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ACHIEVING UNIFORM POLICIES

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The problems of effecting a more beneficial distribution of population and of achieving a measured use of land and other resources in this country are closely related, and both are matters of special concern to the Nixon Administration. In his last two State of the Union messages the president focused considerable attention on these issues. In 1970 he initiated a crash program for formulating national growth policies which tapped the resources not only of hundreds of staff workers but also numerous cabinet-level officers and top aides of the president.

The first step in this high priority inquiry was to try to sort out and identify the existing programs carried out by, or with the assistance of, the federal government which affect the pattern of national growth. Particular emphasis was placed on programs affecting the trends toward population migration to major urban areas, economic distress in city cores, and growing suburban sprawl.

Existing federal policies and programs regarding population distribution and land use are contained in bits and pieces of legislation, administrative rules, and bureaucratic practices scattered throughout federal agencies concerned with domestic affairs. The task before the administration is to draw these bits and pieces, as well as new initiatives, together into coherent policies and to align administrative practices toward achievement of those policies. One of the major questions which must be answered in the formation of policies toward a desirable pattern of national growth pertains to the extent to which the federal government should try to dictate uniform policies.

A basic precept guiding the formulation of domestic policy, both past and present, is that democracy is best served by keeping decision making close to the people affected. Moreover, circumstances vary so tremendously among different cities and communities that the federal government must find it difficult, if not impossible, to adjust policies to allow for those differences. This is not to say that there are no national goals which are susceptible to generalization and, therefore, to solution by federal means that have some uniformity. But the nature of our form of government, and the differences among regions and localities, dictate that if uniformity is called for, it should be flexible enough to apply in a relatively "nonuniform" way.

All of this leads a federal policy maker to the necessity of answering certain critical questions, such as the following:

Assuming the need for uniform policies, how can we permit variations in policy to adjust to local differences while controlling these variations sufficiently to assure implementation of national policy?

Assuming that one way to achieve variations to adequately account for local differences is to delegate decision-making authority to levels below the federal (i.e., congressional or executive) levels, to whom should such authority be delegated, and subject to what controls?

If a significantly increased delegation of decision-making authority is found to be desirable, how can those in the existing system be persuaded to relinquish the decision-making authority on which much of their power is based?

A decision-making policy having less shock effect, but still a great deal of impact is the decentralization of decision making within the federal establishment to offices and people as close as possible to the people affected by the problems involved. This policy is designed to account for local differences, but does not give local people the decision-making power. The president has already embraced this policy and is vigorously carrying it out. He is faced with the same problem of persuasion of the existing federal establishment, if to a lesser degree, as would be faced if decision making were delegated to levels of government outside the federal establishment.

States and other localities tolerate a crushing number of planning programs with overlapping geographical jurisdictions. This situation has led the president's Federal Agency Review program to focus special attention on ways of simplifying planning and procedures required by various federal programs. The same bewildering array of programs providing for categorical grants has been identified and the FAR and the Ash Committee have tackled the problem of administering these in a way which minimizes the confusion to the local beneficiaries of the programs.

In looking toward a redirection of national growth programs, I would like to state a few basic assumptions and then move in a very summary fashion through specific proposals which have been generated by the administration, Congress, and nonfederal sources as possible solutions.

The president has already enunciated his basic policies to achieve optimum national growth. Included are policies to encourage the

people of less populated, more rural areas in this country to stay where they are, or at least to migrate within those nonurban regions rather than to our largest urban concentrations. Included also are policies designed to direct a major portion of the future growth of our population toward the less densely populated areas of the country. The goal is to stabilize the growth of urban concentrations at a slower rate. This goal must be achieved in the context of improved, enforceable land-use planning in both urban and rural areas. The president has no intention of abandoning the people of our cities in the furtherance of this policy.

