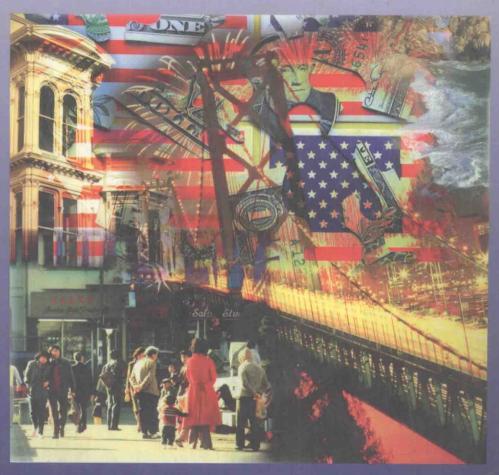
# REGULATION AND CONSUMER PROTECTION:

POLITICS, BUREAUCRACY AND ECONOMICS

THIRD EDITION



KENNETH J. MEIER E. THOMAS GARMAN LAEL R. KEISER

## Regulation and Consumer Protection:

Politics, Bureaucracy & Economics

Third Edition

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## **Preface**

Regulation is essential to modern society. Without rules for acceptable behavior in relationships with other individuals, any complex society would rapidly collapse. Regulation provides a framework that defines acceptable behavior for individuals in a variety of situations, People in business must be concerned with the quality of products they produce, the safety of the workplace, and any pollution that results as a by-product. Other citizens also find their lives regulated: Restrictions are placed on how fast they can drive, what kind of products they can buy, even where they can live.

#### The Changing Environment of Regulation and Consumer Protection

In the last two decades we have seen a wave of regulatory reform. The 1960s and 1970s saw an explosion of regulatory functions at the federal level with new agencies created to regulate the environment, workplace safety, product safety, and automobiles among others. The 1980s saw a backlash against regulation with the market-oriented reforms of the Reagan administration. If anything regulation and consumer protection emerged, however, from these reforms stronger than before. While the types of regulation that dominate have changed since the 1970s, American society is just as regulated as it was previously.

In the 1990s, power in American politics shifted to the Republicans who have promised to reduce the size and power of the federal government. For the first time in forty years Congress is controlled by Republicans. Not surprisingly, Congress has attempted to challenge and change the regulatory consumer protection environment. The new Congress has attempted to cut taxes; slash budgets; narrow missions of regulatory agencies; place new constraints on regulatory authority; consolidate agencies; demand new risk assessments, impact analyses and cost-benefit analyses before agencies are permitted to issue regulations; eliminate programs; increase waivers from federal rules to state and local government; eliminate cost shifting to state and local governments; abolish unfunded mandates (requirements of the federal government that cause state and local government to increase spending to be in compliance); and make greater use of devolution (sending federal programs to states, localities and the private sector).

Although the Republicans have managed to maintain control of Congress, they have failed to win the White House. Consequently some of their attempts for radical reform have been thwarted by the President. In response to a hostile Congress, however, regulatory agencies have moderated some of their activities and have suffered some budget cutbacks.

The constituency that seeks to protect consumers through more government is seriously challenged to retain gains already achieved, especially as the role of the federal government is reduced. Alternative ways of protecting consumers (i.e., information,

education, self-regulation) are likely to receive increased emphasis in the years ahead. No doubt, the remainder of the 1990s will be interesting to students of regulation and consumer protection.

#### **How and Why This Book Was Written**

Regulation and Consumer Protection is intended to document the scope and coverage of regulation and consumer protection in the United States. The growth in regulation and consumer protection plus the unique aspects of each area mean that one or two persons simply cannot serve as an authority across all policy areas. We have invited experts in these fields to write about the areas that they know best.

To provide some coherence, a conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2. The framework essentially combines the viewpoints of those who feel regulatory policies are determined by the social and economic environment and those who feel that bureaucracies are permitted the freedom to set policies without restriction. The economic and technological environment, along with the macropolitical forces, sets the general parameters for regulatory policy. These elements provide both opportunities to make policy and restrictions on such activities. Within the context of these forces, specific policies are established by bureaucracies in interaction with their policy environments. Internal agency factors can be used to explain the specific policies an agency follows among those permitted by the environment.

