

# Democracy without Bureaucracy?

Ronald Reagan's idea of a workable democracy is one in which bureaucracy does not come between the people and their leaders. Realistically, democracy in America hinges upon the reduction and decentralization of government, leading to a more direct and candid relationship, at all levels of government, between elected officials and the people who elected them. "Let the people understand. Because the people's instincts are still right."

Being a government planner in a free society should be almost as unrewarding as being a free-thinker in a fascist state. The major difference, as any bureaucrat can tell you, is that while a free society may thwart your plans, it allows you to keep your job and your life. The resulting combination of frustration and security gives government planners an attitude of desperate benevolence toward the people they serve. They want to tell us how to live and, by heaven, we'd better listen if we know what's good for us.

Unfortunately, their compulsion to make us listen often turns planners into schemers, looking for ways to make us live as they think we should, whether we like it or not. Their latest scheme, shaped and polished over the past 15 years, is a new layer of government, called "regional government."

The idea of regional government really stems

from the bureaucrats' distrust of elected officials and the people who elected them. Elected officials sometimes listen to the people, much to the distress of the planners. The answer: reduce the power of elected officials, and thus of the people, by installing regional governments of appointed bureaucrats to make all of the important decisions. The design: put regional governments between local and state governments to usurp local control, and put other regional governments between the states and the federal government to usurp states' rights.

Regionalists have tried to disguise the movement toward regionalism as a public good in two ways, both spurious.

The first is the argument that state and local governments, and especially our larger cities, have failed to meet the public needs of their citizens. The argument is persuasive until one looks at the incredible burden that Washington has placed on state and local governments. With its ability to deficit spend, the federal government has forced lower levels of government into so-called sharing programs that have broken the backs of local taxpayers and placed impossible restrictions on the flexibility of local governments.

The second approach has been for regionalists to join with environmentalists in promoting a myth that only regional governments can solve regional problems, such as pollution, congestion, and transportation. This contention presupposes that there are natural geopolitical "regions" in which all of these problems are completely contained. The truth is that each problem affects a unique area and population, making boundaries for general purpose regional governments as artificial as state and county boundaries. These problems are best solved by cooperation of local governments—cooperation forced by the state, if necessary.

One of the calling cards of the regionalists across the country is a lapel button labeled "*Be regional.*" You'll see it at meetings of regional govern-