Recent political commentary contains numerous references to "out of control," "irresponsible," or "runaway" bureaucracy, and already this concern has had important effects. It has stimulated various reform proposals (zero-based budgeting, sunset laws, revenue and spending limits), helped elect Jimmy Carter, and made it increasingly difficult to tell traditional liberals from conservatives. Recent academic commentary also recognizes that the bureaucracy is not well-controlled, perhaps that it cannot be well-controlled. Stephen Hess contends that the attempt to manage the bureaucracy — in the sense of overseeing day-to-day bureaucratic operations — is a mistake modern presidents should avoid and advocates instead a presidential role of agenda setting and policy (not managerial) decisionmaking. According to Peter Woll, the emergence of the federal bureaucracy adds a fourth dimension to the constitutional separation of powers. His work attempts to come to grips with the bureaucracy's place in that system. Somewhat earlier Samuel Huntington wrote gloomily of the future of democratic assemblies in a world of large and powerful bureaucratic establishments.

Although well-meaning reformers often construe such theses as justifications for institutional panaceas, such as sunset and sunshine
laws, zero-based budgeting, and executive branch reorganization, I doubt that the cited authors were advocating such institutional engineering. It is one thing to note that the bureaucracy is an important branch of the federal government, that it can develop and use political resources, that its expertise gives it an advantage in dealing with other branches of the government; it is quite another to claim that the bureaucracy is out of control. On its face, the claim may appear patently true, but on a deeper level it is mostly false.

**WHAT IS CONTROL OF THE BUREAUCRACY?**

The bureaucracy is not out of control because the Congress controls the bureaucracy, and the Congress gives us the kind of bureaucracy it wants. If some modern day James Madison were to conceive a plan that would guarantee an efficient, effective, centrally directed bureaucracy, Congress would react with fear and loathing. To be sure, particular members may wish to terminate particular agencies, but if the choice were between the existing bureaucratic world and the utopian bureaucratic world just conjured up, Congress would cast a nearly unanimous vote for the status quo. The parent loves the child, warts and all.

**Theoretical and Actual Control**

Obviously, I am playing on ambiguities in the concept of “control.” First, we must distinguish between theoretical (formal or legal) control and actual (politically feasible) control. The Constitution divides formal control over the bureaucracy between the president and Congress, and the courts have come to play an important role as well. While nominally the president heads the bulk of the federal apparatus, his practical authority is rather modest. Civil Service and advise and consent requirements circumscribe his appointment powers. The president’s personal agency, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), is indisputably powerful, but once matters escape its clutches and get into the congressional arena, renegade agencies may defy their formal master. Lacking the rifle of the item veto, the president can only threaten the cannon of the general veto, and denizens of Washington can judge when he dares not fire the cannon.

Congress, on the other hand, has the formal power of life and death over the bureaucracy. Congress can abolish an agency or reorganize it, change its jurisdiction or allow its program authority to lapse entirely. Congress can cut its appropriations and conduct embarrassing investigations. A hostile Congress unconcerned about the consequences of its actions could decimate the federal establishment.
Of course, Congress seldom exercises its formal powers. In fact, such seemingly radical ideas as sunset laws and zero-based budgeting are merely attempts to insure that existing congressional powers are used more frequently or at least that their use is contemplated more frequently. As numerous observers have remarked, procedural changes alone are insufficient to increase control over the bureaucracy; to achieve their purpose such changes must also provide incentives to exercise that control.⁴

**Coordinated and Uncoordinated Control**

There is a second, more important ambiguity in the concept of “control.” What kind of control do we want? Control for what? Imagine a naval fleet in which each vessel is under the absolute control of a chief officer. But suppose that these captains themselves are responsible to no higher authority and have no particular interest in communicating with each other. Well-meaning observers who watch such a fleet maneuver might judge the fleet to be out of control. They might even recommend measures intended to enhance control of the fleet’s operation. Yet each commanding officer would greet such recommendations with skepticism; looking about his ship he sees no evidence of lack of control.

