

TITLE: "IRON TRIANGLES" AUTHOR: JOHN "VINCENT" BALISTERE; NEVADA

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE BLOCKS TO PRESIDENTIAL POWER HAS DEVELOPED FROM A THREE-SIDED COMBINATION OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, BUREAUCRATS, AND INTEREST GROUPS, REFERRED TO AS THE "IRON TRIANGLES." MOST OF THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES HAVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AGENCIES OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH WHOSE PROGRAMS THEY AUTHORIZE AND FOR WHOM THEY APPROPRIATE MONEY. THE COMMITTEES AND THE BUREAUCRATS FROM THE AGENCIES HAVE PERMANENT AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH INTEREST GROUPS THAT WANT TO INFLUENCE THE POLICIES OF GOVERNMENT. NAME A POLICY AREA FROM DEFENSE TO AGRICULTURE AND YOU WILL FIND AN IRON TRIANGLE. WHEN PRESIDENT REAGAN, FOR EXAMPLE, PROPOSED SELLING THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADMINISTRATION (FHA) TO PRIVATE INTERESTS, THE OUTCRY FROM THE ORGANIZATIONS OF HOME BUILDERS AND MORTGAGE BANKERS AND THE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS WITH JURISDICTION OVER THE FHA WAS SO GREAT THAT THE WHITE HOUSE BACKED OFF BY SAYING THAT THE PROPOSAL NEEDED FURTHER STUDY.

THE IRON TRIANGLES USUALLY OUTLAST THE FOUR OR EIGHT YEARS OF A PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION. PRESIDENTS MAY COME AND PRESIDENTS MAY GO, BUT THE CIVIL SERVANTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH HAVE CAREERS SPANNING FORTY YEARS; AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND INTEREST GROUPS ARE MORE PERMANENT FIXTURES OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT THAN PRESIDENTS' CAREERS. ACCORDINGLY, PRESIDENTS ARE ANXIOUS TO SEE THEIR PROGRAMS ENACTED, SINCE THEIR TIME IN OFFICE IS LIMITED BY THE CONSTITUTION. PRESIDENTS TRY TO ACCOMPLISH MOST OF THEIR OBJECTIVES EARLY IN THEIR TERMS. AS SECOND TERMS PROCEED, THEY ARE SEEN AS LAME DUCKS WITH LITTLE INFLUENCE.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, IT IS OFTEN EASIER FOR A BUREAUCRAT TO DEFEY A PRESIDENT THAN TO COOPERATE WITH A PRESIDENT IN DEFEYING CONGRESS, WHICH, AFTER ALL, KEEPS THE BUREAUCRATIC SHIP AFLOAT WITH APPROPRIATIONS. ONE WAY IN WHICH PRESIDENTS HAVE SOUGHT TO BREAK UP THE IRON TRIANGLES IS BY PROPOSING REORGANIZATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH WITH THE GOAL OF BRINGING SIMILAR PROGRAMS SCATTERED AMONG A VARIETY OF FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS INTO A SINGLE AGENCY. FROM THE PRESIDENT'S POINT OF VIEW, THIS PERMITS A MORE RATIONAL APPROACH TO A SINGLE NATIONAL PROBLEM. HOWEVER, MANY IN CONGRESS PREFER THE FRAGMENTED APPROACH.

THE IDEA OF EXAMINING POLITICS IN WASHINGTON BY STUDYING THE SUBGOVERNMENTS OR THE TIGHTLY KNIT GROUPS THAT CONTROL POLICY MAKING WAS DONE BY DOUGLASS CATER IN THE LATE 1950'S. CATER'S SUBGOVERNMENT HAD THE THREE COMPONENTS WE NOW CALL THE IRON TRIANGLES.

A. KEY MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES RESPONSIBLE

FOR THE POLICY AREAS (SUCH AS A COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN)