#### Goals of Regulation and Consumer Protection

In this study of regulation and consumer protection, we have attempted to do three things. First, we have not felt bound by disciplinary restrictions but rather seek to use the valuable information provided by all perspectives on regulation and consumer protection. The result is a multidisciplinary view of public policy. At times concepts and approaches are taken from history, economics, law, consumer science, organization theory, and political science. Guiding this multidisciplinary approach, however, is the belief that regulation is a political process. We have emphasized political rather than economic or legal explanations for regulation and consumer protection.

The second and third goals of this study are sometimes in conflict. One goal is to explain regulatory and consumer protection policy outcomes. The other goal is to suggest specific changes in public policy. Although positivist tradition holds that empirical analysis should be separated from value judgments, in regulatory and consumer protection policy this rarely occurs. Most regulatory analysis has either normative objectives or was instigated by normative concerns. This is as it should be. Social sciences, as Herbert Simon (1969) argued, are sciences of the artificial, concerned as much with how things might be as how they actually are.

Accordingly, this book will not ignore normative issues, nor does it expect the reader to do so. Regulatory and consumer protection policy determines who benefits from government intervention into the marketplace, a topic with few people who can claim

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neutrality. Rather than disguise normative presentations as empirical arguments, as much of the literature does, this book will make its normative contentions explicit. Although normative and empirical arguments cannot always be separated, some effort has been made to do so by keeping the normative arguments in separate sections and labeling them as such.

#### Useful Features of This Book

Features of the book that enhance readability and usefulness include employing four levels of headings, putting key terms and concepts in bold print, placing discussion footnotes at the bottom of the page where each reference is cited, locating all references in a single appendix, placing all case citations in a separate appendix, and including a detailed index

#### **Expressions of Appreciation**

The genesis of this project lies with Tom Garman who convinced Ken Meier that *Regulation: Politics, Bureaucracy and Economics* needed to be updated and expanded. Tom was right. Coordinating the work of twenty-two people and fitting it within a single conceptual framework, however, was not an easy task. As is tradition in political science and now for the first time in consumer affairs, all remaining errors of omission or commission are the responsibility of Paul Sabatier.

This book would not have been possible without the help of many people. We especially want to thank the wonderful authors—people who are rich in real-life regulatory and consumer protection experiences and possess substantial higher-level thinking powers—the experts who generously contributed their authoritative views to *The Politics of Regulation and Consumer Protection*:

- \*James Anderson, Professor of Political Science, Texas A&M University
- \*Mary L. Carsky, Assistant Professor of Marketing, The University of Hartford
- \*Mary Ellen R. Fise, Product Safety Director, Consumer Federation of America
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- \*Jing J. Xiao, Assistant Professor of Consumer Economics, University of Rhode Island

Meier, Garman and Keiser are grateful to their spouses for their continued support for yet another book writing project that again took away some shared time, but we all hope that these efforts will contribute to people learning more about regulation and consumer protection so they can help create a better society.

KJM, ETG, and LRK

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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Kenneth J. Meier is a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Part of the famed South Dakota connection in political science, he received his BA from the University of South Dakota. His doctorate is from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. He previously taught at Rice University, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is currently the editor of the *American Journal of Political Science*. Unlike Garman, Meier tries to avoid working for a living but he occasionally picks up some nonacademic experience. He was a member and chair of the Oklahoma State Ethics and Merit Commission where he gained experience enforcing merit system laws in a patronage state. He was a member of both the Governor's Task Force on Professional and Occupational Discipline and the Insurance Commissioner's Task on Property and Casualty Insurance (Wisconsin).

Professor Meier has wide ranging research interests, considering almost any topic relevant for a political scientist. He has published on bureaucracy, minority politics, education policy, insurance regulation, alcohol and drug policy, abortion and family planning policy, agriculture, traffic safety policy, infant mortality, and several other areas. The Political Economy of Regulation: The Case of Insurance (SUNY 1987) was awarded the Clarence Kulp award by the American Risk and Insurance Association and both The Politics of Hispanic Education (SUNY 1991) and Race, Class, and Education (Wisconsin 1989) won the Gustavus Myers Award. His most recent books are Politics and the Bureaucracy 3rd ed. (Wadsworth 1993) and The Politics of Sin: Drugs, Alcohol and Public Policy (M.E. Sharpe 1994). He has served as president of three different sections of the American Political Science Association (Public Policy, Public Administration, and State Politics and Policy).