Like the individual ships in the preceding analogy, the parts of the federal bureaucracy typically are well-behaved in the sense that they are responsive to the captains in the congressional committees and subcommittees that determine their fates. But the whole of the bureaucracy is out of control, as is Congress.⁵

Thus, the second distinction is that between coordinated and uncoordinated control, or alternatively, centralized and decentralized control. When I remark that the Congress controls the bureaucracy, I use the term in the second sense.⁶ Congress controls the parts, but there is little overall coordination. Particular congressional committees control the agencies they want to in the manner they want to. But those who address the problem of “control of the bureaucracy” have centralized or coordinated control in mind. How can the disparate parts of the bureaucracy be integrated? How can they be made to work in harness to achieve major policy goals?

The causes and consequences of decentralized control of the bureaucracy constitute the agenda for this essay. In the next section I will consider to what degree the bureaucracy is out of control and what can be done about it. Central to this discussion is a consideration of the incentives of the interested parties: the Congress, the president, the bureaucrats, and the electorate. Who can exert influence? To what end do they wish to do so? What kind of control will result? Answers to these questions provide a basis for speculating
about the value of various suggested "reforms." In a nutshell, I will argue that the Congress has the power but not the incentive for coordinated control of the bureaucracy, while the president has the incentive but not the power. This mismatch between the incentives and capabilities of the relevant political actors is at least as important as informational overload, imbalance in expertise, and the internal processes of bureaucracies in explaining the absence of coordinated control of the federal bureaucracy.

MODELS OF COORDINATED CONTROL

New procedures are not necessary to achieve coordinated control over the bureaucracy. All necessary powers now exist. While this claim is hardly original, a review of its basis may prove useful. Models or idealizations of the political order will serve as the vehicle.

A Simple World

Assume that a new president were to take office with a large and reliable congressional majority, a majority that he could depend upon to "rubber stamp" his legislative program and budget. This president would first appoint his people to every executive political post not covered by Civil Service. The president's people at OMB then would make sure that all new proposals by federal agencies were consistent with the administration's grand design. With these steps the future operation of the bureaucracy would be brought under control. Meanwhile, in formulating the budget, OMB could bring existing programs under presidential control by starving those found to be inconsistent with his program or in extreme cases by having Congress abolish agencies and/or programs. By assumption, the Congress approves all such requests as well as the budget and proposed legislation.7

In this simple world the bureaucracy could be out of control only because mistakes are made, mistakes of program conception or mistakes in administration. Perhaps there is simply too much new legislation proposed or too little time to review existing programs. Still, such mistakes would be unlikely to persist for very long; rather, old mistakes would be remedied as they became apparent. There would be no chronic cases of out of control programs or agencies; in such a world any outright opposition could be broken. Programs could be abolished, agencies reorganized, executives fired, and civil servants transferred. All this follows from the assumption of a cooperative, compliant Congress.
A More Complicated World

But Congress is not a rubber stamp. Congress makes more than marginal adjustments in the president’s program and budget. So, let us assume a more active legislative body. We now presume that the president’s budget is submitted to businesslike appropriations and revenue committees, and that his program is submitted to expert legislative committees. But let us also assume that the authorizing committees have jurisdiction over all aspects of a policy question (other than appropriations), that such committees are representative of the membership of the whole chamber, and that the individuals who serve on such committees have as their primary goal the formulation of effective, efficiently implemented national policy. For good measure, let us presume that a powerful party leadership consciously coordinates the work of the authorizing, revenue-raising, and revenue-expending committees, and that individual members heed the party position because they believe in it and/or because their political fortunes are tied to it.

In this more complicated world I submit that again there would be little or no problem with out of control bureaucracy. The president and the Congress would each formulate coherent programs. Undoubtedly, these would differ in some respects, and in compromising the two, some incoherence might result. But the assumption of common affiliation to a cohesive party should exert a reasonably tight constraint on the amount of irrationality that creeps into the process.

