

My analysis is exploratory and undoubtedly imperfect. After long adversarial review, I published it so that it could be improved. But so far, regrettably, substantive criticism and refinement have scarcely begun. The jury will be out for a long time.

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References and Notes

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3. U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Small Business and Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Alternative Long-Range Energy Strategies* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., May 1977); *ibid.*, supplement, in press.

The Smithsonian Under Scrutiny

Art Buchwald once wrote an article in which he noted that nothing succeeds like failure in Washington, D.C. The Buchwald thesis should now be elevated from hypothesis to theory, if not law. The ascendancy of bookkeepers within the Washington hierarchy has caused greater and greater emphasis to be placed on form, not substance. It is now the successful programs that suffer. The contributory programs of first the National Science Foundation, and then the Smithsonian Institution (News and Comment, 20 May, p. 857), have been subject to scrutiny for the wrong reasons. The bottom line is no longer success or failure or achievement of goals or contributions; instead it is adherence to bureaucratic procedures. It appears that bu-

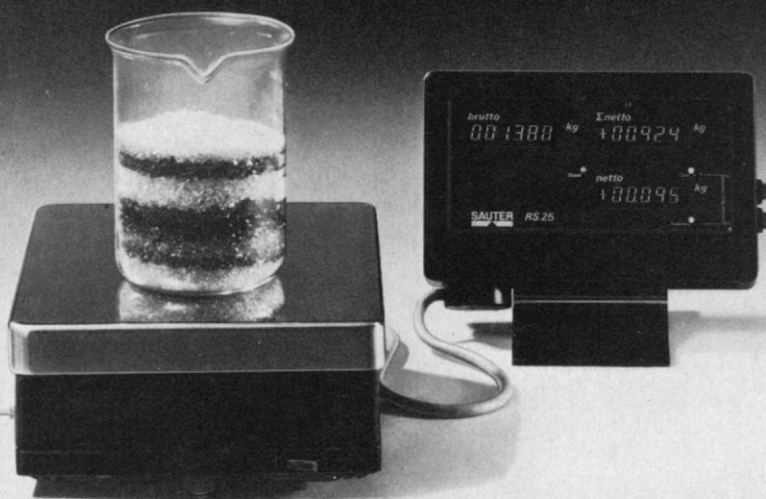
reaucrats would have Andrew Wyeth painting by the numbers and Salk busier taking inventory than proceeding with the polio vaccine. To be concerned with the hours a person works or the life-style pursued while ignoring the contributions made is bureaucratic badgering designed to ensure a mean of mediocrity.

Senator Proxmire (D-Wis.) gathers front-page publicity by holding up to ridicule what he considers to be absurd research projects. Even when he is right (and "right" and "wrong" are not absolutely determined), he is attending to projects that account for very little of the government's expenditures. One is reminded of the police department that bragged it had cited all drivers going 27 miles per hour in a 25-mile-per-hour zone, while it glossed over the increase in major crimes.

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The Golden Fleece may not so much be awarded as pulled over our eyes. Diligent pursuit of minor derelictions gives the impression of protecting the public purse. However, if it becomes a substitute for dealing with major malfeasance, the results may be neither positive nor neutral, but doubly negative, as accomplishment is rebuked and malefactors rewarded.

Evidently what is needed for wholehearted government support is monstrous failure, accomplished "by the numbers" for bookkeeping purposes. No matter what the cost overruns or management ineffectivenesses may be, the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, the Penn Central railroad, and the Social Security system, among others, receive massive infusions of government money with the only expressed desire that they try to use it more effectively. In Washington, gross failures seem to be either swept under the rug or alleviated by more money. In the meantime, projects that are infinitely less costly, and often quite successful, are made targets of ridicule and censure by these guardians of the public trust.

My hat is off to S. Dillon Ripley, who can build a National Air and Space Museum without having the contents ruined by a leaky roof such as the one at Kennedy Center. What Washington needs is more Ripleys and others like him who can get the job done, and fewer Proxmires. It is about time that bureaucratic spleen be spent on Washington-sponsored failures rather than on its sometimes eccentric successes. It is difficult to imagine that Buchwald's law is reversible, but one can always hope.

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Forecasting Climatic Fluctuations: The Winter of 1976-77

The highly abnormal winter of 1976-77, characterized by severe cold over the central and eastern part of the nation and drought over the West, has brought into prominence the subject of short-period climatic fluctuations and raised the question of whether such events might be foreshadowed. Evidence suggests that there was some consensus among people who have worked on seasonal forecasting problems for many years, so that the dramatic change of temperature pattern relative to the mild conditions observed in the East during the past five winters was foreseen.