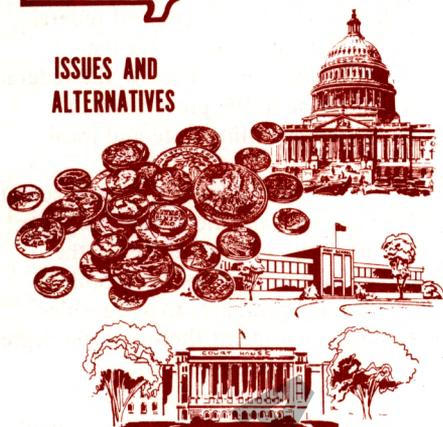


# PROVIDING PUBLIC SERVICES

*...in Missouri*

## ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES



Government at all levels is under great stress. Demands are made daily for new and improved public services while citizens are increasingly reluctant to approve new and increased tax levies. Government officials—whether federal, state or local—are caught in a web of pressures and counterpressures called “politics.” If sufficiently persuasive and sensitive to the opinion of constituents they survive. If not, others may be enduring those same pressures.

Recommendations for changes in policy, governmental structure, and revenue sources are coming from every direction. The individual voter and taxpayer is faced with a maze of information and is generally left without a reasonable framework within which he can consider the alternatives and make choices.

The intent of this educational program is to better equip citizens to make choices by providing information on basic principles of government and finance and on alternatives available.

Discussion Leaflet 1 concentrates on gaining an understanding of our complex government. Leaflets 2 through 5 follow with material for discussion sessions on the current situation and possible alternatives for Missouri local and state government organization and finance.

## Understanding the Complexity of American Government

### EXPANSION IN PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

Throughout history the one basic function common to all governments has been the maintenance of an orderly life. Americans also expect government to be a servant of all of the people. Our basic documents—such as the Declaration of Independence, and the U.S. and state constitutions—all proclaim the beneficiaries as “we the people.” Our political philosophy emphasizes government “of the people, by the people and for the people.”

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the Jefferson tradition, government was generally considered to be a “necessary evil.” Most people thought government necessary for maintaining order and defending them against external violence as well as protecting their property rights. They felt it should interfere with their

activities only where absolutely essential.

In a relatively simple society, governmental needs were few. However, even during the colonial period the major population centers such as Philadelphia, New York City and Charleston were developing paid police forces, substantial welfare programs, water and sewage disposal systems, street and sidewalk programs and other functions which evolve with urbanization.

Americans generally view government as a tool to be used when it appears to be the best means of accomplishing any public function. If it can provide water, electricity, and waste disposal more effectively than private enterprise then that is the means used. Thus, government in the United States at one level or another—usually all three—performs nearly every function imaginable relating to human needs and wants.

NOTE: References cited in the discussion leaflets are listed by source in the discussion leader’s manuals.

What functions do you think government should provide? Private business? Are there government functions you feel should be discontinued?

## AUTHORITY DIVIDED, SHARED

Because of this pragmatic approach to government Americans have built a complex system that almost defies description. There are well over 80,000 local units of government, 50 state governments and a federal government. Although the total number of local governmental units has declined over the past 40 years, this has been primarily the result of school district consolidation.

The number of counties has remained virtually unchanged since at least 1930 (See Table 1). Township numbers have declined slightly while the number of municipalities has increased by 11 percent since 1942. *Special districts meanwhile have been increasing at a rate of over 500 per year since 1942.*

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTAL UNITS IN U.S. 1930-1967

Type of Government	1930	1942	1957	1967
Total	175,448	155,116	102,392	81,299
U. S. Government	1	1	1	1
State Governments	48	48	50	50
Local Governments	175,369	155,067	102,341	81,248
Counties	3,053	3,050	3,050	3,049
Municipalities	16,366	16,220	17,215	18,048
Townships	20,262	18,919	17,198	17,105
School Districts	127,108	108,579	50,454	21,782
Special Districts	8,580	8,299*	14,424	21,264

\*Changes in census definition eliminated many special units as subordinate to general governmental units

This increase in local units is indicative of the pragmatism of American government. If a new function emerges which citizens wish accomplished and the older units will not, or cannot, perform it, then they create a new unit of government for that purpose. This may accomplish the direct purpose desired but can create problems of coordination, planning, and general citizen understanding and participation.

