

2015 AGM Concurrent Panel: “Creation of New Legislation with a Poverty Focus”

This panel, moderated by Alex Shakow, included remarks by Jack Sullivan (New Directions legislation), Chris Holmes (Global Water Initiative), and Terry Peel (Development Fund for Africa and Child Survival legislation). All three panelists had served on the Hill, and two had served in the Executive branch as well. All three were key actors in guiding bipartisan action on and passage of major foreign aid legislation, and they were asked to identify the most important actors and factors in their success.

In the case of the New Directions legislation, Jack Sullivan highlighted several critical factors:

- Major development thinkers of the 1960s, among them Barbara Ward and Gus Schumacher, were vocal in noting that foreign aid was not getting to the poor;
- Opposition to the Vietnam War led to the defeat of the Foreign Assistance bill of 1973;
- Jim Grant of the Overseas Development Council worked with the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) and gathered bipartisan support for a new approach.
- The Administration was not particularly engaged, with the exception of Ted Owen. Many in USAID were concerned that the legislation might curtail large capital-intensive programs, while State was concerned that it would curtail their practice of political poaching of USAID funds.

The bill saved foreign assistance The restructuring of the foreign assistance accounts under New Directions still had enough flexibility that successive administrations were able to pursue their priorities within the account structure. The influence of this legislation lasted thirteen years, through Peter McPherson’s term as Administrator.

In the case of the Development Fund for Africa (DFA) and Child Survival legislation, Terry Peel pointed out that by the mid 1980s, large coalitions inside and outside government were needed to get legislation passed. In the case of the DFA the White House, USAID, State, the Black Caucus, and outside advocacy groups were focused on the small amount of funding (roughly \$300 million) being directed to Africa, compared to \$1.2 billion for Central America. The DFA was written without earmarks or functional account restrictions. In 1989, the DFA was put in that year’s appropriations bill. Although the Administration officially opposed it, the bill had great support from the USAID career cadre. After the Republican victory in the 1994 elections, the DFA was eliminated (with lukewarm protest from the Administration). But the legislation had its intended effect, as funding for Africa more than tripled during that period.

As for the child survival legislation, coalitions and a wide range of constituencies were also important. In particular, the Select Committee on Hunger (Tony Hall), Jim Grant at UNICEF, and a sympathetic Administration that was concerned for dwindling political support for foreign aid, all played a role. The legislation began with a \$22.5 million earmark on the appropriations bill for child survival programs, designed in part, according to Terry Peel, to make it possible for Members of Congress to justify their vote on foreign aid to their skeptical constituencies.

The Water for the World bill, passed in 2014, began in 2005 as an effort by Senator Dick Durbin and Congressman Earl Blumenauer to honor Senator Paul Simon's legacy. The bill required bipartisan support from faith-based groups, women's organization, environmental groups, and groups advocating for a more transparent and accountable approach to foreign assistance. It is quite directive, in terms of reporting, targeting and measurement of results, and it took a great deal of confidence-building between professional staffs in the Administration and on the Hill. It would not have succeeded without political leadership and commitment in both branches of government.

In summarizing the lessons learned and the common themes, the panel and moderator identified the follow key elements:

- Trust or confidence building among conflicting constituencies, be they between parties on the Hill, between the Hill and the Administration, or between the Administration and outside stakeholders.
- A clear strategy that identifies both the rationale for the legislation and some specificity of approach.
- Intellectual and political leadership and
- Strong efforts by all supporters to build bipartisan support and broad coalitions.

In the discussion that followed the panel presentation, a number of additional ideas were presented:

- "New Directions" was about the poor majority, although many wanted to interpret it as directed at the "poorest of the poor." USAID needed to educate Congress and the public on what it really meant.
- The non-profit and contracting community was not as large or as well organized in the 1960s, 70s and 80s as it is today. Even social media now plays a major role in advocacy, as do celebrities.
- Congressional Staff field visits and CODELs play an important role in educating Congress and building trust with the Administration. In non-election years these visits are critical.

The MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) is another legislative initiative that required strong political leadership and a large outside constituency. That it is still going strong ten years later, focusing on economic growth with discretionary funds and no earmarks, is a testament to what can be done when the Administration makes a concerted effort and asks for the resources.