

Looking to the Future

Water Wars Among the States?

We take water for granted in much of the United States, but it has become scarce in some areas, and not just in the desert regions of the West. Drought, over-allocation and overuse, aging infrastructure, and land development threaten water supplies, and population growth and trends in water usage increase the demand on water resources.

Conflicts loom within and between states as demand for potable water exceeds existing and anticipated supplies. The states can address some of the supply problems by promoting the transfer of water rights, discouraging overuse, and creating drought plans. On the demand side, states can meter water use for everyone and adjust the price of water to promote efficient landscaping and recycling.

Here is one prediction in the form of a map of the areas in the western United States where water is likely to be a source of growing conflict. The map highlights areas of potential conflict, as water becomes an increasingly scarce commodity. By 2025, continued explosive population

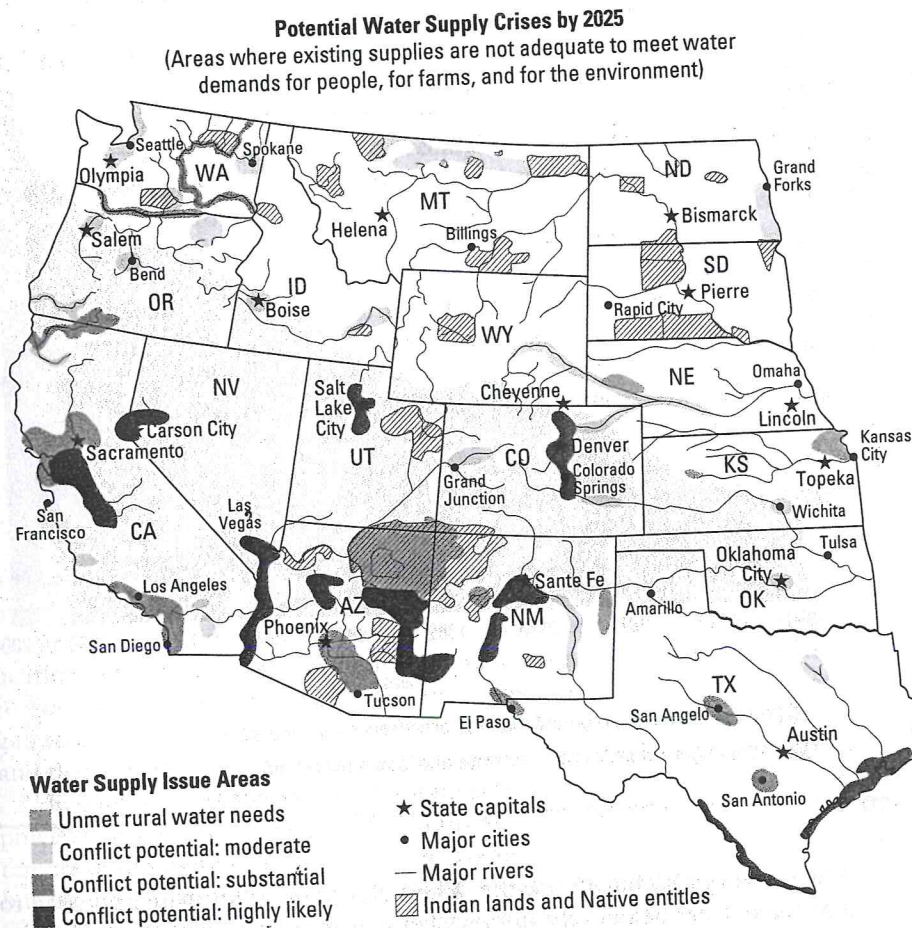
growth in the western states, coupled with their naturally arid climate, will combine to strain existing water supplies. Continued severe drought in the region will only make the problem worse. The current infrastructure of water storage and delivery is well past its useful life, relying on nineteenth-century technology to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Of course, if the drought ends or the population growth slows, then the areas most at risk of conflict over water usage might never materialize into conflict.

Is it in a state's interest to encourage or discourage population growth without considering the need for adequate water supplies? How should a state balance the needs of its citizens against the water needs of other vital consumers (such as farmers and water-dependent industries)? Do we need to establish a water bank where surplus water can be "deposited" and "withdrawn" at a price?

Source: Council for State Governments, *Water Wars. Trends Alert: Critical Information for State Decision-Makers* (July 2003). Map from <<http://www.doi.gov/water2025>>.

combining and reformulating categorical grants into block grants. The shift had dramatic implications for federalism. Block grants were seen as a way to redress the imbalance of power between Washington and the states and localities. Conservatives in Washington wanted to return freedom to the states. New Federalism was nothing more than dual federalism in modern dress.

