The early years of newborn screening (NBS) for phenylketonuria were roiled by controversy. Many metabolic researchers and public health workers charged that legislation mandating screening was premature given unknowns about the reliability of the screening test, who actually needed to be treated, the duration and efficacy of therapy, and possible harms from unnecessary treatment or overtreatment. Advocates, on the other hand, considered the concerns exaggerated and insisted that, in any case, the only way to obtain answers was to identify, treat, and study those with PKU. Nearly identical arguments are central to the current controversy over expanded NBS. This talk explores both what has changed and what has not in the politics of screening and also how the history of the 1960s controversy has come to be deployed as a political resource by partisans on both sides of the current debate over NBS expansion.

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