

Outline how and why federalism has changed since the 1960s. How federal is the USA in reality?

In the 1960s, the government had a creative federalist approach. Lynden Johnson's Great society programme's objective was to eliminate poverty; this meant large government grants, and a high level of interference from the federal government. LBJ would provide categorical grants instead of block grants, which meant the states had much less control over their spending. He also supplied a lot of federal aid, increasing the dependence of states on the federal government. It wasn't just the executive increasing the role; the judiciary were also pushing the government this way, with cases such as Gideon vs. Wainwright and Miranda vs. Arizona.

Since the 1960's the argument is that New Federalism has been the main objective of the executive and judiciary as a reaction to the creative federalism. From the 1970s there was an ideological shift, with the rejection of liberal values from the 1960s. President Nixon started the development of the idea that the federal government was too powerful, and that the states needed to have more power of their local rights. He felt that the federal government should be small to promote self reliance and 'rugged individualism'. As a reaction to creative federalism and the great society programme, he severely reduced aid to the states, and instead of issuing categorical grants, he would give states block grants.

President Carter a democrat president shockingly carried on Nixon's ideas of New Federalism. From the 60s and before, it was clear the democrats supported the large federal government; however he was a governor, and thus he wanted to give the states more freedom to act. He carried on Nixon's plans of block grants, and reduced the size of the federal aid of the states to release the government of the large federal deficit.

Reagan took this all one step further; famously saying "Government is not a solution to our problem, government is the problem." He was a firm believer of the conservative view that federal support undermined hard work, creativity, determination and eroded America's Federal system. Reagan had two main policies that would create the modern form of dual federalism: Reducing federal aid to the states (in his first 2 years in office he reduced it by \$18 billion), and to input the swap system. Reducing federal aid created a sever problem for certain states; New York as effectively made bankrupt, and the number of Americans living in poverty rose from 29 million to 35 million. His system of swaps also had many flaws; the states found the idea very attractive but it was clear that they would not be able to carry out these programmes without severely increasing taxes or cutting benefits, and thus the scheme was rejected. The limits on his policies also show that Dual federalism may be too impractical to undertake.

During Bush Snr's presidency, there was a lot more emphasis on foreign policy which required the increase in size of the federal government. Also during his presidency, the Supreme Court started to make decisions that leant towards state rights; the political layout of the court took longer to change than the executive due to life tenure of the justices. The atmosphere mainly created by Reagan of dual federalism was accelerated through Clinton's presidency. Like

Rachael Burden

President Carter and Bush Snr, Clinton was previously a governor, and believed that governors should have freedom to decide what was in the best interests of their states. Many Supreme Court decisions made in these years also started to give more rights to the states. For example in *New York vs. United States*, the court ruled that the federal government could not instruct a state what to do with radioactive material. Also in *Pritz vs. United States*, the court ruled that Congress could not instruct states to carry out background checks on people buying handguns, as it was a matter for the states to decide.

Bush Jnr also an extremely conservative republican and former governor wanted more influence for the states and a lesser role for the federal government. He tried to implement this desired structure of new federalism, but circumstance stated otherwise. He took office as a fiscal conservative who believed that if taxes were cut, the national government would be forced to do less, and people would increasingly rely on personal resources and their local government. However two developments of the 'dot-com' bubble and the 'War on Terror' meant that he was not able to carry out this agenda. These events meant that the federal government had to act nationally in times of crisis. After this, the argument also exists, that a spending habit ensued. There were acts which were deemed to have 'useless' strings attached; 'The bridge to nowhere' being a prime example where millions were spent on a bridge connecting a small town to its local airport in Alaska replacing a 7 minute ferry route. Also with the 'spending habit' of the federal government, there were many arguments that stated that the federal government were interfering too much with the education which is seen as the responsibility of the states. Bush's administration put forward the 'no child left behind act', where the federal government was forced to pay for its own suggestions in legislation.

Now with President Obama, many people argue that there will be much more involvement of the federal government still. He has passed many bills which interfere with the states rights, such as stem cell legislation and his efforts with abortion legislation. He is also giving a lot of aid in the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 to many large corporations and also to the states. He may arguably further the concept of government intervention with policies similar to affirmative action, since he is a very left wing democrat, and also is being accused of being socialistic by some Americans in his approaches.

In conclusion, the United States seems to vary in its size of federal government. For many Americans the ideal solution may never be reached, as it was too close to the ideas of the articles of confederation and was proven to have not worked. In the view of these states rights idealists, Washington DC's government has far too much power, and that their constitutional safe guards against the concentration of power in central government are inadequate. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that even committed states rights activists such as Ronald Reagan, can only slow down the process of centralisation of power in the modern era, rather than reverse it. However from the opposite view point the centralisation hasn't gone far enough, with the argument that there is too much disparity between the rights given in each state. The debate of the US federal system is an ongoing debate, and many compromises will have to be met, as there is no clear answer with a large variety of political viewpoints across the united states of America.