Discussion Board Post for class on January 28, 2019

1. Considering Stone’s discussion, which of the two dominant paradigms (Market v. Polis or RAM v. Politics or System 1 v. System 2 thinking – where the first item in the pair represents the dominance of rational thought and the second the dominance of reflexive, subconscious, non-fact driven thought) best captures the policy process as it applies to your policy domain and specific policy. Why? (2 short paragraphs)

I believe the Rational Actor Model (RAM) v. Politics paradigm best captures the policy process as it applies to the policy domain of technology transfer policy and the specific policy of providing funding for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) projects. Public Law 97-219 (Small Business Innovation Act of 1982) created the SBIR program. The legislation was the result of the passage of H.R.4326 (Small Business Innovation Development Act of 1982) by the House of Representatives and S.881 (Small Business Innovation Development Act of 1982) by the Senate during the 97th Congress (1981-1982). One of its four stated objectives (which is of particular interest to me) is to increase the transfer of innovations derived from Federal research and development (R&D) to the private sector. The program was most recently reauthorized through FY2017 by the Public Law 112-81 (2012 Defense Authorization Act). There have been several attempts to amend the law, the most recent being H.R.447 (SBIR Enhancement Act of 2011) introduced in the House during the 112th Congress (2011-2012).

The debate about this specific policy seems to be driven by interpretations of the data, facts, and information presented by various interested parties and logical consideration of what might produce the desired policy outcomes. The issue itself doesn’t seem to impact most people in a direct personal way or be of a nature of which many policymakers can personally identify. It also doesn’t evoke strong emotional responses. Moreover, there does not seem to be any overriding metaphor or analogy that is being used to frame the debate, which would be indicative of System 1 thinking.

1. In two or three succinct sentences, comment on two of your colleagues’ discussion board entries that you find intriguing, disagree with, or can expand upon.

Response to Erica Sanders’ post regarding mental illness:

Erica, mental health policy is a very broad topic so I’m going to reply to your post in terms of a personal example of a very specific mental illness issue. Mental illness actually runs in my family, particularly on my mother’s side. I had one maternal uncle that suffered from Schizophrenia and another maternal uncle that suffered from severe depression that led to alcoholism. My mother, who passed away a year ago, suffered from mental illness that was never clearly diagnosed. Eventually her doctors settled on major depression with psychotic features but that was only a guess. I had to work with a state agency to petition to have her placed under state guardianship on two separate occasions. One of the biggest frustrations dealing with my mother’s situation was the government policies and laws regarding when a person can be forced into treatment against their will. This seems like one of those paradoxes that Stone discusses. Current policy seems biased towards our societal value of “personal freedom” but in following this policy we seem to be violating our societal value of “helping the helpless”. There may also be some System 1 v. System 2 Thinking going on in the debate. There are those who characterize mental illness as being “weak minded and weak willed” and others who characterize it in terms of disease and genetics. Moreover, there is the stigma many still associate with mental illness that causes many who suffer from it, and sometimes their family members as well, to pursue seemingly irrational actions (or inactions).

Response to Joseph Fetter’s post about The Market v. Polis Paradigm in Affordable Housing:

In her book Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making, Stone argues that a struggle between equally plausible but conflicting ideas underlies every policy issue. With regard to affordable housing, the conflict might be over the idea that everyone should be able to live in decent housing of minimum quality versus our societal commitment to capitalism and aversion to anything that “feels” like socialism.

Discussion Board Post for class on February 4, 2019

1. A paragraph describing the Morality Tales various stakeholders appeal to in advancing their case for or against Fire Department reforms. What is (are) the Morality tale(s) informing your policy?

In reading The Fires, to me it didn’t appear that the stakeholders were making strong appeals to any particular morality tale in advancing their case regarding fire department reforms. Lindsay’s framing of policy issues in general seemed to appeal to the Rot at the Top morality tale. In his bid to reform the bureaucracy, Lindsay essentially argues that the government is the problem because it is insensitive to its failings, arrogant in its power, and contemptuous of challenge. One might argue that O’Hagan’s efforts to institute policy reforms in the fire department tepidly appealed to the Benevolent Community morality tale in an effort to save lives.

With regard to the policy domain of technology transfer policy and the specific policy of setting aside funding for small businesses to participate in federal research and development (R&D) projects through the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, there are hints that some stakeholders are appealing to the Rot at the Top morality tale. Advocates of the program seem to frame the issue as the system being subverted in such a way that small business don’t get a fair chance to compete for government contracts and that the playing field is somehow titled to the advantage of large businesses. Opponents seem to be appealing to the Triumphant Individual morality tale by framing the issue as any business being able to successfully compete for government contracts without set-asides and special considerations if they’re worthy.

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Comments on post by Tiffany Rosenweig regarding morality tales in education policy:

Does the framing of the issues and the particular morality tales to which stakeholders appeal varying depending on whether the focus is K-12 or post-secondary education or by various segments of the community? To me it seems that some advocates of comprehensive reform of education policy, particularly in the African-American community, are also appealing to a Rot at the Top morality tale. At times it seems that they are arguing that indifference or subversion of the system is preventing the playing field from being leveled and impeding the implementation of changes that would benefit particular segments of society (e.g., the urban poor which is sometimes a euphemism for “poor Blacks”).

Comments on post by Erica Sanders regarding morality tales in mental health policy:

It sounds like opponents of providing mental health assistance and resources to various segments of the community are appealing to the Benevolent Community morality tale. It seems that they are essentially saying that we should only expend resources for treating mental illness on those who are deserving but alcoholics and drug addicts not deserving.