Too Many Governments

In 1938, all governments, federal, state, and local, collected 14,811 million of tax dollars. For a variety of reasons, the popular notion prevails that the federal government consumed most of these revenues. As a matter of fact, it received little more than six of the approximately fifteen billion. The balance was divided between the state and the local governments— counties, towns, cities, and school districts. These local governments collected $4,920,000,000.

In 1938, local governments in Oklahoma cost taxpayers $80,197,756.89. County governments cost almost 19 million, towns and cities slightly more than 22 million, while public schools cost about 39.5 million. When this respectable total is broken down to discover the costs of particular county offices, we find some occasion for concern. We spent $538,000 for seventy-seven offices of the county attorney; almost $1,153,000 for seventy-seven offices of the county sheriff; approximately $325,000 for seventy-seven offices of the superintendent of education, and so on.

Naturally, the question is raised: "Are so many offices, performing the same functions, necessary to good government of Oklahoma?" Sound principles of administration, private or public, do not condone unnecessary duplication of service agencies.

A factual study of local government administration in Oklahoma confronts numerous difficulties. Government reporting in this state is inadequate, and in some instances, is entirely lacking. One generalization, however, finds increasing factual support. The more populous counties receive more services per tax dollar spent than do counties of small populations.

Some indication of the wide difference in the costs of services, from county to county, is found in the expenditures per enumerated pupil by the various offices of the county superintendent of education. In Oklahoma county (1938), with almost 350,000 inhabitants, this cost was 27 cents per child; in Cimarron county, with a population of less than 6,000, it was $1.61. Tulsa county spent 31 cents for this service, while Harper spent $1.10.

This variation reaches into other county services. Tulsa, with its great wealth and large population to protect, spent 49 cents per capita on the sheriff's office; Cimarron spent 62 cents. However, low costs are not always with the populous county. Harper, with less than 8,000 inhabitants, spent almost identically the same amount per capita on the sheriff's office as did Tulsa.

The fact remains that there is no satisfactory accounting for the variation of the costs of services from county to county.

Comparative conditions are found in school districts. High school costs, the Brookings Institute revealed, decline in this state per enumerated pupil as enrollment increases.

Cleveland county rural schools disclose the same trend. Sixty-eight rural schools operate in this county, none of which has an enrollment in excess of 100. Investigation (1938) reveals that schools of this type having an enrollment of less than 21 cost $75.66 per enumerated child, while schools having an enrollment of less than 101 cost $34.70 per enumerated child.

Unjustified conclusions can be drawn from limited facts. Arithmetic is not the sole standard by which good government is to be judged. Road building in mountainous McCurtain county confronts problems not found in the prairie counties of the west. The costs of administration are likely to be greater in sparsely settled areas, even in these days of the automobile and the telephone.

But allowances for such factors do not explain all differences. It remains doubtful whether Oklahoma needs seventy-seven county jails, and whether we are best served by seventy-seven different county road building authorities, (often split still further among individual County Commissioners) or by seventy-seven county sheriffs. It is inconceivable that this state can long afford the questionable luxury of some 4,700 school districts, fifty-four per...
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Oklahoma’s fourth defeat of the year followed on January 10 at Stillwater when Hank Iba’s smooth-passing Oklahoma Aggies, winners of 10 straight games this season and undefeated on their home floor in five years, won an exciting contest before son and undefeated on their home floor in this game when Oklahoma suddenly hit a scoring streak that saw them thread the hoop for 25 points in ten minutes, a furious pace that if continued the full 40 minutes of a game, would have netted 100 points. A few days later Kansas State went to Lawrence and nearly upset the Jayhawks, Kansas barely winning on her own court, 34 to 33, on a free shot in the last four seconds of the game.

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