

Opportunities for Local Government

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If we keep on letting government get more and more topheavy—unnecessarily topheavy—it will be our own fault. If we are not willing to put our brains and civic brawn to work in a slugging battle to resist the natural and manufactured pressures which are squeezing our governmental structure out of shape and mostly upstairs, we might as well kiss close-at-home government goodbye.

Believing that you will want to choose the fighting and courageous American way to carry on the great traditions handed down to us, I have come before you with a plan in which I hope you will join to battle the tide of centralization.

It is a plan which has all good-will toward good American government—and bad-will toward the witting and unwitting forces which are combining to literally squeeze the life out of our local governments—and to a lesser but just as dangerous extent, out of our state governments. It is abundantly clear that we must exert our goodwill with vigor, determination, and imagination against the bullying forces that beset our local governments—much in the same fashion as the resolute and sensible “good boy” sometimes has to slug it out with the plug-ugly bully.

And after I’ve finished here, I don’t want you to say: “That’s a good idea—let’s *you* go ahead and do it!” I want you to buckle on the armor and help us help you get this job rolling. It will take three things:

1. A firm belief in well-adjusted self-government, with local, state, and federal governments doing their proper part of the job.
2. The development of machinery to help local-state-federal government keep geared to the job.
3. Cooperation in a “front running” experiment by the local, state, and national governments, through the Henry County Council

on Intergovernmental Relations. This experiment is in its fifth year and has already made a real contribution toward reducing intergovernmental conflicts, promoting cooperation, and starting local government back toward full partnership in the local-state-federal team.

Contrary to some of the criers of doom, the day for local government need not be over. In fact, we can march into a new day of effectiveness for local government and the entire American System if we but have the courage, initiative, and imagination to do the job.

The time is already overdue for the honest, capable, vigorous advocates of good self-government to join in the job of preserving the fundamental basis of our form of government—at the community level—to rally its forces into an intelligent, fighting unit and hammer down the selfish advocates who are selling close-at-home government down the river by undercutting its powers and finances.

It is also time we stopped tilting with the windmill in the foolish way we have been doing, and use our brains as well as our brawn to push a real program which will successfully combat the seemingly relentless march of centralization. And I am going to ask your organizations, if you really believe in local government, to get solidly in back of the effort that is getting results in this direction. We are asking all interested citizens to join us in a determined program of standing by our local and state governments in their efforts to improve their positions in a sound local-state-federal trinity.

Let me say that it is the reasoned conclusion of the Henry County Council on Intergovernmental Relations that there is something wrong with a situation that permits wildfire centralization without any effective brake. We firmly believe we have developed a plan which will give us the machinery to not only put on the brake, but to reverse the trend. But let me warn that it will require long, patient, consistent work in your community and mine—and the patriotic efforts of more and more good citizens. Let's tackle the task realistically.

Let's stop kidding ourselves that we can keep up to date and on top of today's complicated job by (1) wishful thinking, (2) cussing the bureaucrats, (3) holding conventions of statewide groups of local officials once a year, (4) buzzing the legislature with piecemeal "me first" programs, or (5) leaving it to "George" or the pressure group that marshals the slickest campaign or trickiest law ideas. Instead, let us break down some of the silly barriers in the community and work cooperatively at home in discovering and understanding new problems and developing sound means of meeting our problems. In doing this,

let's clear the skeletons out of our closets; let's stop the poor or bad reporting which gives local government an undeserved black eye; let's stop thinking our job in local government is limited to preserving the status quo.

Would it not be better if we take the forward look, determined that it is our job to strengthen ourselves, correct our mistakes, find more efficient ways of doing things, do a better job of informing our citizens, and draw more and more competent citizens into this job of self-government?

There is not a more absorbing, challenging job in the world today or any day than that in which we are engaged—that of governing ourselves. Let us make no mistake about it that as we go so goes the world, governmentally speaking. The balance of the world is standing by, ready to be convinced to follow our lead. It is both exciting and soberingly true that we face the greatest opportunities and the greatest responsibilities of all time. We must have in our generation the greatest Americans of all time; and we must bring up a generation which can become even greater than we.

