

Electronic Green Journal

Review: Business and Environmental Policy: Corporate Interests in the American Political System

Edited by Michael E. Kraft and Sheldon Kamieniecki

Reviewed by Jan-Martijn Meij
Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA

Kraft, Michael E. and Sheldon Kamieniecki (eds). *Business and Environmental Policy: Corporate Interests in the American Political System*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007. 358 pp. US \$ 25.00 paper. ISBN: 9-780262-612180. Recycled paper.

It is a widely held assumption that (American) business has a disproportionate influence on the American political system. This assumption also holds in the environmental policy-making realm and many people fear that environmental protection is weakened because economic growth is seen as more important. Ironically, the extent to which corporations are able to influence environmental policymaking has not received as much scholarly attention as it perhaps deserves. For that purpose Kraft and Kamieniecki co edited this book which serves as an excellent introduction to the complexity of the matter.

The book consists of five parts (seven if one counts the introduction and conclusion by the editors), in which the role and influence of business in environmental policy making in the U.S. is examined. The influence of business in issue framing and agenda setting (Part II), and the effectiveness of actions that business takes in the legislative process in Congress (Part III), executive agencies (Part IV) the courts (Part V), (courts) and in state and local governments (Part VI) are all discussed.

In general the assumption that business has an unfair advantage in this matter is proven to be correct (especially when it comes to agenda setting, with Congress, with the EPA, and the courts. However, this issue is complex. For example, while business has an unequal advantage in its access to Congress, that does not mean that it always gets its way. This seems to be especially the case when an issue becomes salient to the public or when there is significant media attention. In these cases businesses seem to prefer to shift their attention to challenging policies within regulatory agencies and the courts. In these venues business has adequate resources and skills to challenge policies and to seek more pro-business legislation or enforcement. One of the resources that business uses to its benefit is money. By being a major donor in many political campaigns business gains influence in policy making. Since other groups, such as environmental organizations, are not able to give similar amounts of money, business receives an unequal advantage. In fact, sometimes politicians will defend the interests of business even when business is not actively taking a stance on issues. Moreover, regulatory agencies are dependent on the information they receive from businesses in order to function. Again, this does not mean that business automatically gets its way, especially not when there are health risks

involved, or when the public rallies behind an issue (in which case politicians will not necessarily support business interests).

One of the problems that several of the authors had to deal with was the difficulty (if not impossibility) of getting reliable empirical data to find conclusive answers to their questions. For example, it is nearly impossible to measure how effective certain actions are in influencing policy without relying on some type of self-assessment which in and of itself has problems.

The intended audience for this book would be students and scholars in the realm of environmental policy-making for which it provides academic avenues for further research. Its information is also highly relevant for environmental activists and environmental NGOs who might derive insights from the strategies engaged in by business. Finally, from a social movement perspective this book provides interesting case studies concerning framing issues, resource mobilization in the endeavor to influence environmental policy making, and political opportunities for these endeavors. I highly recommend this book to these and other interested audiences.

Jan-Martijn Meij (janmart@okstate.edu) PhD Candidate in Sociology, Oklahoma State University, Classroom Building 006, Stillwater, OK 74078 (405-744-9455).