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STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION: A SYMPOSIUM

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AN OVERVIEW

It is stated by some authors of state and local government textbooks that if states did not exist in America they would have to be created. Undoubtedly this is to underscore the importance of the geographical decentralization of government in a country with such an extensive area as the United States. What the cliché does not explain is that governmental decentralization accomplished through a federal system is far different from governmental decentralization by a central government decision in a unitary system. Shifting the focus from the constitutional, legal aspects of federalism to the political, policy aspects---from layer cake federalism to marble cake or picket fence federalism---has obscured the fact that the fifty states are separate entities of government, each with its source of power in the United States Constitution. While that document imposes certain uniform requirements and certain uniform prohibitions and lays the groundwork for additional uniform requirements to be promulgated by the national legislature, executive, and judiciary in fulfillment of their respective constitutional objectives and obligations, the state governments are no mere creatures of the central government as is the case in a unitary system.

An underlying guideline of this symposium is that the administrative activities of state governments provide an array of rich opportunities for productive research and that the

scholars of government and particularly of administration need to turn their attention from the institutions and processes of the American national government to those of the American state and local governments. The expansion in the available research technology in the social sciences in the last two decades coupled with the shifting focus from state to national governments has caused us to overlook the importance and the contributions of state/local government practitioners and scholars. Officials of the national government, seconded by both the scholarly and popular literature, trumpeted the inadequacies of state/local policies and administration as if it were immutable principle. Several presidents talked about management-capacity-building programs for state managers as a prelude to turning back many governmental programs from the national government to the state governments.

Such catchy phrases obscured the fact that state and local governments vary from poor to excellent in any number of categories---from policy enactments to policy implementations. It was forgotten that executive budgeting was introduced by some state and local governments years before it was adopted by the national government; that some states had anti-discrimination laws on their books a decade before the national government; and that, while Congress still struggles under the Congressional Budgeting Act, many state and local governments have utilized a unified appropriations act for an extensive number of years. Thus, with so much attention focused upon national institutions and processes, it may be beneficial to our understanding of the total American system of government to turn our attention once again to state and local governments and ascertain the areas of commonality and the areas of difference.

The original emphases of this overview and of the symposium---to demonstrate the richness of the methodological approaches for studying state/local administration and present the findings of these myriad studies---have been underscored by President Reagan's announcement of his New Federalism policy. Almost immediately upon the conclusion of his "State of the Union" message, critics, both foe and friend, started proclaiming that the proposal was unworkable because the states were not capable of handling these programs---either

administratively or financially. It also has been proclaimed that the states may administer these programs unfairly. In essence, the criticisms of the President's New Federalism proposal have presented a picture of the states as a monolithic institution in American politics.

Ironically, at a time when discussions of the appropriate functional roles of national and state governments have moved out of the classroom to trendy cocktail parties, serious scholarship about the administrative realities of state government remains in short supply. A cursory glance at public administration literature reveals that most research on public management examines first the national government and second local jurisdictions.

For example, if one looks over that last three volumes of **Public Administration Review**, one finds that approximately 70% of the articles focused on either national or local governments and only about 18% of recent **PAR** articles studied state and county governments. Much of the same can be said for other scholarly journals that are not directly sponsored by some type of professional association for state government officials (e.g., the National Conference of State Legislators' magazine **State Legislatures** or the Council of State Governments' magazine **State Government**). [1]

Thus, it is hoped that this symposium fulfills a critical need to examine and re-examine the institutions and processes of state and local government. Readers should be concerned with a number of points as they review the contents of the symposium. First, the methodology or research procedures utilized. Are they appropriate for the purposes of the particular study and do they achieve what they are supposed to achieve? Would another approach have been more useful or more productive than the one utilized in the study? Second, do the substantive findings support the propositions or hypotheses of the study, if such have been stated? Do they provide any insights into the state and local governments which might be the basis for future explorations? Do the studies provide insights which might be useful to state and local government practitioners? Finally, do the studies provide opportunities for replication and thus serve as the basis for testing hypotheses and for the building of some

preliminary theories relative to state and local administration?

The articles presented in this symposium reflect the state of the art---both in strengths and weaknesses---of research on state and local government administration. In terms of basic methodological strategies, the eight articles can be classified by (1) their sources of information, (2) their method of data analysis, and (3) their degree of theoretical orientation. For example, the articles by Lauth and by MacManus exhibit the influence of the Dye-Sharkansky "paradigm" that has been popular in the study of comparative state policy outputs since the mid-1960s.

Following the style established by Sharkansky's statistical analyses of budgetary battles between governors, state agency executives, and state legislators, Lauth uses causal modelling techniques to identify the degree to which the method of agency head selection in the state of Georgia affects the governor's "success" in the appropriations process. MacManus, on the basis of data derived from 243 SMSAs, examines the interactive effects of state fiscal and personnel mandates on changes in a municipality's general obligation bond ratings.

Both of these articles inferentially test hypotheses drawn from a body of descriptive and statistical studies that utilize traditional administrative and political variables gleaned from government documents and statistical abstracts. Although neither article sets out an explicit theoretical framework, the rigor and strength of their analyses lay a foundation for the further generation and testing of hypotheses.

The majority of the symposium articles continue the classic tradition of state government research that was typical from the 1930s through the 1950s and is now in renaissance, especially in the policy implementation studies. Among others, scholars such as Lynton K. Caldwell, John Fenton, James Fesler, Robert B. Highsaw and Charles N. Fortenberry, V.O. Key, Jr., G. Theodore Mitau, and York Wilbern amalgamated institutional analysis with information gathered from their carefully cultivated contacts with state and local officials. [2]

Through a similar use of interviews, the authors of the symposium articles have captured the attitudes and perceptions of a wide variety of state government officials. The purpose of

the interviews is more than just to add colorful details to institutional analysis; rather, the authors use one of the principal tools of the professional social scientist to examine how variation in attitudinal factors such as job orientations, role conceptions or value conflicts can determine an official's pattern of behavior. By going "inside" city halls, county court houses, and state capitols, six of the symposium's articles offer not just an intimate look behind the sometimes closed doors of state government administration, but they also create the basis for systematic comparison with other state-oriented research.

