

In Memoriam
Lester W. Milbrath

On the morning of December 26, 2007, Professor Lester W. Milbrath passed away peacefully following a long illness. His research had enormous influence on political science, and he was widely regarded as a major figure in the discipline. His former students, colleagues, and family are deeply saddened by his passing. He will be missed greatly by all those who knew him or profited from reading his numerous books and articles.

Professor Milbrath was born in Bertha, Minnesota, in 1925 and served as an electrician in the Navy at the end of World War II. Following his discharge, he received his BA and MA degrees from the University of Minnesota, and his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 1956. He held a research fellowship at the Brookings Institution in 1956–1957. He then taught at Duke, Northwestern University, and the University at Buffalo (the largest unit in the SUNY system), where he spent most of his career.

While at Northwestern University, Professor Milbrath published his seminal work, *The Washington Lobbyists*, in 1963. Building upon his early interest in the role money plays in politics, he sought to analyze and explain the influence of lobbyists over congressional actors in Washington, D.C. Very little empirical research had been conducted on them before that time. *The Washington Lobbyists* was considered a path breaking work. Much to the surprise of political scientists at the time, his survey suggested that lobbyists exerted little influence and, instead, were a critical source of information for legislators. Exactly how lobbyists communicated with legislators was a focus of Professor Milbrath's study.

In 1965 he published, *Political Participation: How and Why do People Get Involved in Politics*. It examined the literature on citizen political participation extensively, conveying major empirical findings reported in previous studies in a highly organized manner. The book attracted a great deal of attention in the discipline. It became widely cited, prompting Professor Milbrath to co-author a second, substantially updated edition of the volume in 1977 with Professor M. Lal Goel.

Excited about the significant expansion of the SUNY system in the 1960s, he joined the department of political science at Buffalo in 1966. (He also held a joint appointment in the department of sociology beginning in 1987.) By then he had already established himself as an important scholar in political behavior, a central focus of the discipline at the time. Professor Milbrath continued to place his 80-plus chapters and papers in prestigious political science journals or books. He regularly taught undergraduate and graduate courses on political psychology, political attitudes and behavior, and research methodology.

In 1971 Professor Milbrath was invited to attend a faculty meeting at SUNY/Buffalo on environmental issues. Although he had not previously given the subject much thought, he left the meeting convinced that this was a crucial area for investigation. As a consequence, he shifted his attention away from research questions strictly involving political behavior, and began analyzing the human dimension of the environmental problems facing society.

The topic of environmental beliefs and values, as well as environmental policymaking, remained a research focus for Professor Milbrath throughout the remainder of his long career. In addition to his numerous journal articles and book chapters, he published *Environmentalists: Vanguard for a New Society* in 1984. This book compared and contrasted the attitudes, values, and perceptions of environmentalists with those of the rearguard, a group of people who embrace the dominant social paradigm of economic growth at any cost. *Environmentalists: Vanguard for a New Society* was based on extensive survey data. It received a great deal of acclaim by political scientists and scholars in environmental studies. Because of this work and his other writings, we now understand the belief systems of leaders and citizens who significantly differ in their support for environmental protection much better.

According to Professor Milbrath, a major challenge for those calling for the establishment of a new, sustainable society is the need to map out a way to abandon the dominant social paradigm of growth and move towards embracing a new environmental paradigm of harmony with nature. How must the social, economic, and political order change in order to protect and enhance environmental quality and quality of life (broadly defined) for future generations? He tackled this difficult and complex question before it became popular to invoke the general issue of sustainable development, in *Envisioning a Sustainable Society: Learning Our Way Out?* In this brilliantly written work, published in 1989, he persuasively argued how average citizens must undergo significant value change, and how government in most cases must lead this effort. He suggested a model for new governance at the end of the book. Clearly, he was far ahead of his time in his effort to outline how to develop a sustainable society.

Professor Milbrath retired from teaching at Buffalo in 1991, but continued to write and to testify in a variety of public settings on environmental matters. In 1996 he published *Learning to Think Environmentally: While There is Still Time*. In this unusual book, he utilized a fictional conversation with a neighbor about important environmental issues and what we must do to develop a sustainable society. Time is running short, he told the neighbor, and we must act now. Unlike Professor Milbrath's previous publications, this book was intended for reading by the general populace. At first, SUNY Press was reluctant to publish the book because of its nontraditional approach. However, it has been widely adopted in many environmental studies, policy, and politics courses. After he retired, he also escaped Buffalo's snow and ice by spending three winter quarters teaching and lecturing at the University of California, Irvine, which he enjoyed immensely.

In addition to his exemplary research and publication record, Professor Milbrath was a model citizen for his department and university. Between 1969 and 1976 he directed the campus-based Social Science Measurement Center and the Social Science Research Institute. He also served as the associate provost of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Administration during the same period of time. Between 1976 and 1987 he headed the Environmental Studies Center, and later directed the Research Program in Environment and Society. He was extremely skilled at obtaining research grants, and funded many graduate students and some faculty during his career. In addition, Professor Milbrath served on numerous department search and advisory committees.

Throughout his career he traveled widely and lectured all over the country and the world. He

frequently testified on environmental matters at a variety of levels. Fulbright fellowships allowed Professor Milbrath to teach in Taiwan and twice in Norway. He frequently reviewed book and journal manuscripts. In addition, he served on various editorial boards of major journals, including Political Psychology and Social Indicators Research. A graduate fellowship in environmental studies was created in his name in 2001 to honor his outstanding research and teaching contributions.

Professor Milbrath loved the outdoors. He especially enjoyed hiking, fishing, and sailing, and he always looked forward to spending the summers at his second homes at Cuba Lake and later at Crosswinds on Lake Chautauqua. He occasionally cross-country skied during the winter months.

Professor Milbrath was a wonderful colleague and mentor. He was extremely passionate about his work, spending many long hours conducting research and writing. As a consequence of his renown, graduate students were frequently drawn to the Buffalo Ph.D. program in political science in order to study under him. He was a conscientious and demanding mentor, consistently providing honest and prudent guidance to his students and the junior faculty in the department. He affected the lives and careers of many graduate students as well as junior professors. He also loved his family dearly. He was a devoted husband to his wife, Kirsten, and a doting father to his son, Erik, and daughter, Linda, and to his grandchildren. Professor Milbrath touched many lives. We all will be forever grateful for having the opportunity to have known and worked with him.

Sheldon Kamieniecki, University of California, Santa Cruz

Claude Welch, State University of New York at Buffalo

This memorial was published in the March 2008 issue of *PS: Political Science & Politics*.