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CASE STUDY 5

Introduction

In the foregoing essay, Professor Conlan clearly and concisely presents an overview of contemporary American federalism and why it is such an important aspect of today's public administration. He stresses that its current characteristics have moved away from "cooperative federalism" to "opportunistic federalism" and how this shift has changed the day-to-day operational realities of IGR, often negatively. Yet, opportunistic federalism can possess pluses as well, most notably by allowing considerable latitude for effective managerial initiatives to occur throughout various entities within the federal system.

The following case, "Wichita Confronts Contamination," by Susan Rosegrant of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, illustrates well several of the themes discussed in Conlan's essay. In the summer of 1990, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), acting on behalf of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), reported that Wichita, Kansas, was sitting on a vast underground polluted lake of various commercial and industrial chemicals. It was located beneath the central downtown business district, called the Gilbert-Mosley site, and the hazardous chemicals were known to cause cancer and other health problems. The report said the contamination was spreading about a foot a day, and it was feared that serious community health problems and water quality deterioration would result if this underground pollution went unchecked. Besides the very vocal public outcry for government to

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"do something about the problem," the report also triggered an immediate reaction from the banking community which stopped making loans to downtown residential and commercial owners in the Gilbert-Mosley area, thereby causing serious economic repercussions. What should the city do to protect its environment and economy—indeed the very health of its citizens?

In the following case, the city manager, Chris Cherches, who is faced with the responsibility of drafting a plan of action to deal with this crisis, must work with various intergovernmental bodies such as the KDHE and EPA to frame options and devise a strategy to clean up the affected site. In the process, Cherches achieves a workable plan, but one that very much develops within—and depends on—an IGR framework.

As you read this case, consider the following:

What features of opportunistic federalism as described by Professor Conlan does this case possess?

What are the potential benefits public administrations might derive from opportunistic federalism? How can it work for, rather than against, effective public management?

How might opportunistic federalism benefit communities, society, and the general public? How can it advance the public interest? Or, serve to negate it?

In this case, how did IGR entities help to identify the problem(s), frame the options for the city manager, and ultimately help him create a workable plan of action for the affected site?

Why were the environmental and IGR problems in this case so complex?

Identify the negotiations among the various IGR actors in this story. Why were these negotiations so critical in dealing with Wichita's contamination?

In general, what does this case tell us about the importance of IGR to the work of public administrators in the twenty-first century?

Wichita Confronts Contamination

SUSAN ROSEGRANT

In the summer of 1990, the central business district of Wichita, Kansas, faced familiar problems of urban decline, along with the prospect of revitalization. The downturn in the regional oil and gas industry had exacerbated the nationwide real estate slump, leaving

downtown Wichita stagnant. At the same time, local business leaders were pursuing a common formula for renewal: a project relying on substantial public improvements to leverage new private investment, a \$375 million undertaking in all.

In downtown Wichita, however, a special problem was brewing. Hazardous chemicals known to cause cancer and other health problems had been detected in some private and industrial wells in Wichita's core area. Banks were growing more careful about requiring site inspections, and even soil and water sampling, before they would grant loans. And in June, local manufacturer Coleman Co., Inc., the venerable maker of camp stoves and other outdoor equipment, approached the city's legal department for advice about a contamination problem it had first discovered during routine tests in the fall of 1988.

This case was written by Susan Rosegrant for Professor Alan Altshuler, director of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, for use at the Program on Innovation in State and Local Government "CEO Symposium," September 24–26, 1992. Funding provided by the Ford Foundation. (1292)

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Source: Case Program, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Parts A & B C16-92-1157.0 & C16-92-1158.0