Meier does not consult and wonders how Garman can do all that consulting and still have time to write so much. Instead he performs the role of satirical gadfly for the political science profession. Among his contributions are: organizing and participating on the "Contributions of Elvis Presley to Political Science" panel, coauthoring with Joe Stewart, "Rotisserie Political Science," presenting "Get Your Tongue Out of My Mouth 'Cause I'm Kissing You Goodbye: The Politics of Ideas" at the "Country Music and Political Science" panel, as well as authoring a number of underground cult classics that shall remain nameless owing to the nation's libel laws.

Meier teaches graduate classes in research methods, public policy, and political institutions. He enjoys teaching undergraduates but the University's Vice Chancellor for Risk Management will not let him. Meier lives with the love of his life, Diane Jones Meier, in a turn of the century home near Lake Michigan where his hobbies are stripping paint and trying to find the perfect California zinfandel.

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E. Thomas Garman is a Distinguished Fellow, Center for Organizational and Technological Advancement, and a Professor of Consumer Affairs at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration from the University of Denver and his doctorate in economic education from Texas Tech University. Garman's experience includes work for a United States Senator in Washington, retail sales management in Colorado, economic development project management in West Africa and teaching for 33 years in 8 states and 3 countries. Garman has taught 15 summer workshops for 10 different universities, and 8 of those were 'Consumer Issues in Washington' classes taught on location in the nation's capital. He is a professor who truly enjoys teaching. His work as a COTA Fellow focuses on Personal Finance Employee Education (and he may be reached at his World Wide Web site <a href="http://www.chre.vt.edu/~/pfee/">http://www.chre.vt.edu/~/pfee/</a>).

In 1994, Garman received the Stewart E. Lee Consumer Education Award from the American Council on Consumer Interests in recognition of his lifetime achievements in consumer education. In 1995, that same organization elected him a distinguished fellow.

Professor Garman has authored or co-authored over 12,000 pages of writing, including 120 refereed articles and proceedings publications, over 60 non-refereed publications, and 18 books, including five currently available titles: *Ripoffs and Fraud: How to Avoid and How to Get Away* (winner of the 1996 Association for Financial Counseling and Planning education's "Journalism Award"), *Consumer Economic Issues in America, Regulation and Consumer Protection, The Mathematics of Personal Finance* (all with Dame Publications), and *Personal Finance* (Houghton Mifflin). Garman has been identified by the editor of the journal *Financial Counseling and Planning* as "The Most Cited Author" from 1989 through 1995.

Garman is a past president of two national organizations, the American Council on Consumer Interests and the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education, as well as the Consumer Education and Information Association of Virginia. He has made 84 major speeches to professional groups in 23 states and 3 foreign countries. He has appeared on various CBS and NBC affiliate stations as well as The Nashville Network.

Garman has been a consultant to over forty corporations, trade associations and government agencies. He recently completed terms of service for the National Advertising Review Board, Consumer Advisory Council of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, and National Advisory Council on Financial Planning for the International Board of Standards and Practices for Certified Planners. Garman currently consults as a subject matter specialist for the U.S. Navy and the Department of defense.

Garman teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in consumer affairs and family financial management, fields in which his books are widely used. Garman has two grown children, and lives with his wife in their home located on Gap Mountain near Newport, Virginia. He may be reached at his e-mail address: tgarman@vt.edu

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Lael R. Keiser is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Public Administration at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She received her BA from Lawrence University and her MA and PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Prior to entering academics, she worked as a staff member for Senator Paul Simon of Illinois.

Her research focuses on the role of bureaucracy in public policy with special emphasis on social welfare bureaucracies. She has published articles in the *British Journal of Political Science*, The *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* and the *Public Administration Review*. Currently she is working on a book on child support enforcement. At the University of Missouri, she teaches classes on regulatory policy, social welfare policy, gender politics and policy evaluation at the undergraduate and graduate level.

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