Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Describe the political process in local government.
   2.1 Define the major roles that governors are expected to fulfill in state politics.
   2.2 Describe the factors associated with the making of a governor and the politics involved in a gubernatorial election.
   2.3 Define the executive and legislative powers of governors in state politics.

5. Assess how major policy responsibilities vary among different state and local governments, to include economics, immigration, and civil liberties.
   5.1 Identify the state budgeting process.
   5.2 Describe how a governor’s power can influence his or her leadership role and legislative relationship.

7. Contrast the varied systems of government and bureaucracy found among the state and local levels.
   7.1 Explain the components of state bureaucracy and the issues surrounding representativeness and responsiveness.
   7.2 Explain how states are seeking to reform, privatize, and reinvent government.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 7:
Governors in State Politics

Chapter 8:
Bureaucratic Politics in States and Communities

Unit Lesson

Chief administrator, chief legislator, party leader, ceremonial head, chief negotiator, opinion leader, and crisis manager are all the offices and labels held by one man or woman in each state, all under the guise of the name Governor. Which label(s) would best describe the governor of your state?

It used to be that a governor was a white male in his fifties and from a wealthy family. Public service was a way for these wealthy families to “give back” to society. Today’s governors are more diverse. Governors have come from a variety of job backgrounds (actors, business owners, singers, and moms). They are from various ethnicities and include both males and females ranging in age from mid to late 40s. While political experience is seen as a good thing, it is not a must for a governor to get elected (think about Arnold Schwarzenegger, or Jesse Ventura). Many voters see that a successful businessman or woman can also be a very good choice for running a state (which is, after all, a business enterprise with both personnel and a budget).

More of those elected to the office of governor have gone on to be elected to the office of President of the United States than those who have been elected to the Senate and run for president. Governors themselves often have better name recognition than those elected to the legislature of their state. Dye and MacManus (2015) state that “Gubernatorial candidates running on the same party ticket as popular presidential candidates enjoy a significant advantage. But most gubernatorial elections are held in ‘off years’” (p. 203). This is done so that the “coattail” effect will be minimal. As with those elected to other offices “incumbent governors who seek reelection are usually successful” (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 204).
Just like in every other election, each candidate for governor will have campaign issues that they use to connect with the voters. Often candidates will also pick issues that they know their opponents are weak on to show their own strengths. Setting the "campaign issue agenda is often the key to victory" (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 204). Campaigning for any office today is expensive, and most gubernatorial candidates will spend millions to get elected to this office.

Once elected, governors have both formal and informal powers. Formal powers are those that are given to the governor within the state’s constitution. Dye and MacManus (2015) relay that informal powers are related to "a governor’s popularity, charisma, ability to generate positive media attention, path-breaker status, unusual occupation, atypical political career progression, famous relatives, designation as a potential presidential candidate, or the crisis situation under which he or she took office" (p. 196). A governor can be weak or strong depending on his or her formal powers within that state’s constitution as well as the informal powers that they wield. A major source of power is the power of the veto.

The most important task governors will complete during their time in office is to prepare the budget. "Governors are generally responsible for preparing the state budget for consideration by the legislature" (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 210). Each department is held responsible for filling out the forms for their budget request for the next fiscal year (FY typically runs July 1st – June 30th). A department must show how last year’s money was spent and justify any requests for an increase in budget. There are certain items within a budget that are “earmarked” or have a particular purpose named within the state’s constitution. Money must also be set aside for “uncontrollable” expenses due prior commitments to existing programs. Many states require a balanced budget and must at times make mid-year cuts in programs and personnel if enough money does not come in to the state.

While a bureaucracy consists of the departments and agencies that help the government run, it can come with its challenges. Dye and MacManus (2015) describe these challenges as “tape, needless paperwork, waste and inefficiency, senseless regulations, impersonality, and unresponsiveness to the needs of the people” (p. 224). Bureaucrats and bureaucracies get their power from how they interpret the policies that they are formed to implement.

In order to understand how bureaucracy can affect us as individuals, imagine that you are fresh out of high school and land a job as a janitor in a local school system. You go to work every day and get good evaluations that lead to pay raises along with the good county benefits that go along with the job. You have been working for the school district for 10 years when the school board decides to privatize all cleaning staff throughout the county to save money. Now after 10 years of hard dedicated work you must apply with this company that has been awarded the contract, and you do not have assurances that you will get hired. If hired, you must take a pay cut, as well as cuts in benefits and your hours may no longer the same. The school board looked at this as a way to save money, but what happens to you now?

Privatization is one idea considered to reign in out-of-control bureaucracy. “Privatization includes the shifting of many responsibilities from government to the private marketplace” (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 238). Some of the most common ways to privatize are contracting, franchising, using grants, and using vouchers. While it can be argued that privatizing can be cost-saving, government contractors can often become just like those within the bureaucracy (rude and unresponsive).

Many believe that when an economic downturn hits, those working for the government are safe in their jobs and pay. The truth is that when the economy turns for the worse, it affects everyone. Cities, counties, states, and even the federal government must tighten their belts and make “personnel-related cuts ranging from hiring freezes, layoffs, and furloughs to major reductions in employee health care and pension benefits” (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 242). This is the time when you will see the biggest changes within bureaucracies, and you will see many of the higher paying administrators retire or move on.

Governors have a hard road to walk and need all of the powers (both formal and informal) that they can gather in order to get the work done and keep the state moving forward. While the bureaucracies have become large lumbering monsters, they serve the purpose of keeping the state mandates and taking care of day to day business.

**Suggested Reading**

If you would like additional information regarding the textbook readings, consider reviewing the below Chapter Presentations:

- Click [here](#) to access the Chapter 7 PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Chapter 7: Governors in State Politics.” Click [here](#) for the PDF version.
- Click [here](#) to access the Chapter 8 PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Chapter 8: Bureaucratic Politics in States and Communities.” Click [here](#) for the PDF version.