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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

A Budget for All Seasons

"The Myth of the Annual Budget" by Naomi Caiden, in *Public Administration Review* (Nov.-Dec. 1982), 1120 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

The battles over the federal budget seem to become longer every year. The problem, says Caiden, a political scientist at the California State College at San Bernardino, is not only that "reform" is needed, but that the very idea of an annual budget is obsolete.

Originally, the annual budget, submitted by the President and modified on Capitol Hill, was intended to allow Congress to monitor programs and evaluate policy. But today, because of Washington's vastly expanded responsibilities, such goals are rarely met.

The official budget does not even give a full picture of Washington's activities. Between 1967 and 1981, outstanding federal *loans*, many of them "off budget," jumped from \$47 billion to \$187 billion. Invisible "tax expenditures" (revenue lost due to tax "breaks") grew from \$36 billion annually to some \$228 billion during the same period.

Meanwhile, time constraints and the need to pass budget proposals through a welter of House and Senate committees virtually preclude careful congressional review. And by 1981, 76 percent of federal outlays were classified "uncontrollable," up from 59 percent in 1967. Two-thirds of such spending goes for "entitlement" programs such as Social Security and food stamps—and is determined not by budget-makers but by the number of eligible recipients. Conflicting estimates of such needs and of future economic conditions in general make fixing even the overall shape of the annual budget an illusory exercise.

Attempts to reform the process have backfired. In 1974, Congress created the Congressional Budget Office to provide forecasts. Fixing overall spending limits became the responsibility of newly created House and Senate budget committees. But the reforms fragmented the process further and consumed more time.

A yearlong budget period, Caiden argues, "is too short for some purposes and too long for others." Spending for the military, public works, and some social programs must be planned years in advance; outlays to

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cushion economic downturns must be increased on short order. The creation of separate budgets for various types of expenditures would help to rationalize matters. So would agreeing on a single economic forecast and giving more budget authority to either the legislature or the executive branch.

Congress is already considering some of these ideas. Caiden is unsure what the final product will be, but she believes that the days of the annual budget are numbered.

The Fate of the Welfare State

"Towards a Self-Service Society?" by Nathan Glazer, in *The Public Interest* (Winter 1983), 10 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Ronald Reagan's conservative Republican administration and Francois Mitterrand's Socialist government in France have at least one thing in common. Both are pushing programs of political decentralization, trying to shift more power from the national to the local level.

For both nations, says Glazer, a Harvard sociologist, the changes represent a sharp departure that suggests a new direction for the modern Welfare State. In France, locally elected officials are gaining greater power at the expense of the central government in Paris. Reagan's "New Federalism" and other proposals aim at giving states and localities more financial responsibility in all areas of social policy.

In the United States, the tide began to turn against Washington as Lyndon Johnson's Great Society got under way during the late 1960s. Acceding to demands for "power to the people" and "community control," LBJ's aides created elected local advisory boards for new federal urban uplift efforts such as Model Cities.

Today, this trend is far stronger. The soaring cost of social programs—old-age pensions, housing, health care—is one factor. And growing numbers of college-educated Americans are less willing to defer to the wisdom of "experts" of all kinds—government administrators, social workers, doctors, teachers. By the late 1970s, Glazer writes, the push for grassroots responsibility could no longer be characterized as either conservative or liberal.

Moreover, between 1965 and 1974, the number of Americans doing volunteer work—from delivering hot meals to house-bound elderly to teaching the illiterate—grew from 22 million to 37 million, according to the U.S. Labor Department. Analysts in other Western societies—the Netherlands, Israel, Great Britain—have also noted a resurgence of interest in "self-help."

Do such changes spell the demise of the Welfare State? Hardly, says Glazer. But given the overwhelming scope of government's purview today, "elections are no longer sufficient to ensure a popular role in government." And the heavy taxation and high deficits that afflict the Welfare State, he argues, bar further sizable increases in social outlays. The next logical step, he believes, is an enlarged role for voluntarism.