The Real World

Ah, the incredulous reader may say, that’s just not the U.S. Congress you’re describing. Committee jurisdictions are a “crazy quilt.” Congress is no place for the compulsively neat person. The national energy policy passed in 1978, for example, was worked over by five different House standing committees, then run through a rarely used ad hoc procedure. Moreover, congressional committees are anything but representative. The westerners head for Interior, farm district representatives for Agriculture, and urban representatives for Education and Labor and Banking and Currency. This self-selection bias is then exacerbated by observance of reciprocity: the country people on Interior will keep their noses out of Housing matters, if the city people on Banking and Currency will do the same for public lands. Suddenly, even common party membership is not sufficient to insure reasonable agreement between the program of the president and the programs of the congressional committees. And the worst is yet to come.

Implicit in the notion of reciprocity is the admission that members of Congress do not have as their primary goal the formulation of
good national policy. That is a secondary goal; policy that benefits
the district, and thereby re-election chances, is the primary goal.
Consider two policy alternatives in some specific area. Policy X provides
$100 in net benefits to each of districts 1-400, and costs districts
401-435 $1,000 each. Policy Y provides districts 401-435 with net
benefits of $1,000 each but costs districts 1-400 $100 each. In terms
of national net benefits the policies rank as follows:

Policy X: \((400 \times 100) - (35 \times 1,000) = 5,000\)

Policy Y: \((35 \times 1,000) - (400 \times 100) = -5,000\)

Understandably, a president might support policy alternatives like
X; if you want to make an omelet, you’ve got to break some eggs.
And Congress? Typically, the representatives of districts 401-435 control
the committee that chooses between X and Y. By enabling special
interest members to gain control of their area of special interest,
reciprocity insures that more policies like Y will be chosen than
would otherwise be the case. And given that we are a large het-
erogeneous country, all members are special interest members in some
areas. Thus, reciprocity makes it possible for a relatively greater
number of policies like Y to defeat policies like X than would be
the case under simple majority rule.

When we see a public agency spending inordinate amounts of
public funds to pave over certain congressional districts, we are not
observing an out of control agency. We are observing an agency
that is paying off the members of Congress who nurture it. The
federal agencies exist in a symbiotic relationship with the congressional
committees and subcommittees to which they report. Of course, not
everything an agency does is of concern to its set of relevant members.
It purchases freedom in such areas by playing ball in the areas
that are of concern. So, part of the agency may be genuinely out
of control, but Congress wants it that way. It is a necessary cost
of maintaining a bureaucracy sufficiently unconstrained (in law and
by its nominal leaders) that it is permeable to congressional influence.

What do sunset laws and zero-based budgeting do in such cases?
Little, really. Oh, on occasion they might force consideration of some
overlooked program that no longer has any conceivable rationale.
But the principal effect of such procedural innovations would be
to shift more of the burden of proof from Congress to the bureaucracy,
and thus make it easier for members to extort favors from the bu-
reauacracy. If that’s what we mean by control of the bureaucracy,
fine.

The foregoing is a highly simplified argument, one subject to
many qualifications, but that does not detract from its essential
accuracy. If one is concerned about control of the bureaucracy, the
critical questions do not revolve around the legal instruments of control.
These exist and are used regularly. The critical questions revolve around the fact that the Congress and the president do not want to control the bureaucracy for the same ends. The goals of the typical president and the goals of the typical member of Congress differ considerably. Consequently, what they want from the bureaucracy differs. And therein lies the problem.

DIFFERING INCENTIVES FOR CONTROL

Put most simply, the goals of the president lead him to prefer centralized control of the bureaucracy, while the goals of members of Congress lead them to favor decentralized control. Given the Congress’s somewhat stronger position than the president’s vis-à-vis the instruments of control, decentralized control prevails.

