

## **Political Science in Arkansas - Problems and Opportunities**

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It was much easier to accept the gracious invitation to speak to you at this historic first meeting of the Arkansas Political Science Association than it was to decide what to say! I asked my wife for suggestions and she said, "Why don't you go to the oldest, most experienced, wisest political scientist in the state, and ask him?" So I went to Dr. Bob Riley (Chairman of the Ouachita Political Science Department and current Lt. Governor of the State of Arkansas) and asked him for suggestions. He said "Some of us have more than a passing interest in whether Arkansas Governor Dale Bumpers will run for the Senate and be elected. Why don't you demonstrate some of political science's predictive powers?"

I pondered Bob's suggestion and reminded him that Peter Lisagor described the role of political science as making a series of "if....then" statements, such as "If Governor Bumpers should decide to run for the Senate, and if he should win, then he would leave a vacancy in the Governor's office." I reminded Bob of the painful 1936 experience of the **Literary Digest** which employed political scientists with early skills in public opinion polling, and then predicted that Alf Landon would defeat Franklin D. Roosevelt in his re-election effort. As I recall, the life expectancy of poor predictors is not very good— zero percent, as a matter of fact!

Political scientists, in Arkansas and everywhere else, have their hands full, almost four decades after the death of the **Literary Digest**, trying to explain political behavior of the past and present, without assuming the burdens of prediction!

So I returned to my wife and explained my predicament, with "age, wisdom and experience" not helping me choose a topic. Betty Jo said, "Why don't you go to the youngest, most brash and headstrong political scientist in Arkansas, and ask him for suggestions." So I went to Jim Ranchino and asked "What questions are most important to you these days!" He said, "What are the prospects for a salary increase next year?" I said, "No, Jim, I

mean seriously,” and Jim said, “You think I’m not serious?” After letting me sweat much too long, he suggested that I share some of my personal struggle with the question, “Can a person continue to be a practicing political scientist when he becomes a university president?”

I recalled my struggle with that question when I was offered the Ouachita presidency in the summer of 1969. I was a professor of political science at Vanderbilt University at that time, and Director of its Urban and Regional Development Center. The Chancellor of Vanderbilt was Alexander Heard, who had been a practicing political scientist at the University of North Carolina, and I felt sure he had once struggled with that same question. I called and asked if I could come to his office in nearby Kirkland Hall and talk with him about his opinion on that subject.

Chancellor Heard was very gracious in inviting me to come over and talk with him about that question, but he said “Don’t come right now; wait until five o’clock, when I can clear some of the notes on my desk and we can talk.” I did that and he was very helpful in sharing with me how difficult it would be to continue being a practicing political scientist. He described his inability to accept invitations to be on the program of various political science meetings. Occasionally it was the problem of preparation time, but often it was simply the unavoidable conflict of top priority university events.

Then he pointed to three big fat books stacked on one corner of his big mahogany desk. “Five months ago I accepted the request from an old friend,” he said, “to write an analytical and comparative review of those books for the **American Political Science Review**. He flattered me into agreeing to do it by telling me I am the world’s leading authority on money and politics, and am the only person who could review all three books fairly to the authors. I want to do it— I’ve just got to do it, but when on earth am I going to find time to read those books!”

After an hour of sharing similar stories with me, Chancellor Heard convinced me that, although it is a worthy goal, and one that he had set for himself, every year it got harder and harder to achieve. His response to my question was, basically, “I recommend that you try to do it, but must assure you that it is almost impossible to do!”

As if his experience was not enough to dissuade me from attempting to do both, other friends shared a pocket full of stories about all of the snares and dangers of being a university president "in these times of student demonstrations, riots, and occupation of the president's office," when average tenure of a newly appointed president was said to be just a little more than two years. I have shared these stories all over the state of Arkansas, in hope of getting a little sympathy for the job we presidents have to do. With apologies to those of you who have already heard them, I share the top three to you now as evidence the difficulty of a president being an active political scientist:

Two of these stories were told by Dr. Porter Routh, Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention, who said, "Dan, I have been trying to find the right words to share with you as you wrestle with this decision. I finally chose the story of the prison chaplain who visited "death row" and didn't want to say exactly the same thing to each of three prisoners awaiting the electric chair. After saying "God Bless you" to the first, and "I will pray for you" to the second, he paused a moment before the third and finally said, "More power to you." I then asked Dr. Routh, "Do you think they will expect me to walk on water after I arrive in Arkadelphia?" He said, "No, they'll expect you to come in walking on water!"

The third story was shared by Dr. J. Leiper Freeman, a political scientist colleague and friend at Vanderbilt, who enjoyed telling what almost qualified as a "shaggy dog" story in my presence to anyone in the Vandy faculty lounge who would listen, hoping to discourage me from leaving Vanderbilt! As he told it, one night I was awakened from my sleep by a loud voice calling, "Daniel!" I answered, "Speak Lord for Thy servant heareth." God said, "I want you to go over west of the Mississippi River into Arkansas to be president of Ouachita Baptist University." My reply to God was "Let me think about that and pray about that." God said, "All right, you do that." and I did. A few nights later I heard the voice of God again, saying, "What is your answer, Daniel? I said, " God, I have decided to go over into Arkansas to be president of Ouachita on one condition." God asked what the condition was. I said, "The condition is that You go with me!" God replied, "Let me think about that, and pray about that," and I said, "All right, you do that." (Obviously this had become a two-punch-line story!) A few nights later, I heard God calling out, "Daniel!" and I replied, "Yes,

God, what is your answer." God said, "I have decided to go with you....as far as Memphis!"

