

The Truman Administration, Its Principles And Practice

RUNNING THE CONSTITUTION

Framing Public Administration

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ABSTRACT: *As public administration develops in the twenty-first century, we continue to grapple with century-old questions that are fundamental to the field of study and practice of public management. How does the administrative function relate to the political function? How does a public administrator satisfy conflicting managerial and legal imperatives? In this short essay, I argue that Wilson's 1887 essay holds an unrealized vision for public administration. The unrest over some of public administration's fundamental questions can be partly remedied by framing public administration in its functional home: the execution of public law. I use an institutional framework to illustrate my argument and underscore the conceptual arrangement of politics, law, and management that I read in Wilson's vision.*

KEYWORDS: *constitution, institutional framework, public administration, public law*

One hundred and twenty years ago Woodrow Wilson noted: "It is getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one" (1887, p. 599). In that same essay Wilson notably distinguished public administration, the practice of running a constitution, a function existing since ancient times (Rabin & Bowman, 1984, p. 1), by arguing the politics/administration dichotomy. Since that time many scholars have wrestled the relationship between politics and administration with a number of objectives in mind. These objectives include resolving the conflict inherent in managerial discretion and public accountability; professional expertise and public participation; authority and legitimacy; and market-like efficiency and public purpose. Indeed, Waldo observed, "No problem is more central to public administration . . . than the relationship of politics and administration" (1980, p. 65), further observing that Wilson's 1887 essay is "the most important document in the development of the field" (p. 67). While others (Van Riper, 1983) may rightly question Wilson's role in the early development of contemporary public administration, scholarly attention to the Wilsonian politics-administration dichotomy since the 1950s has been both influential and prolific. Nevertheless, relatively little consideration has

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