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tion to head Commerce because he felt the country's greatest challenge was to forge a cooperative relationship between business and government. Fearing that stringent federal regulation would ultimately threaten freedom throughout society, he hoped to offer a brand of "gentle guidance" acceptable to business.

To stabilize markets and assure efficient production, Hoover created commodity divisions that churned out statistics on current production, inventory, and equipment for 17 industries. He secured business cooperation by appointing industry representatives to run these divisions. By expanding his personal staff, Hoover gained control over the department's previously autonomous agencies.

Finally, Hoover put Commerce in the public spotlight by building a crackerjack public relations staff. He hired professional newsmen and courted the business press with frequent Washington conferences. And he regularly fed scoops to eminent journalists such as William Allen White and Mark Sullivan.

By the time Hoover became President, Commerce was an influential Cabinet agency. After the Great Depression began in 1929, historians quickly branded Hoover a stubborn advocate of laissez-faire economics. But his term at Commerce showed his firm belief in active—though benign—government regulation of business.

Public Power Over Public Schools

"The Government in the Classroom" by J. Myron Atkin, in *Daedalus* (Summer 1980), American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 165 Allandale St., Jamaica Plain Station, Boston, Mass. 02130.

Twenty-five years ago, federal and state governments generally left teaching to teachers. Now, Congress, various executive agencies, and state officials have gotten into the act—setting standards for math instruction, prescribing agendas for parent-teacher conferences, and defining requirements for high school graduation.

Atkin, dean of Stanford's School of Education, traces Big Government's educational role back to America's near-panic over the Sputnik satellite launched by the Soviets in 1957. Fearing a U.S.-Soviet "science gap," Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958, which provided funds for upgrading science instruction. This made it easy for the federal government to expand its presence in the classroom during the early 1960s. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, for example, established remedial programs for ghetto youngsters—with lesson plans developed by government and academic specialists. By the late 1960s, single-interest groups were pressing government to meet the special educational needs of racial minorities, the gifted, and others. [Thus, in 1975, Congress required all public schools to provide "a free and appropriate education" to all physically and emotionally handicapped children—many of whom

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would previously have been committed to institutions or compelled to take private classes.]

Meanwhile, state officials have reacted to falling test scores by drawing up stiffer competency tests for students and teachers, and setting detailed curriculum requirements. Today, a proposed California law would force teachers to spend 200 minutes per week on the arts. Other states are variously mandating stronger programs in alcohol-abuse education, vocational training, and ethnic history.

Atkin argues that added state requirements could narrow the range of serious subjects that local schools can offer. The problem will be exacerbated if public schools—now heavily dependent on aid from Washington—have to spend scarce funds on more special programs for the handicapped, the poor, and other federally selected students.

Repeal the PAA?

“Pseudo-Opinions on Public Affairs” by George F. Bishop, Robert W. Oldendick, Alfred J. Tuchfarber, and Stephen E. Bennett, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Summer 1980), Subscription Dept., Elsevier North Holland, Inc., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Pollsters have long suspected that some respondents give opinions on subjects they know nothing about. An experiment by University of Cincinnati researchers Bishop, Oldendick, Tuchfarber, and Bennett indicates that these suspicions are well founded.

The authors polled more than 1,800 Cincinnati-area residents in the summer and fall of 1978. In addition to asking about genuine domestic and foreign policy issues, the researchers sought reactions to a bogus, undefined “1975 Public Affairs Act” (PAA) to see how readily individuals took stands on unfamiliar issues. Some respondents were asked point-blank if the “Act” should be repealed. Others were first asked “filter” questions (e.g., “Where do you stand on this issue or haven’t you thought much about it?”). Nearly 16 percent of the “unfiltered” respondents claimed to support the nonexistent PAA; 17.6 percent expressed opposition. Even in the filtered groups, 4.5 to 7.4 percent had an opinion, with pro and con sentiments split roughly 50-50.

Respondents who took stands on the PAA were far more likely than persons who admitted their ignorance to express views on real issues, such as affirmative action programs for blacks or tax cuts. And both PAA advocates and opponents tended to hold liberal views on domestic issues—though no such connection existed on foreign policy questions. (The neutral title of the “act” may explain the even pro-con division.)

The authors conclude: Surveys that fail to factor out ignorant respondents overstate public support for *specific* domestic social programs. However, they clearly reflect the public’s attitudes toward government’s role, in general.