Traditional explanations of American government have emphasized the division of powers and functions among the three levels of government: local, state, and federal.

*In the Jeffersonian tradition, power was considered dangerous and it was thought by his followers that only*

*those functions and powers which were strictly national in nature should be entrusted to the national government and that all others should be reserved to the states and their local units of government.*

This concept might be compared to a layer cake. James Madison, on the other hand, foresaw a system of federal interaction that would protect the citizen from the "tyranny of factions" on the local level. He saw the federal government playing a major role in the prevention of oppressive majority factions controlling state and local government.

Although there is still a heavy belief in the Jeffersonian concept of decentralized government the actual operation of the American system has followed more closely the interaction of Madison. Upon this base has been built a system which Morton Grodzins compares to a "marble-cake." In every function of government there is some degree of responsibility at all levels of government. *There are no exclusive functions.* One level might dominate the performance of some functions as the federal government does defense and foreign affairs. However, even in these traditionally federal activities the states have a hand in civil defense administration and the national guard. Most states have departments of agriculture or commerce that promote trade and tourism with other nations. Education has always been considered a local responsibility but today federal and state governments not only provide funds for local education but operate directly many types of educational institutions. Even local public utilities are regulated by both state and federal agencies.

What functions do you feel should be the responsibility of the federal government? State? Local?

## How Functions Are Shared

*Intergovernmental cooperation* has long been used where several units of government have multiple responsibility (e.g., police functions, highways, water supply and waste disposal). The various units have made formal and informal agreements dividing the responsibility or agreeing upon one authority to which all will delegate their authority. Federal and state agencies typically leave direct administration of programs to local government while providing funds, certain rules and regulations, and technical advice. One of the dangers of such a system lies in the tendency for local, state, and federal government employees to work together and bypass the elected officials of the various levels of government. There is some fear that this has resulted in government by experts not responsible to the citizen.

## DIVERSE POLITICAL CULTURE

There are several methods for sharing governmental functions. *Regulatory powers* possessed by each level of government are used to influence or direct the actions of other governmental units in a particular function. For example, federal agencies regulate certain aspects of flying and airports. States also have regulatory bodies that enforce federal laws and usually add a number of their own which may change intent of the federal regulations. Local ordinances may also regulate certain aspects of airport operation and also apply to federal and state activities at the airport.

*Financial aids* are another method of sharing responsibility for governmental functions. Those functions for which Congress feels a national responsibility have been increasingly influenced by grants and low-cost loans. Certain functions such as transportation, education, water pollution prevention, and others have been considered too important in the national economy to tolerate local inadequacy.

This has both positive and negative effects. The availability of matching funds for highway construction may direct local funds to that function even though there may be higher priority needs locally. On the other hand, without those funds, adequate highway systems might not be built.

Recent attention has been given to the possibility of the federal government providing broad block-grants to local or state governments, thus allowing greater freedom in attacking their priority needs. *Revenue sharing* has also been seriously considered in order to equalize somewhat the resources available to various regions for public services.

Financial aid has been used increasingly by state governments to influence local public service. Some units of local government are pooling their resources to provide more effective services for a larger area under one administrative unit.

*Direct operation* of facilities for the same or similar function by each level of government also is common. An example is the presence in Columbia, Mo., of a county hospital, two state hospitals, and a federal VA hospital. Each has responsibility for treating the sick and, in this case, each has built and operates a separate facility for carrying out this responsibility.

It is probable that sharing of functional responsibility for public services will increase in the future. The major concern is how to most effectively administer the functions and eliminate duplication and other inefficiencies.

Are there public functions the federal government should not be influencing? How would you suggest dealing with discrepancies between states in the level and quality of services provided (such as education)?

