

Raymond W. Cox III, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Department of Public Administration and Urban Studies
University of Akron

One of the core values in US public administration and management is the importance of establishing and empowering a competent, professional public service. As early as the 1840s the federal government and by the 1870s state governments recognized that government decision-making required a professional administration that could provide comprehensive and timely decisions that were based upon science and evidence, rather than political platforms. Policy formation and policy implementation were understood as complex processes that were often beyond the knowledge of part-time legislators. The complex world needed governments that utilized trained professionals and scientists to fully understand the policy problems. As early as the 1840s the US Navy used a system of examinations to screen and hire civilian employees. The work of the US Navy Observatory was essentially turned over to trained astronomers and other scientists, rather than commissioned officers. The success and reputation of the US Navy after 1850 was founded on the use of these scientists.

The lesson of the value of competent, professional civil servants was not lost on the rest of the federal and state governments. Trained, professional civil servants were necessary for a timely response to important state policy matters was addressed by creating non-political, profession agencies to regulate and oversee the activities of local governments and private enterprises. Regulatory agencies addressing the major policy issues of the day, such as labor rules, railroad billing arrangements, and model civil service systems were created in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The first federal civil service commission was enacted in 1871- 150 years ago. The first regulatory commissions and departments for both the federal and state governments followed in the 1880s and 1890s. Much of everyday life today in this country is overseen by professional administrators who first created and then work within a framework of rules and regulations. The political leaders of 150 years ago recognized that the world was too complicated and policy matters required such technical knowledge that professional researchers and scientists were needed to adequately understand the problems of the late 1800s. This has been the accepted practice more than 125 years ago.

Public policy making and policy implementation have not gotten less complex since the 1880s and 1890s when such public decision-making models were first introduced and universally implemented. To this day the hallmark of competent, professional government is in the extent to which professional researchers, scientists, and managers are valued for their competence and knowledge. Because these were processes and practices that were new, the concern was not the professional competence of the civil servants, but rather how to ensure that the process supported American understanding of democratic decision-making. Two solutions to protect democratic governance were implemented. First was a requirement for public participation before rules are approved. Second was the near universal creation of post audit review programs in legislatures to permit the legislative branch to adjust the law based upon the experiences of the agency in implementing policy. The after-the-fact post audit process was enacted to avoid constitutional conflicts associated with the legislative veto of on-going programs. The legislative review is critical, but to be constitutionally valid it cannot be used to halt program in mid-implementation. Legislative review occurs through the traditional enactment of revisions to current statutes.

For well more than a century public policy has been divided into a four-part process. First, elected officials and others in the public arena identify policy problems to be addressed, Second, the professional public service provides background information and analysis. Third, the legislative branch uses the research provided to create (and enact) new or amended statutes. Fourth, the enacted legislation is given back to the professional public service to set rules and implement the law. H.B. 93 essentially turns the public policy clock back 150 years by returning to a model in which part-time legislators can over-ride professional judgment in the middle of the implementation of constitutionally valid regulatory actions.