

In our day of controversial issues such as health care and NAFTA, huge medical (AMPAC) and labor-oriented (UAW, for example) interest groups working with Congressional Committees and government agencies play a central role in establishing foreign and domestic policy. Today, without each other, it is nearly impossible for Congress, the bureaucracy, and interest groups to operate.

Paul C. Light, a political scientist, described many aspects of the Iron Triangle as Congress considered the Department of Veterans Affairs Act in 1987 and 1988. This act would elevate the VA to the Cabinet, creating the Department of Veterans Affairs, with the possibility of linking judicial review to the new department. The Veteran's Iron Triangle at the time was very complex. Among the Congressional Committees in the House and Senate were the Senate Governmental Affairs committee, the House Governmental Operations Committee, and the Senate and House Veterans affairs committees. John Glenn, the Chair of the Senate Governmental Affairs committee, played a central role in the debate over the Cabinet bill. He argued in favor of the judicial review provision to the bill. One of Glenn's opponents was Representative G.V. Montgomery, who strongly opposed judicial review and its linkage to the Cabinet bill.

In addition, the Veterans agencies such as the DAV, VFW, American Legion, and AMVETS were opposed to Glenn's plan of judicial review and linkage. Alone among the big veterans interest groups that was for Glenn's plan was the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Besides lobbying the Congressional Committees, these interest groups wrote hundreds of letters to Senator Glenn and other Congressmen to ensure that the Cabinet bill was passed.

Finally, the Veterans Administration itself had a pull on the outcome of the cabinet bill. They simply wanted to be elevated to the Cabinet with no judicial review provisions attached. To accomplish their desires on the bill, the VA testified and lobbied among the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees and Subcommittees.

It is easy to see how the triangle worked to decide the fate of the Department of Veterans Affairs Act. First, the interest groups influenced Congressional committees. Not only did the Veterans committees generate excitement about the Cabinet bill, but they used their powerful lobby to keep the bill going. This was exemplified by the letter written to Senator Glenn from the VFW which put intense pressure on him to pass the bill without linking judicial review to it.

Second, the VA influenced Congressional Committees. The VA continually fought judicial review and supported its elevation to the Cabinet. The VA had a strong influence on Congress because many former VA employees were working on the Committees on Veterans Affairs. Also, Congress was dependent on the VA for carrying out the laws they made as well as for information concerning the implementation of their legislation.

Lastly, we can see how the Veterans interest groups influenced the VA. The Veterans lobby became as much a part of the VA as the bureaucrats themselves. (Light, p.61-62). The top jobs at the VA were not only reserved for those of the Veterans groups, but the veterans groups even had free office space in almost every "hospital, clinic, and benefit office across the country. (See Light, p.62)". The Congressional Committees, the VA, and the Veterans groups all created a great amount of influence among themselves to produce the desired legislation.

The Veterans triangle was important to the fate of the bill because: (1) The bill would not have made it through Congress were it not for the Veterans lobby and (2) Due to this triangle, Congress formed a different bill than the one which had originally been proposed. The VA got Cabinet status with judicial review, but the judicial review was mostly limited to within the VA itself. An interesting point is that much of the newly formed appeals system in the Department of Veterans Affairs consisted of former VA bureaucrats acting as judges.

Iron triangles exist today as Congress considers health care reform. First, Hillary Clinton and the President each have an influence on Congress. Both Mrs. Clinton and the President have each given recent speeches on the importance of health care reform, acting as an interest group for reform. Since this health care reform would involve everyone, including nurses, doctors, pharmacists, insurance companies, poor people, and all types of companies and businesses, many of these people are involved in interest groups that lobby to get their wants and desires in this health care reform bill.

Included in Congressional Committees involved in health care reform are the House Ways and Means, House and Senate Small Business, and the House and Senate Labor-oriented Committees. The Congressmen on these committees are especially affected by large interest groups such as the AMA because (1) they contribute vast amounts of campaign money and (2) they contribute political and substantive information.

Next to the Congressional Committees and interest groups, the influence of the bureaucracy closes the iron triangle. The Department of Health and

Human Services, the FDA, and others are included among the Government Agencies that have an influence on Health care legislation.

What are the implications of iron triangles for Congress? With health care as a central issue in today's political world, many interest groups and government agencies have an influence on Congress. In 1992, for example, the AMA had a 4-day meeting for legislators to get to know them better and share their ideas about health care reform.(see Burns et al, pp.245 -246). The Congressmen are concerned about (1) the way the public views them, (2) (2)Obtaining money from interest groups for their next campaign, and (3) the opinion of the bureaucracy toward them, whose job it is to implement legislation such as health care reform.

What are the implications of iron triangles for the President? As PAC's continue to be in favor of or oppose health care reform, they will have their influence on the President. The President is in an interesting position. (1)Being an elected person, the bureaucrats may or may not belong to the President's party. (2)To the bureaucrats, the President is just someone who comes and goes while theirs is a permanent position. (3)Even if they belong to the same party as the President, the Bureaucrats have very little loyalty to the President because of their distant position to him. Today, the President has little say in iron triangles.

What are the implications of iron triangles for Public Policy? With health care, free trade, and other issues raging in Washington currently, as well as all the bills to pass or reject, there is no doubt that these iron triangles existing today will have a strong impact on public policy. Today, the physicians, auto workers, and businesses have a strong say in government as interest groups. Iron triangles among Government agencies, Congress, and these interest groups themselves will combine to influence public policy.

In some ways, these Iron Triangles have a positive effect on public policy. With the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs, for example, a mutually accepted and good outcome was created. However, there is a potential for iron triangles to form laws which exclude a group of people. If health care reform put the burden on small businesses to provide health care for their employees, for example, these small businesses may be forced to go out of business. Truly, iron triangles can be like iron.