We might as well give up any beautiful but dumb dreams that we can go back to the good old days, or stay in the present good new days. We will do much better if we march adventurously into the much, much better days that surely lie ahead. And we will do ever so much better if we march forward realistically, admit to ourselves that a certain amount of centralization is necessary and desirable, but that we have the right and the duty to define limits. Actually, we must make a choice between uncontrolled *big* centralization, which pushes us around, or little centralization through which we do the pushing. If this sounds like the alternative you want to take, let's have a look—a calculating look—into the practical means by which we can achieve effective little centralization (or better, teamwork) and work at the job of whittling down *big* centralization.

Let's start, however, by admitting candidly that we have brought upon ourselves the trials and tribulations which have left our local governments, and to only a slightly lesser extent our state governments, the prey to selfish pressure groups. In thinking of the opportunities for local government, let's also keep an eye to strengthening the entire federal system of local-state-national government which is the American pattern.

AN INDIANA PROGRAM

Here in Indiana we have taken on the obligation of taking the lead toward raising the level of self-government. We can do a real job of

this program, if we will get to work in every county and city in our state to carry forward the 12-point plan of action for strengthening local governments and meshing intergovernmental gears that is being demonstrated in Henry County. We believe this plan will work and be beneficial in any county—and any state.

The 12-point plan, in brief, is to :

1. Encourage effective home rule through substitution of general enabling legislation for excessive and restrictive legislation on local matters.
2. Provide more pre-induction and on-the-job training for public officials.
3. Develop new methods of revenue sharing and cooperative administrative arrangements between the three "sizes" of government as a substitute for centralization; substitute "wise-spending" for present loose-spending incentive in matching-funds programs.
4. Strengthen county government by making commissioners clearly an administrative body, and the council a stronger legislative body.
5. Revise and strengthen revenue systems by improving assessment, collection, and accounting.
6. Establish the principle that the best role of state and federal governments is the provision of technical and scientific services to communities, leaving more control and operation to local units.
7. Further establish the principle of *one level of government* through maximum possible use of one-stop public-service centers, set up according to each major function, without regard to now-separate levels.
8. To further implement the *one-level* principle, institute: (a) local coordinating commissions in each community, (b) district and state coordinating and administrative councils, (c) rotation of administrative employees in the inter-level services among local, state, and federal offices.
9. Accept this governing principle: "The farther removed the administration from the point of service, the fewer and simpler should be the controls exerted."
10. To enable effective work locally toward raising the stature of local government and improving inter-level coordination, desig-

nate the county planning commission as the "teamwork organizer" for all the public services in the community.

11. Since good government begins in the schools, implement a new and vigorous course in schools and colleges, stressing the practical study and fundamental importance of local government as the foundation upon which the entire self-government system prospers or fails.
12. To speed the development of the local-state gearing process, the HCCIR recommends earliest appointment under legislative authorization of a statewide commission to study and promote methods of (1) strengthening local governments, (2) reorganizing county and city governments to enable citizens to adopt better management, and (3) implementing joint city-county planning. It is further recommended that such a commission be set up to include primarily members of local citizen groups set up along lines of the above recommendations to study and carry forward steps for intergovernmental coordination; also state legislators and administrators and representatives of local-government associations.

Under our "teamwork in the community plan," which is encouraged under Indiana's wisely-conceived community planning law, our officials and citizens will have a place to get together in their own communities to get some clear, top-level thinking done to prevent our governmental functions and controls from slipping away, and also bring back some controls and activities which have been either sneaked or grabbed away—or allowed to go by default. Let's understand that our present law clearly permits and encourages governmental administrative as well as physical planning. As it should work, this plan gives increased numbers of citizens a way in which they can work at government more effectively, giving them a greater sense of participation and contribution, increasing their knowledge of its workings, and consequently eliminating much of the present widespread feeling of frustration.

First, our Council, working with public officials, party leaders, and civic-minded citizens, found that failure to develop the need medium of rallying citizen-official participation into teamwork action had accelerated the withering of local governments and encouraged and contributed to centralization. Then we went to work to find a practical means of developing the method and machinery by which all citizens can make a better contribution to the process of governing themselves.

