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Capstone Portfolio

### The Intersection of Federalism and Public Administration

Britannica defines federalism as “a mode of political organization that unites separate states or other polities within an overarching political system in a way that allows each to maintain its own integrity” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.). In the United States, it refers to our system of government in which there is a division of powers between the Federal Government and state governments.

#### *The Tenth Amendment*

Understanding the Tenth Amendment is integral to understanding the concept of federalism because it helps to define it. When the Constitution was initially written, there were few restrictions on how the national government could exercise its power against citizens. There were competing opinions on whether a bill of rights was necessary in the Constitution, but many states refused to ratify the Constitution in the absence of a bill of rights. The Tenth Amendment states “The powers not delegated by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (Lawson & Schapiro). The Tenth Amendment doesn’t add or take away anything from the Constitution. It expresses the principle of federalism by stating that all powers not explicitly delegated to the federal government in the Constitution fall to the state governments. With the tenth amendment, “It [the federal government] remains a government of limited and enumerated powers, so that the first question involving an exercise of federal power is not whether it violates someone’s rights, but whether it exceeds the national government’s enumerated powers” (Lawson & Schapiro). On a rudimentary

level, the tenth amendment protects citizen rights by preventing a concentration of power. In matters where the Constitution does not expressly give the Federal Government power or prohibit states from exercising power over, states are able to exercise their best judgment.

### *Printz v. United States*

Over the last several decades, the Federal Government has assumed more and more powers not granted by the Constitution (Matthews & Murchison, 2010). With this, more and more states are challenging the federal government by bringing issues before the Supreme Court. An example of the Supreme Court upholding the Tenth Amendment was in the 1997 case of *Printz v. United States*.

The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act aka the Brady Bill was enacted on November 30, 1993. Prior to this bill, federal law prohibited certain groups of people –minors, drug users, felons, and those committed to mental institutions– from purchasing firearms, but there was no system in place to determine whether a buyer fell into one of these categories (Brownlee, 2023). The Brady Bill required state and local law enforcement officials to conduct background checks on potential gun buyers. With this, the The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) would be established by the Attorney General. Until it was operational, the Brady Bill imposed an interim measure of “a waiting period of 5 days before a licensed importer, manufacturer, or dealer may sell, deliver, or transfer a handgun to an unlicensed individual” in states without an “acceptable alternate system of conducting background checks on handgun purchasers” (U.S. Department of Justice). The interim provisions required state and local law enforcement officials to temporarily perform the background checks.

In *Printz v. United States*, two local law enforcement officials, Jay Printz and Richard Mack, challenged the constitutionality of the interim provisions citing that the Federal Government could not compel state and local officials to administer a federal program (*Printz v. United States*). Federalism creates a distinction between the powers of the State and the power of the Federal Government. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the Brady Bill was unconstitutional as it violated the Tenth Amendment. The Federal Government did not have power to commandeer a state's government for federal purposes.

This case demonstrates how the Tenth Amendment and the principles of federalism maintain a strong central government while also limiting its powers to prevent a concentration of power.

### *Public Administration*

Public administrators implement policies and programs enacted by elected officials. Understanding the concept of federalism as a public administrator is important because citizens interact with different levels of government –local, state, and Federal– constantly and public administrators operate at all levels of government. Federalism creates a unique set of challenges which public administrators must manage. Programs initiated at the federal level must be implemented at the state and local levels. For example, Medicaid is a federal program which is funded jointly by the Federal Government and states. “Each state operates its own Medicaid program within federal guidelines. Because the federal guidelines are broad, states have a great deal of flexibility in designing and administering their programs. As a result, Medicaid eligibility and benefits can and often do vary widely from state to state” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). Joint responsibility over welfare programs such as Medicaid, add a layer of complexity to a public administrator's role.

Federalism in the United States lends to a strong sense of separation of powers which can sometimes cause conflict between levels of government who feel they have jurisdiction over implementation of programs (Connolly, 2006). Public administrators must navigate and balance these conflicts while effectively implementing the policies and delivering services. As Connolly points out, public administrators not only need to take into account the various levels of government, but also the relationships with private and nonprofit organizations (Connolly, 2006).

Intergovernmental relationships and management are essential in public administration because it leads to improved cooperation and coordination between different levels of government, overall improving service to the American public. By sharing resources such as information, personnel, and services, public administrators are able to accomplish more than they would be able to without these resources.

### *COVID-19 Pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique challenge and highlighted the critical importance of intergovernmental relationships. Not only did public administrators have to collaborate vertically, they had to collaborate horizontally as well. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event that involved all layers of government requiring them to work together, some in ways they have not had to previously. There are many examples of how these agencies worked together to curb the outbreak, but here are a highlighted few:

- **Federal-State Relations:** The federal government provided billions of dollars of funding in grants to state and local governments through the CARES act to aid with their responses to the pandemic.

- State-Local Relations: State governments provided assistance to local governments and individuals in the form of eviction moratoriums, additional funding through state unemployment, and monetary contributions.
- Interstate Relations: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania created a multi-state working group to collaborate and coordinate actions in efforts to minimize the outbreak. Due to their close proximity, high population, and the level of interstate travel amongst these states, elected officials chose to create a regional partnership and made joint decisions as to when to start reopening schools and nonessential businesses, easing mask mandates, and issuing lockdown orders (Breuninger et al., 2020).
- Interlocal Relations: The Hillsborough County Emergency Policy Group made of representatives of different local and county agencies came together to coordinate county-wide emergency policies and share resources to address the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Benton, 2020).

Public administrators leveraged their intergovernmental relationships in order to effectively and efficiently serve the American public. The COVID-19 pandemic involved health, social, and economic crises. The responsibilities of public administrators were vast and included containment and mitigation of the outbreak, public guidance through protocols such as mask mandates and stay at home orders, providing public health initiatives such as vaccines and free testing, and preventing economic collapse amongst many others.

The value of intergovernmental relationships during this time period is immeasurable. It also served as a learning tool and revealed ‘cracks’ in the system that need to be rectified to better serve the American public going forward.

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