Presidential Goals

What are the goals of the typical president? Re-election comes most immediately to mind, but place in history is a close second. Fortunately for analytical purposes, the two goals often appear to be consistent. The president is the nation’s chief official and responsible for major policy directions. Presumably, the president will attain re-election as well as a prominent place in the history books by dealing successfully with important national problems: attaining peace with honor, lowering unemployment, controlling inflation, ending crime in the streets, achieving racial equality.

Naturally, there are times (as former President Nixon so often reminded us) when the short-run bullet must be bitten to achieve long-range goals, times when re-election and place in history pull the president between them (e.g., energy policy circa 1978). But even when his goals are not completely consistent, the president usually desires to accomplish something in the way of broad policy goals. The president will not be content to sit in office and react to each specific problem or situation that arises. And in order to accomplish broad policy goals, the president must control the executive branch. (Many of the Nixon administration’s more original shenanigans may be viewed, at least in part, as attempts to harness elements of the federal bureaucracy that were not under control of the administration.) As the representative of all the people, the president desires centralized control of the bureaucracy — whether to construct the national coalition he needs to win re-election or to make the major policy initiatives that will insure his place in history.

Congressional Goals

Members of Congress are in a different situation. Most of them simply wish to stay where they are, although House members are
always on the lookout for a stray Senate seat, and numerous senators find personally compelling reasons to offer themselves as presidential candidates. With a few exceptions, there is an unrealistic goal for members of Congress. Each representative is a paltry one vote of 435. Unlike the president, a representative cannot credibly claim responsibility for putting the economy back on its feet or healing the wounds of a civil war. At best, several generations may remember him or her as the person who brought several sewage treatment plants to the district. Senators are in a somewhat better position, but even so they are merely one vote of 100, and how many twentieth-century senators can plausibly be said to have achieved a prominent place in history? No, for the member of Congress life is in the here and now. (“Now” is literally “now” for representatives whose lives are organized into two-year cycles.) The primary goal of members is figuring out how to survive the next election.

And survive they do! Since the Second World War about 90 percent of all incumbents have chosen to run for re-election and on average 90 percent of those have succeeded. Moreover, they have been getting even more successful in recent years. How have they managed, given the erosion of traditional partisan sources of support and the increase in public cynicism toward government institutions and incumbents?

The Congressional Role

The key to this puzzle is a mid-century change in the congressional role. As the scope of the federal government has expanded, the federal bureaucracy has enjoyed a concomitant expansion. Citizens in turn “enjoy” more opportunities to interact with their public servants, whether in an effort to take advantage of federal programs or to evade federal regulations. In this situation the member of Congress is ideally situated. Traditionally, if one has problems with the bureaucracy, one writes one’s representatives in Congress who have a long history of intervening in bureaucratic decisionmaking for the benefit of constituents. With the expansion of federal activity, the member of Congress’s role as an intervenor — an ombudsman — has become more important. Objectively, there is a greater demand for members’ services, and sensible incumbents have done little or nothing to stem that demand. In fact, some members, particularly the more junior ones, stimulate the demand for ombudsman services, seeing such activities as a means to reach those individuals in their districts who would otherwise oppose them on policy, ideological, or party grounds. In short, members are increasingly de-emphasizing their role as formulators of national policies — a controversial role, after all — and emphasizing their role as ombudsmen who strike fear into the hearts of incompetent or arbitrary bureaucrats.
In turn, citizens increasingly tolerate members' positions on major national policies. What does it matter if one's representative is a conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat? One vote of 535 can't make much difference. But as subcommittee chairman or ranking minority member, the representative in Congress has been a whiz at getting water treatment plants and mass transit feasibility studies. Moreover, he or she kept the old coke ovens from being shut down by EPA and tracked down umpteen lost social security and veterans' checks. Why give up the incumbent's seniority and experience just because of disagreements about the MX or national health care?