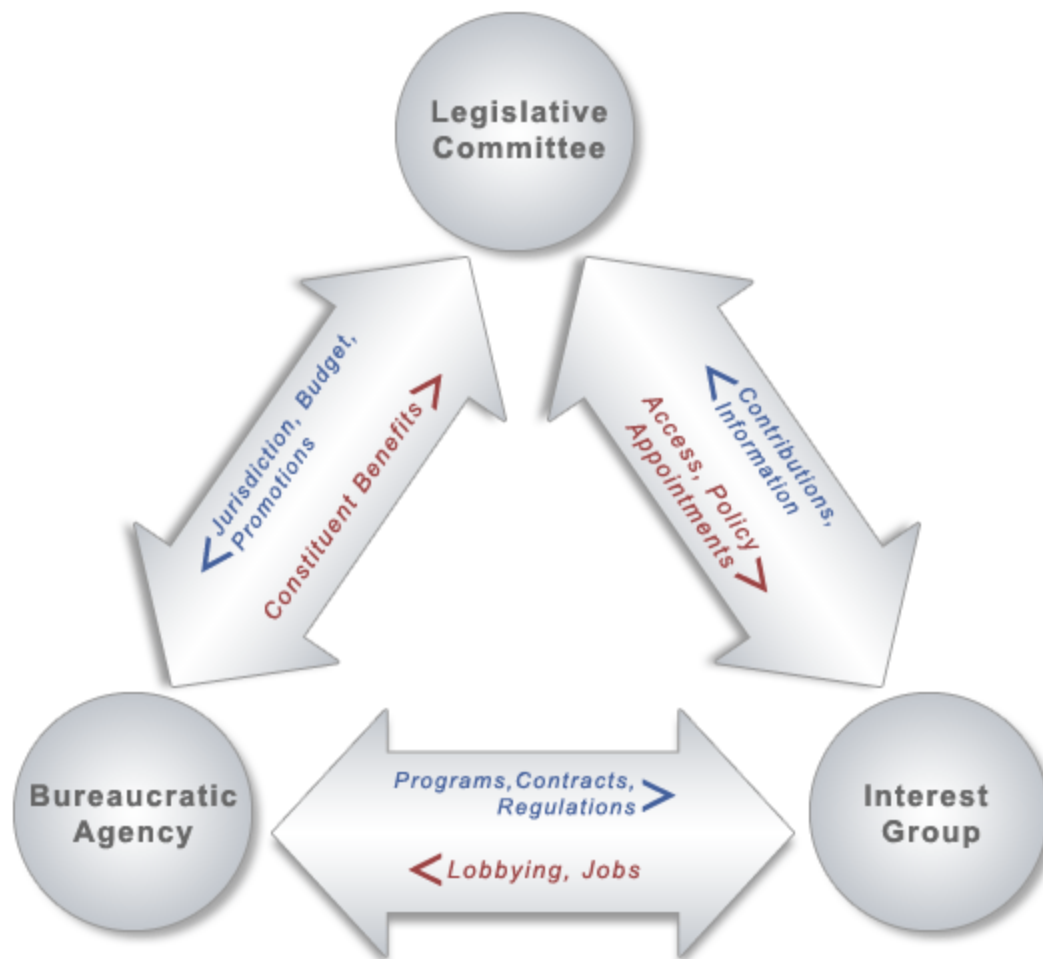
B. OFFICIALS FROM THE AGENCY OR BUREAU THAT ADMINISTERS THE POLICY (SUCH AS THE DIRECTOR OF A DIVISION OF THE U.S. DEPT OF AGRICULTURE)

C. LOBBYISTS WHO REPRESENT THE AGENCY'S CLIENTS (GROWERS, REFINERIES AND FOREIGN PRODUCES)

THE IRON TRIANGLES OR POLICY MAKING COMMUNITIES ARE LARGELY AUTONOMOUS AND CLOSED; OUTSIDERS HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY PENETRATING THEM. EVEN PRESIDENTS HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY INFLUENCING IRON TRIANGLES, WHICH HAVE ENDURED OVER TIME AND CHANGED LITTLE WHEN NEW ADMINISTRATIONS HAVE COME INTO POWER. JOB CHANGES HAVE NOT USUALLY AFFECTED THEM. AN INDIVIDUAL WHO LEFT ONE COMPONENT OF THE TRIANGLE OFTEN WOULD MOVE TO ANOTHER. IRON TRIANGLES HAVE WORKED BECAUSE PARTICIPANTS SHARED SIMILAR POLICY VIEWS AND TRIED TO REACH A CONSENSUS THAT WOULD BENEFIT ALL OF THEM.

IN RECENT YEARS, THE IRON TRIANGLE MODEL HAS BEEN VERY POPULAR WITH POLITICAL SCIENTISTS, WHO MAY USE DIFFERENT TERMS AND FRAMEWORKS, BUT THE BASIC IDEAS ARE THE SAME: TYPICALLY, A SMALL GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS DOMINATED POLICYMAKING IN THEIR ISSUE AREA, THESE POLICY COMMUNITIES WERE LARGELY AUTONOMOUS, AND THEY FAVORED THOSE WHO WERE WELL ORGANIZED.

Iron Triangles A simulation



Participants: The Sugar Industry, the USDA, and the House & Senate Agriculture Committees

Problem: Several states have enacted complete bans on beverages with high fructose corn syrup in schools and have mandated that sugar consumption be reduced 1/3 by school cafeterias by the 2018-19 school-year. These actions have been prompted by demands from citizens groups, medical professionals (such as the AMA), and nutritionists who cite the rising obesity rates among school children. The USDA is in charge of the school lunch program and is under increasing pressure to increase the nutritional value of the lunches they provide. The USDA also has a history of protecting commodities and farmers in the US. A decline in sugar consumption could spell disaster for thousand of sugar beet, sugar cane, and corn producers that make up the sugar industry. Over the last 20 years the sugar industry PACs have combined to give more than \$10 million to members of Congress, most of who are members of their respective Agriculture Committees. The USDA has provided price supports and subsidies to keep the sugar industry alive and thriving since the 1790s. The current program was enacted in 1934 as part of the New Deal. Legislation is now before the House Agriculture Committee that would:

- (1) Require the USDA to direct that the school lunch program reduce its sugar content by 1/3 starting in the 1-19 school year.
- (2) Require that all beverages sold at public schools be 85-100% fruit juice, water, or milk.
- (3) Require all snack foods or desserts to contain no more than 12g sugar.