PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Prime-Time Presidents

"Presidential Speechmaking and the Public Audience: Individual Presidents and Group Attitudes" by Lyn Ragsdale, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1987), Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. 32611.

Presidents frequently seek to sway the public with major speeches broadcast during prime time on network television. But do these broadcasts permanently affect public attitudes toward major issues?

Ragsdale, a political scientist at the University of Arizona, studied the 93 prime-time speeches (including State of the Union messages but excluding inaugural addresses) given by Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan between 1965 and 1983. Most of these speeches dealt with long-term conditions and focused on long-term plans rather than specific events. For example, Richard Nixon delivered 11 TV addresses on Vietnam, but only one (after the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in April 1970) coincided with a particular presidential act. "By disassociating many of their speeches from specific events," Ragsdale argues, presidents "retain greater control" over the timing and impact of a given speech.

By analyzing Gallup polls, Ragsdale discovered that, with the exception of Richard Nixon, approval of the president usually increased after the broadcast of a speech. The effect, however, is temporary, declining gradually over time. Except for Ronald Reagan (whose speeches increased support among all income groups), presidential addresses proved more influential among high- and middle-income audiences than among their low-income counterparts. Ragsdale believes that presidents tend to present "the needs and desires" of the middle class when announcing new policy, thus reducing the effect on Americans with lower incomes.

Surprisingly, a president's oratorical style has little impact on his ability to influence public opinion. Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, for example, were not eloquent speakers, but both Ford and Carter "altered group opinions" among middle- and upper-income Americans as much as the more charismatic Ronald Reagan.

Prime-time TV speeches will not save a presidency racked by war, scandal, or a failing economy. Moreover, success in mounting televised

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appeals does not necessarily signal electoral triumph; Gerald Ford's ability to create surges in support after a broadcast did not extend to the 1976 election. "Presidents," Ragsdale concludes, "cannot talk their way out of short-term and long-term political problems facing the nation."

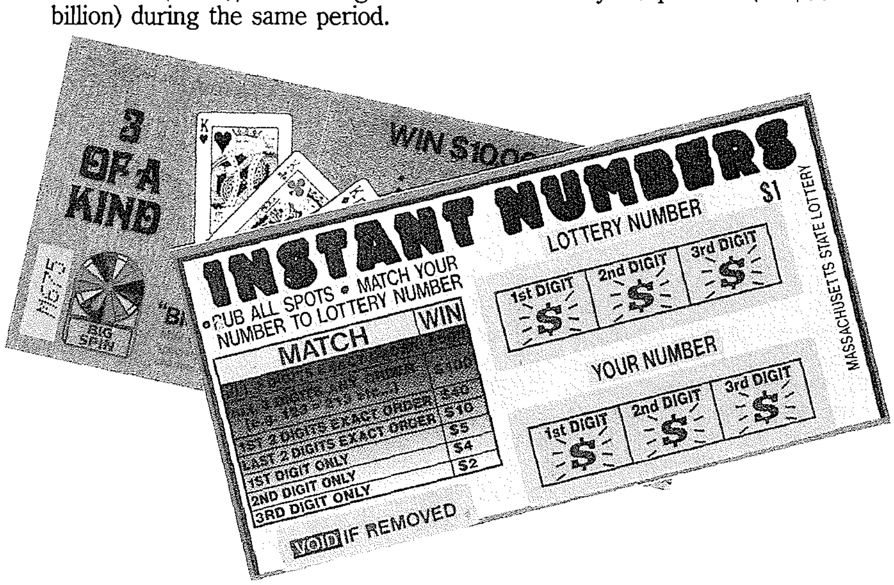
State of the States

"The New Federalism: Unplanned, Innovative, and Here to Stay" by John Herbers, in *Governing* (Oct. 1987), 1414 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

One of the goals of the Reagan administration has been establishing "the new federalism"—transferring control of many federal programs to the states. Herbers, a visiting professor of politics at Princeton, argues that although some proposed federal cutbacks have been blocked, the consequences of reducing federal spending and regulation have been "more far-reaching than almost anyone envisioned."

Many programs designed to transfer income from the federal government to the states have either been eliminated or sharply reduced. General revenue sharing, which distributed over $4 billion annually to cities and states, was eliminated in 1986. Federal job-training programs were reduced from $9 billion in Fiscal Year 1980 to $4 billion in Fiscal Year 1985.

State legislatures have responded to federal cutbacks by raising taxes and budgets. The Census Bureau reports that state tax collections (not including lotteries) increased by 33 percent (to $228 billion) between 1983 and 1986. According to the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), state budgets have increased by 26 percent (to $332 billion) during the same period.



Lotteries have proven a potent source of revenue for cash-strapped states. In Fiscal Year 1986, state lotteries raised $5 billion.