#3 Federalism and Public Policy

How does federalism shape public policy?

• State and local governments become proving grounds for new ideas:
  - Georgia was the first state to allow 18-year-olds to vote.
  - Colorado pioneered the use of sunset laws to see if government agencies are still needed.
  - Local groups in California started new air-pollution control programs to protect the environment.

• Public pressure at the national level forces state and local policy changes:
  - Federal civil rights laws overcame state and local resistance to African Americans’ voting and other rights.

• People have many points of access to the government, increasing their opportunities to affect policy at some level:
  - Citizens can band together to affect local and state policies and have a greater chance to affect local zoning laws, transportation issues, behavioral issues, and tax issues than they have to affect national ones.

• Professional politicians at state and local levels routinely gain political expertise:
  - State and local leaders have learned to create policies that work best for them in business, environment, tax structure, and even social life.
  - These skills often make them as knowledgeable and effective in their own areas as national leaders are in theirs.

Advantages of Federalism:
  - limits the power of federal officials to determine local policy
  - lessens the risk of one political party gaining a monopoly on political power
  - gives people easier access to political offices because they may begin seeking elected offices at the local level
  - gives Americans wider ranges of choices among the different political and economic environments common to different states