Several recent posts on this blog have been about the political process, discussing issues like political polarization, congressional deadlock, and special interest groups. The discipline of political science is in large part the study of how collective decisions get made. It would seem to be in everyone's interest to have a better understanding of collective decision-making. But sadly, having already written off the theory of evolution and climate science, Republicans have now turned their attacks on political science research. Indeed, Eric Cantor calls for eliminating federal funding for *all* social science research, including the pesky subject of economics, but especially research on politics. This isn't just talk: the House of Representatives has already started down this road.

The House recently voted to cut all NSF funding for political science. According to Jeff Flake, the amendment's sponsor,

> *"So what kind of research is NSF charging to our credit card? $700,000 to develop a new model for international climate change analysis; $600,000 to try to figure out if policymakers actually do what citizens want them to do. Let me say that again: $600,000 here spent trying to figure out if policymakers actually do what citizens want them to do. I think we can answer that question in about 5 minutes when we vote on this amendment because I can tell you, people out there want us to quit funding projects like this. $301,000 to study gender and political ambition among high school and college students; $200,000 to study to determine why political candidates make vague statements. $200,000 to study why political candidates make vague statements. That's what we're paying for here.*

Flake couldn't seem to stay away from the issue of whether legislators carry out the will of their constituents. He circled back later to complain again about research into whether legislators do what their constituents want them to. Is there just a bit of defensiveness there? Most Americans, I'd bet, do not find it at all self-evident that legislators do what the voters want them to.

In another attack on political science (or so he seemed to think), Rand Paul went on Fox News to mock a DOD-funded study that he described as researching democracy among goldfish. Although his grip on the facts was a bit loose — the study was about a different kind of fish, was part of a long-term project dealing with robotics, and was only partially funded by DOD — Rand was right that the study (which also included modeling in addition to experiments with fish) has potential implications for the political process. It's easy to see why he didn't like the study — it suggested

how extremist minorities may be prevented from hijacking group decision-making.

Budget balancing doesn't have much to do with these Republican efforts. Federal funding for political science research compares to overall federal spending as an elephant's eyelash compares to the elephant. Cantor argues that eliminating all funding for social science research would add $250 million for medical research. This is obviously a pretext. The NSF budget for social science research is three-quarters of one percent of the NIH budget for medical research, and only about three percent of the total NSF budget. It is also about one-third of one-thousandth of military spending. The federal government could probably generate equivalent savings if the Pentagon ordered cheaper pencils and paper clips.

Maybe, as I've suggested above, some of the opposition relates to discomfort over objective examination of our faltering political system, or a fear that research into economics might not support conservative dogmas. The rest, I fear, is simple, garden variety anti-intellectualism, of the same kind shown by Ted Cruz's allegations about a sinister cabal of Communists on the Harvard Law School faculty.