How have members of Congress managed to carry out ombudsman activities so successfully? Simple. Congress has powerful instruments of control over the bureaucracy, and there is ample evidence that the threat of those instruments is seldom far from bureaucratic minds. The effectiveness of those instruments is made all the more real by the establishment and maintenance of the elaborate committee-reciprocity system already mentioned. Members of Congress are given the opportunity to exercise disproportionate influence over segments of the federal bureaucracy that are of special concern to them. If an agency is causing problems for a member's constituents, the member need not organize a coalition of 51 or 218 members to discipline that agency. All that's needed is agreement from a couple of subcommittee colleagues. One can hardly blame an agency for paying special attention to "suggestions" from an interested member of Congress.

The Congress has had a standing committee system for more than 150 years, but the major trend of the twentieth century has been a decentralizing one. The party leadership lost power to the committee leadership, which in turn lost power to the subcommittee leadership. All of this has occurred under the guise of democratic "reforms" to be sure. But we should not forget that the impact has been one of ever-increasing division of the power to control the bureaucracy. The House under Czar Reed (autocratic Speaker of the House, 1889-91, 1895-99) could and probably did exert coordinated control over a small federal executive. The House under Tip O'Neill and 175 subcommittee chairmen still can coordinate the activities of a much larger bureaucratic establishment — but it won't. Reed was willing to lose back-benchers who were forced to support locally unpopular party positions — breaks of the game. Today there are no back-benchers.

**CONSEQUENCES OF THE STATUS QUO**

The status quo in the last quarter of the twentieth century is not comforting. Citizens increasingly find themselves in contact with
a bureaucratic establishment, often federal or at least federally stimulated. This bureaucratic establishment is somewhat unresponsive as bureaucracies are wont to be; at times it may be downright capricious. And every day it seems to extend a little further into citizens’ lives. But whether the bureaucracy is in the right or in the wrong, citizens know that they can count on one powerful ally in their attempts to triumph over bureaucratic procedures and/or dictates: their member of Congress. Increasingly, citizens view members as powerful, benevolent friends in an ever more threatening, impersonal world. Citizens receive solace; members of Congress get votes.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Congress maintains a federal bureaucracy deliberately organized to make it permeable to congressional intervention — not only to the chamber as a whole, but to subgroups and even individuals. So long as an agency cooperates when members make specific requests, it is unlikely to suffer long-term losses no matter how poor its performance. Perversely, the more inefficient and/or unreasonable its performance, the greater the political resource it constitutes. It is no great exaggeration to say that if OSHA did not exist, Congress might find it necessary to invent it.

And the president? He is something of the odd man out. His personal appointees become the captives of the subgovernments they were appointed to control. He finds himself circumscribed at every step. In the first flush of victory, throwing a net around “runaway” agencies addicted to cement pouring seems like a fine idea. But then Congress tells him that he can forget about a national energy policy if he doesn’t learn to keep his nose out of where it doesn’t belong. To obtain his goals the president must actively use a coordinated bureaucracy to achieve some positive purpose. But to achieve their goals members often can do no more than fend off perceived bureaucratic assaults on their constituents. This asymmetry would put the president in a weaker position than Congress even if his formal control powers were comparable.

The described state of affairs has several important consequences for the operation of the federal government in the foreseeable future. First, in terms of organization and administration, we can expect more of what we’ve got in the way of inefficient, “out of control” bureaucracy. Congress has no electoral incentive to work toward coordinated control. Quite the opposite is the case. Congress is making increasing use of instruments that keep the bureaucracy more closely tied to decentralized congressional control such as the congressional veto and sunset provisions. I think it is accurate to say that we are currently experiencing an increase in uncoordinated control and a decrease in coordinated control. Moreover, the dynamics of current trends have a self-perpetuating aspect. The more that members of Congress are perceived as, and elected as, ombudsmen, the greater
their incentive to maintain the status quo, and the greater their reluctance to agree to proposals that would make major changes in the direction of coordinated control.