Adding to the complexity of governmental operations and the attitudes of public officials and citizens are the cultural differences which occur from one area to another. Our country was settled by a wide variety of racial, religious and nationality groups. It has been called a melting pot of the world. However, these groups often settled in various areas of the nation in fairly concentrated groups. As a result cultural traditions were often largely preserved in those areas, providing fertile ground for difference in outlook toward government and society as a whole from one area to another.

Daniel Elazar\*, a political scientist, has classified the states by political attitude. Missouri is classified as an *individualistic-traditionalistic state*—the only one with that particular combination.

Briefly, this means that there is a general belief in minimal government, a minimum of interference by government in the private sector of the economy, and a strong commitment to the existing political and social order. There appears to be a strong reliance on Jeffersonian democracy with influences of the ante-bellum South.

This evaluation is supported by a 1965 Missouri survey. It indicates that Missourians are more conservative than the nation as a whole. They tend to want less in the way of federal programs and are less amenable to change in institutions.

Jefferson saw the New England town meeting as the means by which “all matters, great and small, can be managed to perfection.” Good government is achieved not “by the consolidation or concentration of powers, but by their distribution.”

The great number of local governments in Missouri is one of the best indications of Jeffersonian values (*Missouri ranked 11th nationally in number of governmental units in 1967*). Other indicators include:

(1) The 24 counties having rural township forms of government with elected officers including collectors and assessors (in those counties with the township form there are no countywide assessors or collectors), and the fact that attempts to abolish the township governments have been consistently defeated.

(2) The commitment to decentralization in county government, with the election of as many as 25 officials.

(3) The preference of many municipalities for fourth class status when they are eligible for third class status and increased revenues (fourth class statutes prescribe a decentralized mayor-council form of government only; whereas third class statutes provide for optional forms, including mayor-council, commission, and city manager).

\*For a more detailed discussion of Missouri's political culture see MP228 in discussion leader's packet.

(4) The deep suspicions of many municipal populations toward the city manager form of government.

(5) The penchant of Missourians for voting on many local and state issues—Missourians appear to be committed to direct democracy rather than representative government in many instances.

(6) The adherence to extraordinary voting majorities required for passage of general obligation and revenue bonds (2/3 and 4/7) which reflects a commitment to conservatism and a suspicion of non-property owners.

(7) The difficulty in achieving county planning and zoning by a vote of the people (only 21 counties of 114 have adopted both planning and zoning).

In summary, Missourians appear to be suspicious of government and are highly opposed to big government; yet they appear to have no objections to creating small, personal governments.

Do you agree with Elazar's description of Missouri's political culture?  
If so, do you think it interferes with effective government?

Elazar further defines an *individualistic culture* as one having a moderately competitive party system with emphasis on candidates and party regularity rather than ideological concerns or issues. The basic goal is to achieve power for the purpose of patronage and the achievement of individual goals through public office. Most public office holders at the top level have come up through the ranks of party hierarchy. Even the occasional upset of the party choice is by someone only a rank or two below—rarely an out and out newcomer.

In an *individualistic culture* politics is generally considered suspect, at best, and the average citizen tends to leave it to professionals. The use of the political system for individual benefit and the indifference of citizens tend to encourage the patronage system with little commitment to professionalism in government employment. Missouri state government has only about one-third of its employees under the merit system and relatively few cities have availed themselves of the professional city manager form of government.

The *traditionalistic* political culture depends heavily upon maintenance of the existing social and economic order. It is resistant to change and tends to draw leadership from traditional elites. Political campaigns are based largely upon the candidates' long residence and established position in the community or state. Jack Walker, in studying state responses

to some 88 innovative programs, found all of the *traditionalistic* states to be low in adoption of such programs. Missouri ranked 39th in the 48 states included. The *traditional* system, according to Elazar, is identified largely with the outstate areas of Missouri and *individualism* with the metropolitan centers.