There is increasing evidence that this "community teamwork plan" can close the ever-widening gap between citizen and government; that

local planning commissions which should be called "Research and Development Commissions," can size up community needs and work out practical answers. Those who have familiarized themselves with our plan agree that we can do a good job of sensibly gearing our governments, and in the process improve the general arrangement of governmental structure and functioning.

Not only is the local machinery for this self-sharpening gearing process being developed through local tryout, but the state machinery to bring together the results of clarified local thinking is already set up and beginning to reach its great potentialities. The state agencies which we regard as fitting into the scheme are the Commission on Interstate Cooperation (which probably should be renamed the Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation), the Indiana Economic Council, and the Legislative Advisory Commission.

In addition to conducting statewide studies, the Economic Council is already working with many of our communities, at their request, on research and development studies. The Commission on Interstate Cooperation, working experimentally with our HCCIR, has received and welcomed recommendations and suggestions on local problems calling for state or federal action. This Commission is composed of five state senators, five members of the House of Representatives, and the heads of five state departments, with the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Lieutenant Governor serving *ex-officio*. Perhaps some thought should be given to establishing a broader representation on this Commission, or even realigning it so that the local-government viewpoint would be preponderant. Lay membership also might well be established.

The law by which the Commission on Interstate Cooperation was established in 1937 specifies that it shall encourage cooperation among states and with units of government within the state. Yet in all these 12 years, Henry County through the HCCIR and the local planning commissions seems to be the only one to have made use of what certainly is a very fundamental piece of machinery. In fact, formation of the Indiana Joint Committee on Street-Highway Program stems directly from a suggestion made in a meeting with that Commission.

So the process for translating local thinking and plans into action at local, state, and federal levels in an orderly manner and on a year-round basis is already established. No new machinery is needed. However, we have hardly scratched the surface. There are many communities where no governmental committee or planning commission has been formed, and this situation should be remedied as quickly as possible.

Our Council on Intergovernmental Relations has, as you know, devoted much study to the total governmental picture in Henry County

as a representative American county and one of five counties in the entire nation in which similar local citizen groups were originally financed by funds of the Spelman (Rockefeller) Fund.

It is not hard to find things wrong, or not quite right, but it is somewhat difficult to work out ways and methods of changing them. For example, it is to the credit of our forefathers that more than a hundred years ago when they established our local government they made it to last. In fact, it has proved somewhat difficult to change it to meet new problems and conditions. It has become needlessly cumbersome, puzzling to citizens, and too slow to grasp its opportunities; so we have let it get shoved more and more out of the picture. Examples are frequent—the township trustees giving up roads and welfare in the '30s; counties and cities tending to duck new law-enforcement opportunities and drop others; local units dodging chances to manage coordinated local health and recreation programs. Much of this is too largely due to defensive tactics and to failure to develop a program and promote it aggressively.

SUGGESTED FIELDS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A move to strengthen local government is starting now where it should start—at the grass roots. We are hopeful that county and city governments will surmount some of the old barriers, and get together to form joint research and development commissions which will study not only the problems of conservation, schools, recreation, sanitation, welfare, health, highways, parking, and zoning, but also governmental coordination and organization.

Many of the problems in each locality will be alike. When most of our counties have joint study commissions and make studies of their governmental services—local, state and federal, we will begin to get sound action to correct not only overlappings and duplications, but gaps in the service which the public requires. It has become clear that state and federal governments impose services on local communities which are sometimes not needed and other times not tied in with available local services. At the other extreme we have local officials groping in the dark, standing in their own light, or backing defensively into a corner when they should be digging out the story and acting aggressively to keep themselves on top of the job.

As an example, there is a growing conviction among conscientious officials and citizens that we need a head for our county government, if our counties are going to be able to handle the increased duties they will be called on to handle as our economy and population continue to grow and change. Such a change need not keep us from electing com-

missioners, but wouldn't it give us a little better management? As part of the same development—and this should be voluntary—we might build up the muscles of local government if we allow our communities—counties and cities—to select the form of administration they prefer.

