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Introduction

- From the era of FDR to the presidency today, every American president has made decisions about science and healthcare policy with the assistance of the President’s Science Advisor

Objective of the Study

My research seeks to understand the development of healthcare policy of the recent decades by examining the contributions of these crucial advisors.

Methods

- To study this topic, I conducted archival research in the presidential libraries of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. I also visited the National Library of Medicine and the National Archives.

Background

- Historians have overlooked the role that these appointed scientists have played in American health and have instead studied their influence in nuclear policy, space policy, and issues of national security. Although President Dwight Eisenhower appointed his Science Advisor to serve in these specific science capacities, advisors from the Nixon administration onward have taken on a generalist role and provided advice in all realms of science and healthcare policy. In particular, since the late 1960s, they have played a vital force in shaping priorities for healthcare policy, biomedical research, and national wellbeing by way of public statements and private actions.

Discussion

- As a historian, I am interested in shedding light on how the office of the presidency balances competing political priorities to formulate decisions on American health policy. At a time where science advisors to the president play a key role in the coronavirus pandemic, I believe that this research is especially relevant.

Questions

- Some of the questions that I would like to continue to explore are: how did science advisors perceive investment in biotechnology to be central to economic growth? How did economic priorities become more central to the work of presidential science advisors over time?

Conclusion

- My findings from this research and archival trips will be central to my dissertation research.

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