After the term of President Jimmy Carter, who made some headway in reorganizing federal efforts in domestic policy but by no means supported the extensive block-grant approach of Nixon, Ronald Reagan took office in 1981. Charging that the federal system had been bent out of shape, Reagan promised what to some could be called "new New Federalism" to restore a proper constitutional relationship among the national, state, and local governments. The national government, he said, treated "elected state and local officials as if they were nothing more than administrative agents for federal authority."³⁰



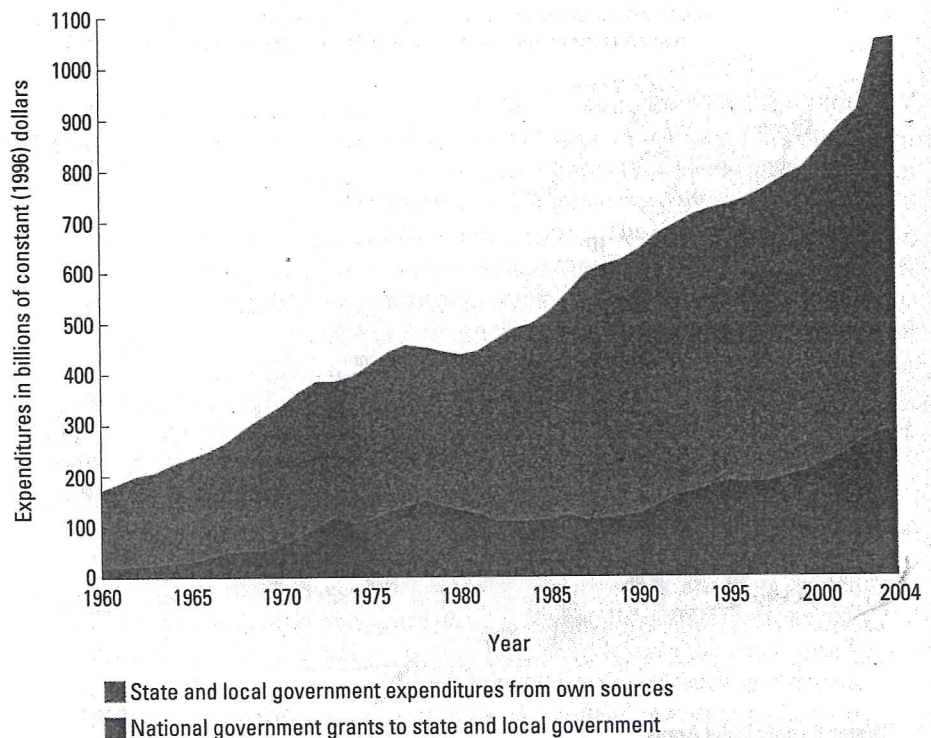
Reagan's commitment to reducing federal taxes and spending meant that the states would have to foot an increasing share of the bill for government services (see Figure 4.3). In the late 1970s, the national government funded 25 percent of all state and local government spending. By 1990, its contribution had declined to roughly 17 percent. By the end of Bill Clinton's two terms in 2000, that figure had increased again, inching up to almost 23 percent.

While it would be inaccurate to describe Clinton and Lyndon Johnson as liberals cut from the same cloth, President Clinton, unlike Nixon and Reagan, saw much more potential for the national government to produce policy successes, especially in areas such as education and environmental protection. Clinton's approach might be described as seeing the national government as a policy guru, guiding and encouraging states to experiment with vexing problems.

FIGURE 4.3 The National Government's Contributions to State and Local Government Expenditures

In 1960, the national government contributed roughly 11 percent of total state and local spending. After rising in the 1960s and 1970s, that total stood at almost 25 percent by 1980. The national share declined during the 1980s, and by 1990 it was not quite 17 percent. By 2000, the national government share had moved up to 23 percent, and by 2004, it had grown still higher, to 27 percent.

Source: Calculations from Historical Tables, *Budget of the United States Government*, FY2006, Table 15.2 (adjusted to 1996 dollars).



When George W. Bush took the White House in 2000, there appeared to develop yet another bend in the nation's federalism road. Generally, Bush, who described himself as a "compassionate conservative" both on the campaign trail and during his term, has sought to embrace the states' rights perspective but in a tempered fashion. That approach signaled a move away from the Republican effort in 1994 to scale back the national government while ignoring the potential costs—in human and social terms, for example—of their proposals.

Ideology, Policymaking, and Federalism in Practice

Despite the apparent consistencies between presidential preferences regarding federalism and refrains such as "liberals love the national government" and "conservatives favor states' rights," these simplifications are only sometimes correct and, in fact, are often misleading. Recall our admonition from Chapter 1 that to grasp the differences between conservatives and liberals, one needs to understand not only these general labels but also the purposes of government under discussion. One illustration emerges from debates over the federal preemption of state power.

National Intervention in State Functions. The power of Congress to enact laws that have the national government assume total or partial responsi-