Could we not also strengthen the sheriff's office, now that we are in the process of changing it over from a two-year to a four-year office, by letting it absorb some of the duties which we have allowed to slip away—such as supervising excise police and some of the work which has been shifting to state police and state conservation officers? And looking at the proposition long-range, would it not be better to take the sheriff's office (and maybe some others) off the ballot and make it possible for voters to concentrate on choosing candidates for fewer offices? We are also in the process of lengthening the term of office of other county officials—surveyor, treasurer, etc. Here's definitely opportunity for local government.

One line of governmental activity offers peculiar opportunity to build up the brain and muscle of local units—engineering. Our county engineers need more authority and better facilities for doing the top-level jobs needed in modern communities. It might be well to look to the possibility of making the county engineer appointive.

We could solidify the position of local government considerably in the collection of taxes. We should grasp every opportunity to keep this service close to our doorstep.

I hardly need remind you that the new street-highway financing program adopted by the 1949 legislature lays new responsibilities as well as opportunities on counties and cities and towns. Not everybody is happy about this, but it does, for the first time, set up a formula of revenue-sharing among the state, counties, and cities and towns. Maybe the counties and cities will be able now to set up a long-range rebuilding and maintenance program. Here is certainly one of the prize opportunities for local government, and it will be watched closely. Let's have some good thinking on long-range programming, on improvement of purchasing, testing, and safety arrangements, and on betterment of road and street building all the way around.

Our local planning commissions, sometimes with the assistance of the HCCIR and sometimes on their own, have made much progress in clarifying the governmental picture. We prevented duplication of veterans services by bringing local, state, and federal officials together, ending up with our local veterans' service office as *the* veteran center. Our communities got together to provide countywide fire protection, and the beginning of countywide trash disposal. Much better use is being made of available state and federal services in the field of soil

conservation and water resources because of our coordinating efforts, and we hope ultimately that the county and city will assume a larger part of the whole job.

Every community should be doing more of this sort of thing. We would find more and more that local, state, and federal officials would welcome new ways of working together—pooling our resources. As time goes on we could bring all lines of public service under friendly review and determine whether better order and larger local responsibility could be introduced into highways, welfare, health, education, law enforcement, etc.

Yes, the woods are full of opportunities for local government. Let's not worry about the state and federal angles so much—the people will find a way to enable them to do their share, and the people can help us control that share to its proper limits. The business of finding our opportunities is like hunting mushrooms. The person who becomes skilled in what to look for and where to look becomes a competent mushroom hunter. But the person who does not have the interest, the knack, and the trained eyes is a dub, and will remain a dub unless he tries self-improvement.

A PROGRAM OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

I am suggesting a potent, positive program of self-improvement to you. If it can be carried convincingly to the candidates for the next general assembly, I believe local self-government will make even greater gains than the good progress made this time.

Now, here's what I'd like to suggest to you. I have brought enough copies of the HCCIR 12-point program and work plans and a "declaration of local competence" entitled "The Home Town Talks Back to the Agencies" to provide one copy for every county in the state. Will you designate a representative from *your* county to pick them up? Then, will you study them, and see that they are officially studied by your local officials? Further, will you inform us whether your community, its officials and citizens, are interested in joining in this voluntary movement? And also, will you see that your organizations of local officials consider this as a possible part of their statewide cooperative activity?

Gentlemen, I am frankly excited about the potentiality of this "teamwork" plan for bucking the centralization tide and getting an effective job done at home. It *will* work wonders for you and all communities—if you will work at it with your citizens. We are immensely rich in citizenship talent, if we will but use and develop it.

Let's do our jobs so well, and tell the people about it so effectively, that our legislators will not tolerate limitation of our authority or usurpation of our job.

I repeat—there is a serious need for a local body in every community in Indiana to study and review the local situation continuously, set up goals, and work toward their accomplishment, and to keep local citizens informed and stimulated for good participation in their affairs. We should see that we have this service, and go about the job of making ourselves full partners in the local-state-federal picture. With a spirit of imagination and adventure, we can rise to new heights. Let's stop selling ourselves down the river. Let's live up to our birthright, which is to improve what has been handed down to us, and pass it to future generations better than we received it. We can be worthy of this great opportunity and this great responsibility, IF we but will. Let's *do* it!