Another factor lending to the reluctance to innovate is the number of cleavages which occur within a state. Missouri cleavages include: (1) political sub-cultures, (2) the general culture, (3) sectionalism, (4) urban-rural splits, (5) localism, and (6) inter-metropolitan problems. Missouri and Pennsylvania were the only states Elazar found to have all the variables which lead to state-local and state-local-federal conflict. Both states are at particularly critical crossroads in the nation and their settlement patterns reflect substantial variation in cultural patterns and potential conflict within the state. Both states rank below the median in state aid to local units of government and *Missouri ranks 45th in tax effort for both state and local government.* \*

In summary, Missouri—

- (1) has a highly diverse social system with many religious and ethnic groups represented,
- (2) party members are generally more conservative than their counterparts nationally,
- (3) has many schisms or cleavages which hinder the passage of innovative legislation in the General Assembly,
- (4) emphasizes individualism and personal gain,
- (5) wants a minimal role for government to enhance individualism and personal gain or achievement,
- (6) favors dispersing political and governmental authority because of suspicion of big government,
- (7) has a minimal commitment to a competitive two-party system of politics,
- (8) supports disciplined political parties based upon patronage, and
- (9) has minimal commitment to the employment of professionally trained men and women in state and local government.

What traditions, values and attitudes in your community can you enumerate that account for the political behavior of its citizens?

\*Tax effort is measured in dollars of tax revenue per \$1,000 personal income in the state.

## STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNDER STRESS

### Proliferation of Offices and Units Brings Stresses

Ideally, democracy should be simple government. Its success depends heavily upon the citizens' ability to understand the public issues at stake and to hold their political representatives responsible for accomplishing their desires. This also requires that public officials be sufficiently responsive and sensitive to public wishes to interpret them and put them into effect.

American government is not simple. It is composed of more than 80,000 separate units of government and 500,000 separately elected public officials. Missouri alone has nearly 3,000 units of government and over 17,000 elected officials. An individual could have the task of voting for, and keeping track of, three or more special district officers, five township officials, four school board members, mayor and one or more councilmen, up to 25 county officials, one senator and one representative in the state legislature, and two senators and one representative to Congress.

In addition there are dozens of boards and commissions and other officials appointed to formulate or carry out policy with little responsibility to elected officials after their initial appointment. Little wonder the average citizen feels frustrated and confused by it all.

### Officials Under Pressure From Many Groups

This frustration is not limited to citizens however. *The elected official* also has a sense of frustration as he is beset on all sides by the importunities of numerous interest groups, individual citizens, officials of other governmental units, political party requirements and public employees. Some are demanding lower taxes, others more and better services—frequently the same person or group may demand both.

Employees are asking for higher wages or better working conditions and state or federal agencies are pressing the official to upgrade the technical and professional skills of his personnel. The political party, meanwhile, is asking for employment for faithful party workers who helped get him elected and for adherence to certain campaign promises he made.

The elected official calls a public hearing on an issue to try and determine how his constituents feel about it and one or two people show up. He makes a decision on the issue and is immediately smothered with phone calls, letters, personal visits, and editorials asking how he could make such a stupid decision and why wasn't the public consulted.

As if this were not enough, government—local government in particular—has been the subject of dozens of critical studies in recent years by congressional committees, special presidential commissions, national organizations,

governors, state legislators and numerous other special interest groups. While these criticisms may be partially deserved by some local officials, the great majority of them are attempting to do their job effectively and honestly as they see it.

What qualifications do you feel an elected official should have for his office?  
Have you ever considered serving as an elected official?

### Problems Grow in Complexity and Number

Most of the institutions of American government developed when the nation was a rural, sparsely-populated country with relatively simple public needs. The high concentration of population into cities and the development of a complex economic system has complicated the task of government immeasurably. Just as the oneroom school is no longer considered adequate for producing well educated citizens, the man with a scraper and a team of mules is no longer adequate to build roads that will carry the modern automobile. Modern equipment and techniques for high quality facilities require trained engineers, planners, equipment operators, administrators, and other skilled personnel.