The common thrust of the six interview-based studies is the examination of particular types of state or local officials (e.g., state energy administrators or county commissioners) and the capacity of these officials to shape the policy process. It is especially interesting to observe that the authors chose to portray the opportunities and constraints in the policy process that occur when a given type of public servant must interact with another type of official or with citizens. That policy evolves not just out of the actions of one official or one office but out of the interaction between responsible authorities and citizens has long been a verity in the study of American politics. From a methodological standpoint, this proposition requires the researcher to collect data on both sides of a given "interface."

Thus, it is not surprising that in the articles by Blair, Dickson, Elling, Freeman, Giventer and Neeley, and Mundt and Heilig, these authors either interview policy participants on both sides of a policy interface or probe the perceptions that one set of officials have about another set of officials (or citizens) with whom they must interact.

A second characteristic shared by the interview-based articles is their common concern with the external context within which state and local administrators must operate. Each of the six articles investigates interactions across a major division of government (e.g., executive-legislative, legislative-administrative, judicial-administrative) or between government and citizens.

Blair, for example, describes the declining importance of gubernatorial appointment powers as a bargaining chip for swaying the members of the Arkansas legislature. Out of a

combination of court proceedings and responses by county officials, Dickson weaves the story of how the Texas Commission on Jail Standards emerged as a buffer between the federal courts, Texas sheriffs, and county commissioners. Elling, by comparing the legislative oversight of state administrative agencies in Kentucky and Minnesota, identifies the principal constraints on legislative oversight activities and then prescribes some remedies designed to foster improved oversight. Drawing on her extensive interviews of administrators and legislators in six states (Arizona, California, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Wisconsin), Freeman probes the sources of conflict over state energy policy. Giventer and Neeley replicate the 1972 Marando and Thomas survey of Florida and Georgia county commissioners with a survey of California county supervisors. And at the municipal level, Mundt and Heilig examine the impact of alternative forms of representation on the interaction of citizens, city council members, and city administrators.

Curiously, not one of the articles selected for the symposium can be associated with what is perhaps the most common species of research on state government--an assessment of modifications in state administrative structure. Nor can the symposium be classified as management studies of state agencies. While in-depth examinations of federal agencies and/or programs flourish, they are quite rare at the state level. Martha Weinberg's excellent book, *Managing the State*, comes readily to mind; but, even in her monograph, she devotes considerable space to the policy interventions of the Massachusetts governor into four administrative agencies. [3]

If there is one type of research into state and local administration that needs to be nurtured, it is the management study that has its theoretical base in organization theory. The success of any effort to restore program control and operation to state governments depends on the existing management and resource base. Additional management studies of state agencies can pave the way for improved policy delivery systems within the states.

Another curiosity about the current condition of the states and the research focused on them is that the prevailing mood to

devolve more programmatic functions to state governments comes at the end of a twenty-year period of substantial change in the character of state government and its administration. From 1960 to 1980, numerous states experienced major constitutional and administrative reforms such as the increase in the length of gubernatorial tenure, the appearance of full-time legislatures, and the almost complete coverage of state employees by merit systems. To a great extent, the articles in this symposium grapple with the effects of these dramatic changes. In the 1950s, state government research diagnosed the pathological effects of political deformities like malapportionment and one-partyism.

The symposium articles, by contrast, pursue the policy impacts of changes in administrative procedures, organizational structures, and in the role conceptions held by public officials. If the effort to decentralize public programs is to succeed, then students of state policy formulation and administration must avoid a fragmented approach to research and must begin to articulate an agenda for research that can assist state and local policy-makers in the execution of their responsibilities. It is in this direction that the articles in this symposium point. Taken as a group, the authors have stated that the exchanges occurring during the interaction between different state government officials are critical determinants in the policy process. Other research, particularly on state governors, also comes to this conclusion. [4]

The symposium presented here does not stand as a monument to long years of coherent and systematic research within a common framework. Instead, the symposium calls attention to two strategic directions toward more fruitful research on state and local government administration: first, the strategy not included in this symposium but necessary to understanding state government---management studies of state agencies; and second, the strategy taken by the symposium authors---policy analysis of state officials and the roles they play as they attempt to shape the execution and implementation of state and local programs.

NOTES

1. For similar assessments of the lack of research on state administration, see Malcolm E. Jewell, "The Neglected World of State Politics," *Journal of Politics* 44 #3 (August, 1982) and Samuel Gove, "State Government Research: Getting Into the Mainstream?" *National Civic Review* (September 1982).
2. Lynton K. Caldwell, *The Government and Administration of New York* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1954); John Fenton, *Midwest Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966); James Fesler (ed.), *The 50 States and Their Local Governments* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967); Robert Highsaw and Charles Fortenberry, *The Government and Administration of Mississippi* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1954); V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Random House, 1949); G. Theodore Mitau, *Politics in Minnesota* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1960); York Wilbern, *The Withering Away of the City* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1963).
3. Martha Wagner Weinberg, *Managing the State* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977).
4. In addition to Weinberg, *op. cit.*, see also Larry Sabato, *Goodbye to Goodtime Charlie: The American Governor Transformed, 1950;1975* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1978) and Richard Eiling, "Contours and Determinants of Gubernatorial Impact upon State Administrative Agencies," paper presented at the 1980 annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association.