It was the same Leiper Freeman who later (at a farewell dinner for me), gave his explanation of why I finally decided to accept the Ouachita presidency. He said my decision was three-fold: God, father, and alma mater. He was referring to my religious commitment, my father's having been president of Ouachita from 1934 to 1949, and my being an alumnus of Ouachita (class of 1945). I told him that he had constructed a pretty good explanation.

For your information, I decided to try to be both a president and an active practicing political scientist, including teaching one course each year and keeping my textbook on state and local government up to date. I have given up on teaching the course (too many travel absences!), but the third edition of the textbook will be published in three months.

I finally decided it would take far too long for me to speak to you today about whether it is possible to be both a university president and an active political scientist. I pause for the standing ovation!

So I returned to my long-suffering wife and asked for another suggestion. She said "Why don't you talk about the effect of Watergate on teaching and research in political science?" We then had a good discussion of that possibility. I told her I had considered that possibility of speaking about the positive and negative effects. The positive included the built-in "attention grabber" for students since it has been in the headlines so much, but most students don't need any help in developing even more cynicism about what's going on behind the scenes in politics. It would certainly be a tough test of our claim to be teaching a science of the political process! Dealing with that would take far more than my allotted time.

Before I could even say more to Betty Jo, she said in frustration, "O. K. Why don't you just talk about what you want to talk about!" I remembered an old Baptist expression, "When in doubt, testify!"

My testimony to Arkansas political scientists, just now organizing into a state association, is that political science is a very worthy calling. My 21

years of teaching, research, and consulting, were very happy, challenging, and enjoyable years. It required a massive set of circumstances (God, father, and alma mater!) to get me to desert the known joys of teaching, research, and consulting, and move into the unknown halls of "administrivia." We Vanderbilt political scientists, housed comfortably on the first floor of Calhoun Hall were known to wave our hands in disdain at nearby Kirkland Hall when we were unhappy at some administrative decision (or lack of decision) that came from one of its administrative offices.

The political science profession has some very challenging opportunities in Arkansas. One of my strong biases is that there is no need to be in either a "mega-versity" or a "megalopolis" (or metropolis) to do first class teaching and research in political science (or the social sciences generally). There is no necessity for expensive atom splitters. All we need is people, political behavior, and political institutions, and we have all of these in Arkansas. Arkansas is the kind of state where the action ought to be in political science today, in 1974.

Let me name just a few examples of very relevant, current, critical subjects just begging for political science inquiry in our state:

1. Metropolitan sprawl and blight. Is there something inevitable about this process? Arkansas provides an excellent research laboratory because we are not too far down the road to change directions if we can help identify the various choices.
2. Pollution of streams, air, and land. Is this inevitable? Arkansas still has areas of unspoiled nature that constitute excellent research laboratories.
3. Political development (or political modernization) as a concept. These terms have become a part of the language of political science used especially on "underdeveloped" parts of the world. It would be interesting to "try out" these terms and related bodies of knowledge within the state of Arkansas. I can think of some areas of state and local government in Arkansas that would provide excellent research laboratories. County government has been called the "dark continent" of American politics, and this may be especially true in Arkansas.

4. New challenges of the politics of balancing agriculture and industry in Arkansas. Is industry synonymous with progress? Is population growth synonymous with progress?
5. Study of critical variables in policy outcomes in Arkansas.
6. Study of the politics of racial justice and racial reconciliation in Arkansas.
7. Study of the struggle for a genuine two-party system in Arkansas.
8. Study of a state political culture that produced Orval Faubus, J. William Fulbright, Winthrop Rockefeller, and Dale Bumpers, all at virtually the same time!

If we can't sell national and local foundations on support for these kinds of inquiries, we ought to be ashamed!

Let me conclude my remarks with an experience I had some fifteen years ago as a visiting professor at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. I was teaching local government to a class of some sixty Thai students and wanted to give them some modest experience in political science research and decided to assign some public opinion polling in the City of Bangkok. This was a very challenging undertaking because Thailand had just undergone a coup, and I was not at all sure the Thai government would look with favor on public opinion polling by inexperienced young students!

I had a Thai "counterpart professor" who assured me he could obtain government permission for students to engage in public opinion polling, and, sure enough, he did! The sixty students walked the streets of Bangkok with a questionnaire asking questions designed to measure citizen knowledge about, participation in, and evaluation of local government in Bangkok. Each student interviewed ten people and wrote for me a report on their opinions, followed by the student's opinion about the over-all result.

I shall never forget the report of one student (as well as his name, Tira Ratannapoon). He first apologized for his poor English and then apologized for the results of his interviews with Bangkok residents, which

he described as follows: "This results may be described in two things: the first is that the people pay no attention to their local government, and the second is vice versa."

After making sure I kept a permanent copy of his priceless words, I wrote the following note on his report and returned it to him: "Mr. Ratannapoon: There is no need to apologize for your English, for your report, or for the Bangkok people. As we often say in the United States, I read you loud and clear! You have discovered what we call a 'universal truth!' What you have described in Bangkok residents is very often found in the residents of American cities!"

I commend all of you for being charter members of the Arkansas Political Science Association and wish for you the joys of teaching and research in the years ahead in this great state of Arkansas! Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you on this special occasion.