

## **Reaction Paper Melissa Scudo**

Brunner's primary complaint about governance is its failure to facilitate a process to come to a common interest through specific policies. Using the example of controlling the size of bison herds and addressing the brucellosis problem among bison in Yellowstone Park, Brunner discusses the challenges in coming to a consensus on issues where there are distinct and sometimes volatile differences of opinions between special interest groups. Contributing to this, Brunner adds, is the failure of "high-level" politics to intervene in conflicts, and specifically, litigation, among special interest groups.

My interpretation of Brunner's argument is that the policy environment in the United States is mired with a myriad of special interest groups, and that in their very nature special interest groups represent a lack of openness to coming to a common ground on issues. What is needed, but is lacking within current governance structures is a process by which these interests can find a common ground (without having to engage in private and public scuffles and messy legal battles). I found it interesting that Brunner points to the constitutional separation of powers as center to the problem. Brunner states, "When constitutional separation of powers builds into the very center of government are pluralism, rivalry, competition, the representation in the executive and legislative branches of differing and possibly divergent interest, and as a consequence the strong likelihood that president and Congress will press conflicting policies. What is missing, because the frames did not provide for it, is a constitutional process for readily resolving these conflicts."

Brunner promotes a goal of improving national resource policy and governance from developing a common-interest stand-point. One of the benefits of a common interest approach, he argues, is that while a common interest may not lead to full consensus among parties, participation in the process by which a "common-interest" is developed and defined may increase responsibility for outcomes and promote accountability by others within and outside the community.

What was lacking for me in this paper was a clear alternative. There are going to be special interest groups and there are going to be individuals who may never see eye to eye with competing interests, no matter the "process" to come to a consensus. And I think there are benefits to the separation of powers within our governance structure. The problem to me lies more within the unequal power of certain interest groups because of affluence and power structures and the inequality of access to information that inhibits full representation of voices and interests in the U.S. policy environment.