Not only are traditional functions more complex but many new problems have arisen which must be dealt with by the community acting jointly through its government. Air and water pollution were not problems when there were relatively few people using these natural resources. Crime problems were much simpler when communities were small homogeneous units and the social mores of the group acted to control anti-social behavior.

Rural areas, too, have been subject to increasing pressures for more and better public services. To compete with urban facilities in maintaining the quality of life of their inhabitants, rural areas have established rural water and sewer systems (often using special districts), provided television translator and booster systems, improved their streets and roads and built new recreational facilities. Pressures of city life and increased leisure time have sent droves of urbanites into the country on weekends for recreation and relaxation. This has required increased law enforcement, business regulation and further pressure on the roads, water supplies, park systems, and other rural public facilities.

### Federal Role Increasing

Due to the enormous changes that have taken place economically, socially and technologically there has been a

substantial change in our federal system. However, these changes have occurred in a piecemeal fashion for the most part and have created great stress on those structures, attitudes and traditions which have remained unchanged. State officials are most unhappy with the direct federal-local programs that have appeared in the past twenty years but neither governors nor legislatures have been provided with the necessary staff for state level planning and coordinating of such programs.

New constituencies have formed around metropolitan areas which transcend state and local government lines. The states have not provided adequate structural and organizational units to deal with the problems and maintain some supervisory authority. Consequently, these areas have appealed to Washington for help with their problems.

The tremendous increase in federal aid programs has posed a considerable dilemma to state and local government. According to the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, there were only ten such programs prior to 1930. From 1930 to 1960 forty-six more were added. During the 1960s a federal aid explosion took place and there are now an *estimated* 1500 aid programs. During one month in 1966, 20 federal aid programs were passed by Congress. In dollar amounts this has represented an increase from \$6 billion in 1959 to \$38 billion proposed for 1972 (including the proposed new revenue sharing plan).

#### Loss of Local Discretion

This shift in financing has meant loss of discretionary authority on the part of state and local officials. It has increased, somewhat, their ability to provide additional facilities and services without increases in local taxes.

Local government is still the largest source of public goods and services, since few federal and state programs have initiated direct service. Local public employment in 1970 was 6.2 million while state and federal governments divided the remaining 5.0 million public employees almost equally.

Many of the new programs have been authorized by Congress with little consultation with the state and local government officials who must now administer them. Federal agencies have multiplied almost as rapidly as programs have been born. Each program requires its separate set(s) of forms and contact with a different federal agency. Confusion and conflict abound. One case has been cited in which a farmer was provided federal aid to drain a swamp on one side and a conservation group was aided by

another agency to fill the swamp from the other side for wildlife purposes. An impasse was the result. This is an isolated case but it dramatizes the problem of coordinating programs.

The proliferation of special districts is also in part the result of federal action in specific areas. To initiate programs to meet needs which local governments are ill-equipped to handle, federal agencies have worked through special interest groups to enact special district laws *rather than change the authority or structure of general local governments.*

The result has been soil conservation districts, water and sewer districts, airport authorities, and other districts which operate almost exclusively on federal funds and with little control by state government or other local general governments. This may result in the accomplishment of a needed function for a specific group but may be costly to the general public in the area. They have an interest in but no control over the disposition of such resources.

#### Citizen-Government Communications Breaking Down

Perhaps the greatest stress on government today—at all levels—is that of public discontent. There is a communications problem. When small local governments involved a county or a city of a few hundred people, nearly everyone could take part and probably knew his representative, mayor, county judge, or other official on a first name basis. When local governments encompass up to several million people in large cities this personal contact is lost.

This alienation has created mistrust, frustration, a sense of hopelessness and futility in the average citizen. The results have been tax increases denied, referendum issues rejected, and a general discontent with all government activities. Bridging this gap is one of the greatest challenges American government faces today. There have been attempts made to provide new means of obtaining exchange of information between government official and citizen but with relatively minor success.

What have you done, as a citizen, to communicate your wants to government? Can you name your elected local government officials, state representatives and senators, federal representatives and senators that represent you? Have you voted regularly at elections? What are some of the reasons people don't become more involved in local government?



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