Oral History Project
Lessons from the 1970s-80s Regulatory Reform Successes

The George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center’s premise is that knowledge and ideas matter, and that sound scholarship can help shape the institutional framework in which policy is made, as well as the policy decisions themselves. This was very evident in the reform of economic regulation during the 1970s and 1980s. The move toward deregulation was driven, in part, by scholarly literature (in antitrust, law, and economics) that showed that regulation of private sector prices, entry, and exit tended to benefit the regulated industries, often at the expense of consumers. Rather than offer a cure for “natural monopoly,” economic regulation was the principal cause of some quite unnatural monopolies. Policy entrepreneurs relied on this academic research to foster competition in several previously-regulated industries, with resulting improvements in innovation and consumer welfare.

RSC’s oral history project will focus on the academics and policy makers whose ideas and actions altered the relationship between government, industries, and consumers. We’ll record interviews with the leaders of the 1970s –1980s regulatory reform movement (both in academia and government), get their perspectives on the drivers and conditions for reform, their evaluation of the long-term impact of their reform efforts, and also their insights into the lessons we can apply from their experiences today.

The resulting recordings will be preserved in their entirety so future generations of regulatory scholars and policy makers can hear first hand from the key players in regulatory reform. We hope to be able to compile excerpts from the recordings for educational materials (for example, a short web-based montage). These interviews will also illuminate a book on regulation aimed at law, economics, and policy students. The goal is to help students understand that they can use scholarship, not just to study policy, but to make it better.

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