Second, in terms of policy, we can identify certain biases that arise from conflicting presidential and congressional goals. A president may look fondly on proposals to replace the jerry-built structure of income security programs with a guaranteed annual income accomplished entirely through the tax laws. Or perhaps he might contemplate razing the educational grant structure and implementing a voucher system. In theory such programs hold the promise of reducing gaps and conflicts in the existing program structure while requiring fewer administrative procedures and allowing greater individual freedom of choice. They are naturals for presidents on the prowl for places in history.

But members of Congress have a different bias. Even if such massive program shifts resulted in no net changes in their constituents' welfare — admittedly an unlikely possibility — they would decrease the political resource base of members. If benefits are distributed automatically, constituents will expect them as their due and not treat them as the gift of their benevolent representatives in Congress. And if costs are imposed automatically, as with the collection of taxes, fewer citizens will seek the aid of members in efforts to avoid those costs. Of course, one should grant the possibility that the congressional biases are preferable to the presidential biases — as those interests vested in existing programs believe. Weighing biases, unfortunately, is much more difficult than identifying them.16

Finally, in terms of political responsibility, we can expect continued abdication by the U.S. Congress. In Theodore Lowi's compelling analysis, elected officialdom delegates power to the bureaucracy but provides vague or nonexistent standards for the exercise of that power.17 Again the persistent theme appears. The bureaucracy can be out of control only because those charged with the responsibility to control it choose not to. Why do they so choose?

Lowi sees the roots of the problem in acceptance of a public philosophy that exalts flexibility over uniformity and dependability, a philosophy that holds that every problem should be bargained and brokered rather than settled according to a fixed rule of law. Perhaps. But why should this philosophy have such a hold on our decisionmakers? Lowi blames a generation of pluralist social scientists who laid the intellectual groundwork in the classrooms of academia. That is rather heavy stuff for a discipline that has been remarkably irrelevant to the conduct of political affairs. Still, ideas may take hold where we least expect.

Perhaps a more plausible explanation lies in the goals held by individual members of Congress. They adopt (or appear to adopt)
a public philosophy based on pluralist tenets largely because it rationalizes what their political self-interest dictates. Woll makes the case nicely:

A major reason for the power of the bureaucracy in policy formulation is the frequent lack of congressional incentives to adhere to the Schechter rule and establish explicit standards for administrative action. This is particularly true in the regulatory realm, an area involving political conflict that legislators often wish to avoid. Congress is always willing to deal rhetorically with problems requiring regulation and with the area of regulatory reform, but real decisions on the part of the legislature will undoubtedly raise the ire of powerful pressure groups on one side or the other that are affected by government regulation.¹⁸

Why take political chances by setting detailed regulations sure to antagonize some political actor or another? Why not require an agency to do the dirty work and then step in to redress the grievances that result from its activities? Let the agency take the blame and the member of Congress the credit. In the end everybody benefits. Members successfully wage their campaigns for re-election. And while popularly vilified, bureaucrats get their rewards in the committee rooms of Congress.

A public philosophy that holds that the bureaucracy should be granted the flexibility to deal with complex issues may seem to be the best way for an assembly of generalists to make public policy in a post-industrial society. But the entire justification of the committee-reciprocity system rests on the specialized expertise it purportedly fosters. Can we have it both ways? Can we afford to have it both ways?

THE (UNLIKELY) PROSPECTS FOR ENHANCING COORDINATED CONTROL

Postwar political science has been slow to embrace proposals for change in our federal institutions. For example, prior to the internal fracturing of the congressional seniority system in the early 1970s, professional students of Congress probably were more united in defense of that system than any other subgrouping of the population, save perhaps old members of Congress. And today, campaign “reform” proposals are far more controversial within our ranks than among the informed public. Radicals in our midst charge us with reactionary defense of the status quo, whether as an unconscious by-product of concern with scientific standards or as a conscious result of more sinister motives. Such theories are hardly necessary to explain the antireform bias of our discipline. History provides us with a distressingly long list of reforms that have failed to solve the intended problems,
created new ones, and produced unanticipated side-effects. Our hesitancy to support reform reflects our uncertainty about the eventual consequences; often the devil that we know appears preferable to the one that we don’t.

