- V. THE WEB AND CLASS NOTES:
- A. For the first three or four days I will hand out a set of class notes. After that time I may make them available only on the class web site. (I’m not sure yet.)
Consequently if you want copies you should read the section of the syllabus that discusses the necessity of obtaining a computer “user name” and password.

1. Do this today if you are not already using e-mail.
- B. Apart from e-mail you can use the university's resources to obtain class materials via the internet.
- C. To do so use a so-called internet browser such as Netscape to view or "open" the class page.
 1. If you are not familiar with the internet, the easiest thing is to go to the basement of Smith Hall or some other public "access" site (they are listed in the basement of Smith). Plenty of help will be available.
 2. But the process is virtually self-explanatory:
 - a. First find either a terminal or a PC.
 - b. To start Netscape when using a PC simply click on the Netscape icon (picture); if you have terminal, "log in" by typing your user name and password and then use the mouse button to open the menu and select Netscape.
 - c. Then, find the "Open" button at the top. (Or click on "File" and choose "open" from the menu.)
 - d. Type in the address or location (sometimes referred to as the URL) for the course: ***www.udel.edu/htr/American98/***
* NOTE THE CAPITAL A; THE OTHER LETTERS ARE LOWER CASE.
 - e. Once you see the Political Science 105 page use the mouse to click on various items. For example, to see the syllabus just move the cursor over "Syllabus" and click.
 - f. If you want a printed copy, click the Print button on the "toolbar" at the top of the screen.
 3. If you work in Smith Hall or one of the other public sites such as the Library or Harrington or Pearson Halls, nearly anyone--staff or fellow students--can help.

VI. NEXT TIME:

- A. Course organization and requirements
- B. Political economy: Relationships between public and private sectors
- C. Reading:
 1. Patterson, *We the People*, Chapter 1.
 2. "An Argument for Government" on the internet reserve room:
www.udel.edu/htr/American98/ then Reserve Room then "An Argument for Government".

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