

# Discussion

Lloyd W. Woodruff, Director of Research and Planning,  
Department of Taxation, State of Minnesota

## Resume

1. Mr. Stringham suggested making a few observations about state and local government and statistics. If Minnesota is a reasonable example, the tremendous contrast between federal and state employment of statisticians almost defies comprehension. As an indicator of the contrast, total state employment in Minnesota approximates 15,000 while one major federal agency, the Department of Agriculture alone, exceeds 80,000. The Minnesota Taxation Department employs 550; the Internal Revenue Service, somewhere in the area of 45,000. In all of Minnesota state service hardly more than one hundred employees qualify as research personnel and a bare handful as true statisticians which I would define in this context as those working above the arithmetic, tabular level of computations. In short, the State of Minnesota does not employ many "high-powered" statisticians.

2. In search for a common denominator or an area of difference among these three papers, I found a lead to the perennial issue of the role of the expert (the statistician in this instance) in the political process. Picture a continuum of viewpoints about this role: at one extreme is the "three-branch" theory of our government where

policy formulation rests almost entirely with the legislative branch; at the other extreme, lacking a short-title, is the belief in the inseparability of policy from administration--that even the lowliest of clerks engages in policy formulation as well as execution or administration. Accepting this continuum, we can locate Messrs. Lehman and Stringham fairly close to the two extremes. Mr. Lehman, strange as it may seem since he is talking about a committee of the legislative branch, shows how statistics and statisticians can remain aloof from the policy process; the Joint Economic Committee, by which he is employed, functions as a research agency and initiates no policy proposals. Its staff concentrates on exploring basic problems, feeding its data into the legislative process but not attempting to obtain specific results. Mr. Stringham, though not centering his paper entirely on this thesis, does contend that statisticians should keep an eye on the political process--that they should be willing to face a policy matter, and I infer, to develop specific analyses needed in support of it. Thus, we have two roles for the statisticians in public policy formulation and enactment. Attempting to determine the "proper" role extends beyond the scope of this discussant's function--but what should it be?