In this essay I have expressed skepticism about the consequences of currently fashionable concepts like zero-based budgeting and sunset laws. This skepticism does not imply approval of the existing situation. Procedural reforms like zero-based budgeting and sunset laws are better than nothing, but their impact will probably be marginal rather than major.

Those really serious about coordinated control of the bureaucracy must realize that the lack of such control is inherent in our electoral institutions. Hence they should be prepared to think big. For example, if they were permitted to make a single change in our federal institutions, they should consider replacing the single-member district system with a list system of proportional representation, treating the entire country as a single district. To elaborate, in every election each party would put up a list with a presidential and vice-presidential candidate, 100 senatorial candidates, and 435 representative candidates. Citizens would cast a single vote for the party of their choice. If one party got 55 percent of the vote, it would get the presidency, the first 55 candidates on its senatorial list, and the first 239 candidates on its representative list. The intended salutary impact of such a reform would be to bring the goals of presidents and members of Congress into closer agreement. To a much greater extent than before, both the president and congressional candidates would depend for election and re-election on the party’s national record compiled over the same time period.

Of course, major change in the electoral rules is politically improbable and constitutionally almost impossible. Additionally, it might create a multiparty system and numerous other by-products. Changing the electoral system is both the least likely and the most risky of the conceivable alternatives.

A less radical means of bringing congressional and presidential incentives into closer agreement could be accomplished within the existing electoral structure by superimposing a responsible party system on it. I am familiar with the reasons why such a system would not be “good” for the United States. But we had an approximation of such a system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Can it be demonstrated that the country is governed better today than it was then? Of course, the question is academic. Those who await a resurgence of responsible party government have a long wait ahead. Party bonds in the electorate are weakening — an irreversible trend in the view of some scholars. And candidates increasingly have divorced themselves from party organizations, an option that
owes its attractiveness at least in part to the existence of decentralized control of the bureaucracy. Advocating a responsible party system at this time is akin to advocating a strengthening of the presidency, which is another possibility we might consider.

Who has the incentives to exercise coordinated control of the bureaucracy? The president. Ergo, to increase such control we should consider ways to strengthen his hand vis-à-vis the Congress's. Scholars of the presidency are much like French generals in their capacity to overlearn the lessons of history. After working under Franklin Roosevelt, they spent two decades expounding the virtues of strengthening the presidency. Now, following the tragedy of Vietnam, the revelations of Watergate, and precedents for those excesses, everyone sees great dangers in a strong presidency. A bit more intellectual evenhandedness would be desirable.

At any rate, given recent history and the attitudes formed in reaction to it, advocates of a stronger presidency are unlikely to meet with much success. It is difficult even to sketch the lines along which the presidency might be strengthened. Congress will not give up its existing powers. Thus, if we strengthen the ties between the presidency and the bureaucracy, we are more likely to increase stalemate than coordinated control. Recall the fundamental asymmetry: to achieve his goals the president must take positive action, whereas members of Congress can do well enough by reacting and blocking.

Finally, we have the unlikely alternative of strengthening the Congress — as an institution, not as an agglomeration of 400 odd subcommittees and committees, amorphous parties, and institutionally weak leaders. The bureaucracy is subject to decentralized control because the Congress itself is so decentralized. Increasingly, the individual members can achieve their primary goals independently of (and even in opposition to) the ends for which the institution was created. As Fenno observes, we see candidates running for Congress by running against Congress. What can we do to harmonize the desires of the individual members for re-election and the integrity of the institution as a democratic, policymaking assembly?

The trick involves making the fate of individual members more dependent on institutional performance and less dependent on their personal efforts. One possible change would be to assign members to committees randomly, for a maximum tenure of, say, four years. This innovation would curb the present practice of allowing members proportionately greater influence in areas of special concern to their districts. It should reduce the number of policies and programs that exploit a large part of the country (e.g., consumers) for the benefit of narrowly based interests (e.g., shoe manufacturers). Less able to play the role of district ombudsmen, members of Congress might have greater incentive to focus on national policy. They could at
least hope that if their colleagues did the same, they all might come out okay. Of course, we would have to sacrifice the system of specialization that exists, but that may be a fair price to pay.

