

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105
MORE REMARKS ON THE PRESIDENCY**

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. Finish the film “What Happened to Bill Clinton”
 - B. Clinton’s successes and failures
 - C. Presidential power
 - D. Preliminary remarks on Congress

- II. EXPLAINING CLINTON’S PERFORMANCE:
 - A. President Clinton came to office in 1992 with a reservoir of popular support and goodwill.
 - 1. The period of initial public support is sometimes called a “honeymoon.”
 - B. He quickly lost ground, however. The film suggests that the problem could be found in the president’s personal traits.
 - 1. In a real sense, however, his initial failures reflect many of the structures and trends we have been discussing.
 - a. An “outsider” or political entrepreneur: note discussion in film about his not knowing how important campaign funds were to Congress. The material on gays in the military makes exactly the same point.
 - b. Interest groups politics and health care reform.
 - c. Lack of party discipline.
 - d. Fragmented power.
 - C. His turn around does not necessarily undercut the thesis that presidential power is (relatively speaking) inherently feeble.
 - 1. Fortuitous events (i.e., “the economy stupid”).
 - 2. Move to the center.
 - a. Welfare reform
 - b. Cooption of Republican issues
 - 3. “Triangulation” and Dick Morris and the politics of illusion.
 - a. Compare Clinton’s news management with Reagan’s
 - D. The 1996 election.
 - 1. His reelection probably resulted in mostly from
 - a. Dole’s weakness as a candidate.
 - b. Clinton’s skill as a campaigner.
 - c. the nation’s economic health.
 - 2. Gone and almost forgotten: “middle class bill of rights,” health care reform; campaign finance legislation.

III. LIMITATIONS ON PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT:

- A. Proposition: every “power” is a source of weakness.
- B. Chief executive versus “controlling” the bureaucracy:
 - 1. The limitations include:
 - a. Bureaucratic permanence and inertia
 - b. The growth of the White House office and the Office of the President.
 - * Reagan’s “response”
 - c. Bureaucratic politics: decisions result from bureaucratic infighting and compromise.
 - * Example: don’t ask what the president wants; ask what the State and Defense departments will give him.
 - d. "Sub-governments" or "iron triangles"
- C. Commander-in-chief versus "group think," advisors, and information
 - a. Example: LBJ and Vietnam?
- D. Presidency versus separation and fragmentation of power
 - 1. As already discussed, Congress, the Federal Reserve (FED), the Supreme Court, state governments, interest groups, and so forth fragment power.
 - 2. Executive-legislative battles define American politics
- E. Party leader versus weakness of the party system
- F. Media attention versus "fish bowl" phenomenon: intense media scrutiny
- G. The context: the contradictions of general-welfare liberalism
 - 1. Liberalism versus the “positive state”
 - 2. The bottom line is that the political system and popular culture places enormous burdens on presidents but does not give them the "tools" (e.g., strong party leadership) to carry them.

IV. CONGRESS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE:

- A. Generalizations:
 - 1. Congress’ capacity to deal with national problems and our ability to hold its members accountable are limited by the factors already considered.
 - 2. Expectations and demands on Congress exacerbate the situation further.
 - 3. So, too, does its structure, as seen below.
- B. What do we want Congress to do? Functions:
 - 1. Legislative: law making
 - 2. Representation of geographical and other interests
 - a. Case work: service, and the permanent campaign
 - b. Satisfying constituents is a major factor in reelection
 - 3. Instructed delegates
 - 4. Administrative oversight (Example: Senate oversight committee on intelligence.)
 - 5. Advise and consent (Examples: Supreme Court nominees, approval of cabinet officers)
 - 6. Investigative (e.g., Burton, Thompson committees)

7. Judicial (e.g., impeachment)
 - C. Summary: legislators have so many responsibilities and are pulled in some many directions that they have relatively little time for deliberation.
 - D. Deliberation: a surprisingly obvious duty but one that is seldom performed is overall policy “deliberation.”
 1. Consider the parliamentary system described before: in such a system the primary role of the legislature is discussion and debate.
 2. Administration and law making are left to the executive, who is a member of the legislature.
- V. NEXT TIME:
- A. Congressional decision making
 - B. Reading:
 1. Patterson, *We the People*. Chapter on the presidency and Congress for general understanding.
 2. Finish *Debt and Deficit*. I will try to highlight major ideas on Thursday.

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