In seeking these goals the president is specifically concerned with a renewed comprehensive rural development effort. This effort must concentrate on alleviating existing problems in rural America and on developing the potential of certain areas within rural America to grow and prosper far beyond their historical achievements. A few existing federal programs have engaged in activities along these lines, such as the so-called growth center programs of the Economic Development Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission, the "new town" program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the recent growth center highway program authorized for the Department of Transportation. All of these programs were designed to stabilize or change existing migration trends, but not in an over-all rural development effort. But they might serve as a starting point for future programs.

An exploration of possible new efforts to carry out the president's stated national growth policies leads to the Nixon Administration's proposals for revenue sharing. Directly relevant to a new emphasis on rural development are the president's bills providing for special revenue sharing for both rural development and urban development. The rural development bill provides for: (1) the earmarking of revenue sharing funds, based on a distribution formula designed to further national growth goals for rural development, and (2) almost \$200 million of new funds. One hundred million dollars (\$50 million in new money) would be available under the urban development revenue sharing proposal for planning support, and a significant portion of this would be used to support planning for rural development. Another \$100 million of new funds has been included in the urban development proposal for expenditure in rural cities of 25,000 to 50,000 population. I believe these proposals to be a very significant administration initiative toward national growth goals.

The essence of the revenue sharing concept, and at the same time its most controversial aspect, is the solution it proposes to the dilemma of achieving the right degree of uniformity of development policies.

Revenue sharing in the rural and urban development areas has been branded by some as a federal abdication of uniform policies. I think a careful analysis of the planning requirements, of the continued federal financial support for planning, and of the distribution formulas incorporated in the proposals will reveal that this sort of bland conclusion is a gross oversimplification. Special revenue sharing is certainly a compromise of the federal urge to solve the collective problems of the people of this country from Washington, but it is a compromise, not an abandonment.

The president's proposals for a comprehensive reorganization of the federal establishment, with or without adoption of the revenue sharing proposals, must be viewed as a significant step in promoting rural development and national growth policies. While the reorganization proposals themselves do not provide for reallocation of resources toward an effective national growth policy, they will, if enacted, tend to reduce the overlap and confusion of federal programs for achieving a balanced national growth. This is a necessary foundation on which initiatives to achieve greater rural development and a balanced national growth must be built.

I think it would be interesting to list the types of initiatives which have been given active consideration. These include:

Comprehensive and unified growth center development programs.

Improved and perhaps more heavily funded new town programs involving development of so-called "free standing" new towns in a rural context, new towns associated with growth centers in the rural context, "satellite" new towns associated with larger urban areas, and new towns within the inner city. This might involve use of public lands for new town development in the first two categories.

Tax credits and other tax incentive devices, either directed toward rural development generally or more particularly toward development in areas with special needs or particular potential.

The so-called "development bank" device, either broadly applicable to rural areas or with a focus on particular regions.

"Disincentives" to urban growth, such as withdrawal of tax incentives, imposition of penalties, or taxes and other payments for services within urban areas which more accurately reflect the true cost of public support of urban living, both private and commercial.

Equalization of welfare nationwide (a presidential initiative

toward this end has been made but as yet has not been adopted).

Direct incentives to individuals to locate in desired places, including help with relocation costs, availability of home mortgages on good terms, or even salary supplements or bonuses.

Redirection of federal installation locations to favor national growth goals. Past efforts in this direction through Bureau of the Budget circulars and other means seem to have had little effect, possibly because of other factors such as needs dictated by efficient operation of federal agencies.

Regulation and possibly subsidies to avoid freight rates which "discriminate" against commercial and industrial activity in more rural areas.

Removal or revision of local building, zoning, and condemnation regulations.

Population distribution, land use, and the whole spectrum of problems which make up the balanced national growth issue are in the minds of policy makers in Washington. These problems are not new, but day by day the consequences of inaction or inadequate solutions become more and more serious. Efforts at solving these problems have been attempted in a piecemeal and so far ineffectual way. But I think the next few years will be exciting for people concerned with rural development and a balanced national growth, because through revenue sharing and other innovations, solid progress is going to be made.