In the past, a great deal of imagination has gone into proposals for the reform of Congress. I hope that imagination still exists because, in the final analysis, an out of control bureaucracy reflects an out of control Congress. We might just as well avoid preoccupation with the symptoms and focus directly on the cause.

NOTES

6. Francis Rourke has observed that it would be safer to limit this argument to the domestic policymaking bureaucracies. Revelations about recent decades raise doubts that the national security bureaucracies were under control in even the weak, decentralized sense. Rourke's point is well-taken, and no doubt my arguments do apply better to the domestic political scene. Still, one wonders whether the committee masters of the FBI, CIA, DIA, etc. were in fact as ignorant of their charges' activities as it appears from the record. See John Elliff, "Congress and the Intelligence Community," in Congress Reconsidered, 1st ed., edited by Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977).
7. Presumably, the serious president would also instruct his people to look very hard at entitlement programs, existing and proposed. An uncontrollable budget is hardly a necessary feature of reality.
10. See Albert Cover and David Mayhew, "Congressional Dynamics and the Decline of Competitive Congressional Elections," in this volume. There is no indication that electoral fears play any major role in the retirement
upsurge since 1970. On the contrary, there is impressionistic evidence that the service orientation described in the text eventually wears down some representatives: what they feel they must do to hold their seat makes the seat not worth holding.


13. This statement should be recognized as an interpretation, not an uncontested fact. For an elaboration of the interpretation, see Fiorina, Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment, chaps. 1 and 7. For a more complex interpretation see Lawrence Dodd, "Congress and the Quest for Power," in Congress Reconsidered, 1st ed.


15. It might appear that I am contradicting Huntington with this argument. Not so. Huntington claims that in a world in which the legislative initiative has passed to the presidency, Congress can exert its power as an institution only by acting negatively — by frustrating presidential proposals — which ultimately weakens the institution. In contrast, I am claiming that members of Congress can achieve their personal goals by acting negatively. The crucial point is that the personal goals of members bear a rather tenuous relationship to the constitutional purpose of Congress. In this connection see also Dodd, "Congress and the Quest for Power."

16. The time is ripe for a semi-serious revision of the prevailing view in the 1960s that the president was the representative of all the people, the sole custodian of the national interest. Congress, on the other hand, was then considered the stronghold of declining interests — small towns, rural backwaters, the South, etc. For this reason, we were told, the presidency was a more liberal institution than the Congress. See, for example, James MacGregor Burns, The Deadlock of Democracy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963). Today one could write that the president remains the sole representative of the national interest, and that the Congress remains the stronghold of declining interests — the cities, the Northeast, labor, etc. That is why the presidency is a more conservative institution than the Congress. The point should be obvious. One must be exceedingly careful when talking about the respective policy biases of the presidency and the Congress. Institutional biases need to be distinguished from those that arise from ephemeral constellations of political forces.


18. Woll, American Bureaucracy, 2nd ed., p. 173. The Schecter rule refers to the 1935 Supreme Court decision Schecter Poultry Corp. v. United States in which the conservative court seized on the inadequacy of congressional standards and guidelines to negate a major piece of New Deal legislation.

19. See, for example, Julius Turner, "Responsible Parties: A Dissent from the Floor," American Political Science Review 45 (1951): 143-152.


24. Recall that national surveys typically find that 1/2 to 2/3 of the population approve of the performance of their members of Congress, whereas only 1/5 to 1/3 approve of the performance of Congress. The perception of a divergence between individual and collective performance is precisely the problem, although incumbent members understandably wish to maintain that divergent perception.

25. This is the proposal of Michael Nelson, Washington Monthly, December 1976.