

## **“Big Questions” About IGR AND IGM Revisited**

In 2011 John Kincaid and Carl Stenberg co-authored a concluding article on “ ‘Big Questions’ about Intergovernmental Relations and Management: Who Will Address Them?” (2011) for a symposium in the *Public Administration Review* symposium on the impacts of the 1996 demise of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and assessment of prospects for restoring intergovernmental institutional capacity. Overall, the contributors’ views were pessimistic.

Kincaid and Stenberg posed 15 questions to provoke discussion about the future directions of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and management (IGM). The former was defined as a term “that encompasses all types of interactions between elected and nonelected officials of federal state, and local governments,” featuring policy-making through laws and regulations “in which elected officials and agency heads are important actors.” IGM was “a less comprehensive term, encompassing the implementation and management of intergovernmental policies...in which nonelected agency heads and street level bureaucrats are prime actors” (196). The intergovernmental landscape at that time featured local and state actions to respond to the national economic crisis together with significant federal domestic leadership initiatives such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Affordable Care Act.

The intergovernmental world has changed dramatically since 2011, and its future contours and directions are unclear and uncertain. IGR and IGM have become more fractious and contentious while relationships have become more horizontal and intersectoral. Nevertheless, many of the “Big Questions” remain relevant. We have recast eight of them below, in consultation with Kincaid. Two contributors to this volume – John Kincaid and Parris

Glendening -- share their insights from academic and practitioner perspectives, respectively. Other authors have expressed their views on questions that are relevant to their chapter.

### *Deinstitutionalization*

*1. How important is the absence of institutions that monitor intergovernmental trends and developments, convene meetings, and conduct research to the health of the federal system? Will the need to rebalance the federal government's financial and programmatic roles call for more and sustained attention to intergovernmental management?* No serious effort has been made to rebuild institutional capacity to understand intergovernmental relations and management since the demise of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations in 1996 and of most of the state ACIRs. Proposed federal budget reforms, reorganizations, and program eliminations have potentially significant impacts on states and localities. Yet, the likely consequences of these initiatives are not well appreciated and often not even considered in the policy-making process.

### *Sorting Out*

*2. The federal budget has been driven the "four d's" for decades – debts, deficits, demographics, and defense – and there have been no serious initiatives to reign in federal spending. Given the political and policy shifts that have taken place recently in Washington, DC and several states, what are the prospects for budget reform and what are the implications for states and localities? Has the time come to systematically sort out functions or divide the job intergovernmentally, as advocated by Alice Rivlin and Senator Lamar Alexander, and if so who should take the lead?* No agreement has been reached on ways to close the widening "credibility gap" between federal

spending and revenues. Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, defense, and deficit spending have long been targets of budget reformers, but they remain “sacred cows” in the IGR pasture. The day of reckoning might be on the horizon and one option is to “divide the job” systematically, as was attempted by President Reagan in 1981-1982. Who would champion such an initiative in Congress and the Administration, or would this be just another exercise in futility given the strength of Wright’s shared authority model?

### *Block Grants*

*3. Are block grants feasible instruments for reforming federal grants-in-aid through consolidation, deregulation, and devolution? What criteria should be used? What does the record show about the trade-off of fewer federal dollars for greater recipient flexibility and discretion?* Block grants have been used since 1966 to give state and local recipients flexibility in targeting federal funds to their priority needs within a broad functionally related area. Typically, more discretion is provided than in narrower categorical grants. Block grants have been considered instruments for federal aid reform, especially consolidation of categorical programs such as under the 1974 Housing and Community Development block grant. They also have been proposed as a means of reducing federal expenditures by lowering administrative costs through devolution or authority. Yet, only 21 block grants have been enacted since the Partnership for Health program in the mid-1960s and block grants account for only between 10-15 percent of the federal aid total. Will block grant proposals be a part of discretionary program cuts that will be on the federal budget balancer’s agenda?

### *State-Local Relations*

4. *Why are states increasingly imposing unfunded or underfunded mandates on local governments, and restricting municipal and county authority in economic, social, and environmental policy? What are the prospects for “fend-for-yourself localism?”* Across the 50 states there is wide variation in the extent to which states have accorded local governments home rule authority over their structures, functions, and finances. In some states, local officials have considered governors and legislators partners in meeting citizen needs, while in others there is an adversarial relationship. Recent years have witnessed a growing number of state laws preempting or restricting local authority, shifting functional responsibility without commensurate resources, and cutting local financial aid. While weak state revenue conditions have been cited as a reason for these actions, the rising cost of Medicaid and the shifting partisan and ideological landscapes also have been contributors.

### *Regional Cooperation*

5. *If, as Beverly Cigler states, cooperation is “an unnatural act among nonconsenting adults” what strategies and tools can states and localities use to encourage interlocal service sharing and joint action on “wicked” problems (Cigler 2007)?* Contrary to expectations that a “New Normal” would emerge from the Great Recession, in which the local government footprint would be shrunk by outsourcing and permanent cutbacks, most counties and municipalities have rebounded from the economic crisis without making fundamental changes in their services or structures. While there is general recognition that “wicked” problems require intergovernmental, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary approaches, local autonomy and parochialism have inhibited regional cooperation in many places. What “carrots” or “sticks” could be used to encourage local governments to work across boundaries on serious problems?

### *“Coercive” Federalism*

6. *What are the prospects for continuation of “coercive” federalism? Is a return to cooperative federalism, as reflected in the work of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and previous respect accorded the state and local Public Interest Groups, likely in the future?* John Kincaid coined the term “coercive” federalism to describe the steady growth of federal policy-making power in the federal system, often at the expense of subnational units. In recent years, however, state leaders have pushed-back against federal authority in health care, environmental regulation, and other areas. The Trump administration and members of Congress have launched initiatives to “deconstruct the administrative state” by shrinking federal career personnel, reorganizing agencies, reducing regulations, and cutting discretionary expenditures. While the outcomes of these proposals are unclear, another chapter in the “New Federalism” story is unfolding and the “coercive” aspects of IGR and IGM could be challenged or reinforced.

### *Networks and Partnerships*

7. *Will the networked and collaborative nature of IGR and IGM continue as efforts are underway to diminish the federal government’s intergovernmental role as was attempted during the Reagan administration?* Federal policies and program initiatives in past decades have expanded and added complexity to IGR and IGM. Governance arrangements have also become more common in recent years both horizontally and vertically. Elected officials and administrators from all levels of government, together with private sector actors, are more involved in public

policy and implementation than previously. As the federal government retrenches, what effect will that have on networked and collaborative partnerships?

### *Partisanship*

8. *To what extent is partisan polarization affecting IGR and IGM? To what extent does the party in power in Washington DC seek to impose its policy preferences nationwide regardless of state and local preferences?* Many observers have highlighted contention in IGR and IGM, though especially IGR; yet, much of this contention is partisan. Republican states bucked President Obama and Democratic states are bucking President Trump. There is a high degree of party congruence in the state-federal system in 2017-2018 as Republicans control the White House and Congress, and conservatives make up the majority on the U.S. Supreme Court. At the state level, Republicans control 33 governorships and both the governorship and the legislature in 25 states (counting Nebraska as *de facto* Republican). The current partisan contention is the six states where Democrats control the governorship and legislature. Will state-federal relations be mostly cooperative for two-thirds or more of the states or, will intraparty differences produce policy and program stalemate as was evidenced in congressional efforts in the spring of 2017 to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act?