In scheduling this hearing, the Committee has expressed some interest in observations on the strengths and weaknesses of the social sciences. I have already commented on the gradually enlarging role of the social sciences in the national structure for providing science advice on issues of public policy. What about the capability of these sciences for providing the advice that is needed?

It is hard for me to avoid advocacy, but if some of my remarks sound self-serving, it is because they rest on a lifelong belief that the social sciences have much to contribute to our society, and could contribute much more than they do if they were supported at a more adequate level. I can greatly abridge my comments by referring you to the admirable report on achievements and opportunities in the behavioral and social sciences recently prepared by a committee of the National Research Council (Gerstein, Luce, Smelser and Sperlich, editors, The Behavioral and Social Sciences, Washington: National Academy Press, 1988).

It is misleading to talk about "hard" and "soft" sciences. In the physical sciences, classical mechanics is hard, but meteorology (e.g., the greenhouse effect) and the theory of high-temperature superconductivity or low-temperature fusion can be (as recent news stories tell us) exceedingly soft. Similarly, in the social sciences, knowledge about the operation of competitive markets or the capacity of human short-term memory is quite hard; but knowledge about how businessmen and consumers form expectations about the future, or about motivations surrounding drug usage can be quite soft.

Since science is always pushing its frontiers, it is always leaving the hard areas behind—they become "common sense"—and pushing into the soft areas. A science that is hard all the way through is a poor place to do research. In cognitive psychology, for example, thirty years ago we were trying to understand and explain how human beings are able to solve simple puzzles. Today, we think we understand those processes pretty well, so we are researching on how human beings make scientific discoveries. The theory of puzzle solving is hard science, the theory of scientific discovery is still softish science.

To be suitable for research, it is not enough that an area be soft; there should also be some tools for tackling it—some ideas about the next step. Often data, or ways of getting them, are the key. Inadequacy of basic data is the most serious impediment to social science research in most domains today, and the data are not going to become noticeably better without substantial increases in the level of research funding.

Economics, sociology, and political science need to collect, on a more or less continuous basis, more facts about the way in which our society operates, and the ways in which its human actors behave. Psychology needs increased opportunities to study behavior in the laboratory, and organization theory and business economics need more extensive and detailed observation of what goes on daily in the decision-making work of business firms and government organizations. We particularly need better data about how people and institutions change over time: longitudinal data. I would count sophistication in building and applying theories as among the great strengths of the social sciences today, and the lack of adequate data as among the great weaknesses.

Let me conclude with a comment on research in an area where all of you are expert, and where you know from your own experiences that the "common sense" of media and public can be wholly misleading. Government has a bad press in our society. We praise our democratic institutions, but we can find nothing good to say about politics. There is little realization that democracy and politics are the reverse sides of the same coin—that a democratic society is a society governed by advocacy, negotiation, consensus building, compromise.

One important area of research in political science is the study of political institutions: building up a realistic picture of how they actually operate and how they would operate if various structural changes were made in them. Even at the modest level of continuing research in this area, political scientists are able to provide a valuable corrective to the stereotyped views of government and politics that are widely current.

They can account for the structure of American political parties—their conglomerate nature and lack of ideological "purity." They can make reasonably accurate assessments of the effect of registration requirements on non-voting. They can analyze the recruitment of young talent to careers in politics and government. They can throw light on how the political agenda is set.

In sum, they can help us know ourselves as citizens and as actors in the political arena; can provide the realistic knowledge of ourselves that is essential if we are to preserve and improve the democratic institutions that are the foundation of our national life. Surely that knowledge repays many times the small investment—a few million dollars at most.
that the Federal government makes each year in basic research in political science.

The Profession

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discussion would be organized.

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Since Almond's article argues there is a methodological separateness that limits us as a discipline, I tried to choose panelists for their different views on formal and normative political theory for the 1989 APSA meetings. Initially, I had wanted to sponsor a panel to address the nature of formal and normative theory. I knew I was a bit uncertain about the precise nature of these fields and sensed that other scholars shared my desire for greater clarity. Then I read Gabriel Almond's "Separate Tables" (PS: Political Science and Politics, 1988). The surprisingly diverse and intense reaction this article generated in the profession suggested the confusion extended beyond my own subfield and into the discipline as a whole. All of this provided the impetus for the round table whose discussion is summarized below.

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Kristen Monroe

University of California, Irvine

What is the nature of contemporary political science? What shared concerns bind us together as a discipline, providing a common definition and direction to our intellectual enterprise? These questions were on my mind as I organized the section on formal and normative political theory for the 1989 APSA meetings. Initially, I had wanted to sponsor a panel to address the nature of formal and normative theory. I knew I was a bit uncertain about the precise nature of these fields and sensed that other scholars shared my desire for greater clarity. Then I read Gabriel Almond's "Separate Tables" (PS: Political Science and Politics, 1988). The surprisingly diverse and intense reaction this article generated in the profession suggested the confusion extended beyond my own subfield and into the discipline as a whole. All of this provided the impetus for the round table whose discussion is summarized below.

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