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Regional Governance: Why? Now? How?
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I'LL BET A LOT OF YOU are wondering why, how, to what end the issue of metropolitanism ever got on your agenda for this morning.

After all, we all learned, some years ago, that regionalism is a dead duck in America. As far as governance is concerned, we Americans are confirmed atomizers. We "conquered" a continent single-handed, and we don't favor people who might ever give us orders. We revel in having hundreds of cities, towns, townships, counties, special districts packed within single so-called metropolitan areas. The God of Local Autonomy drives our political thinking. And the examples of our Balkanized splinterization abound.

Take for example the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This is one Gary Hodge reminded me of one the other day -- that while the Chesapeake Bay is an imperiled entity, there are 2,600 units of government, from counties to towns to special districts, within ~~the watershed~~ of the watershed alone. Vast numbers of those governments will tell you they, and they alone, ought to have final authority over land use decisions -- as if the intimate ecologic interdependency of their region didn't exist.

A classic example has always been Pittsburgh and environs. Within Allegheny County, there are no less than four cities, 82 boroughs, 26 first-class towns and 16 second-class towns. As for authorities and special districts, there are 17 for parking, 37 for sewers, 24 for water, 7 for recreation, 13 for health, 16 with miscellaneous powers. The county has 42 school districts-- yes, 42! And in case you think some single council of government is making sense of it all, forget it. There are *eight* COGs in Allegheny County alone.

Of course it would far too dangerous to mess around with such situations. Change small-bore, close-to-home control and *who knows* what happen next -- perhaps some Big Metropolitan-wide government that might start mollicoddling blacks or browns or other poor folk, or tax the devil out of us, or -- as we often said until the "evil empire" fell -- make Commies of us all.

So bolstered by state laws that generally require majorities both in city and county to combine two or more governments, we have, across our entire

continental land mass, allowed only 16 mergers of cities and counties since World War II. Out of Goodness only knows how many possible mergers. Other great federated nations-- The German Federal Republic, now Australia -- effect radical reduction in their numbers of local governments. We will have none of it. Home Rule is our golden calf. We'll stick with it.

True, a handful of odd experiments have sprung up here or there, under rather special circumstances. Indianapolis got its so-called "Unigov," perpetrated by a single-minded Republican establishment. The Minnesota Twin Cities somehow approved a Metropolitan Council -- appointed by the governor, not elected -- after some crisis related to sewage percolating up into peoples' wells, and a discovery that polluted water doesn't respect municipal lines. Oregonians approved a Portland-area Metropolitan Service District, even agreed to elect its chief executive and members directly. But then it rationed out powers to the MSD at the same velocity that parochial school girls of the 1940s dispensed sexual favors -- namely, *very* slowly.

As for state governments, which ought to see the compelling logic of it all, they pay obeisance to the Home Rule calf and virtually never force the issue. To me that's particularly sad, given the states' compellingly clear governmental and constitutional duty to provide for the welfare of their own citizens and units of local government. We've now had a decade and more of rather remarkable state policy innovations, on every front from economic development to schools to the environment. But structural reform, sad to say, has yet to appear on the resurgent state government's agendas.

There was a time, back in the '50s and '60s, when some people in Washington, D.C., talked about federal power forcing metropolitan cohesion. The feds even wrote some laws, A-95 rules and the like, with hopes of coaxing better cohesion at the grassroots. But no longer. President Ronald Reagan, you'll recall, ended up deep-sixing the A-95 approval process in 1983.

Today we have a fiscally and intellectually bankrupt federal government, so inept in trying to do what it *has* to do that ~~substantive~~ policy adventurism ~~apparently~~ falls almost outside its ken. Is there any chance Washington will soon reverse course and take active interest in the structure of local and metropolitan governance? There's about zero chance, for the rest of this century, and almost none for a generation to come, if you ask me.

Of course we know there are some problems local governments can't cope with. So we have tolerated the creation of some 26,000 special districts, coping with every problem from mosquitoes to trash burning. We let municipalities and counties form their own, *ad hoc* methods of sharing or selling services to each other. Sometimes we're pretty ingenious about shared service agreements. City managers are especially good at working out such deals -- spectacularly good at the game if they can carry it off without the politicians getting too aware of what's happening.

We have, for the last half century or so, allowed creation of councils of governments. Some are quite good planning for regional services, from transit to water to public safety. But let a COG *attempt a truly* courageous act, and the blood calls for its extinction echo across the political landscape.

As for governmental coherence where metropolitan areas straddle state lines -- a phenomenon that appears in some 40 places -- there's been precious little. The biggest exception is the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which has its own money flow from tolls and thus has undertaken some very interesting work over the years.

A few years ago Bruce McDowell of the ACIR drew up for American Planning Association a kind of rough topology of the kind of regional councils once can imagine, or sometimes site, in our culture. A couple looked brave enough -- a "regional provider agency" serving up regional public services, for example. McDowell even listed a "regionweal" model, in which the regional government "authoritatively governs areawide policies and programs"-- an interesting idea, though you tell me where you see a good example of it.

But other regional models on McDowell's scale seemed more instructive, and more familiar. The regional agency, for example, that exists "in name only" and "barely functions." The one that limits its activities to acting as a kind of super-tourist board. The model of the "stalemated" regional agency which "unsuccessfully attempts to resolve major interjurisdictional policy issues."

So you'll well ask, if all that's the case, if metropolitanism is as welcome most places as a rash, as utilitarian as a hang toenail, why *are* we spending an hour on it this morning?

And I'll reply, that as strange as it seems, supposedly dead regionalism is rearing its head across the breadth of this nation today.

Why? you'll ask.

Because, I'll answer, and reel off a bunch of answers.

You can pick your own.

Maybe it's that the "feds," under Ronald Reagan, withdrew General Revenue Sharing and a lot of the other national largesse that ^{had} permitted individual communities to go merrily along with redundant, wasteful practices, courtesy of Uncle Sam.

Maybe it's that our regions today face more and more serious environmental problems, especially air pollution ^{now} to site LULU's -- "locally unacceptable land uses" -- such as solid waste landfills or incinerators.

Maybe it's that in most metropolitan areas, the cities and towns have simply grown together. And start ^{to} recognize how little sense existing boundaries make. The fact is that people use their region as a single entity. Day to day, they pay scarcely any heed to the municipal boundaries we're told are so sacrosanct. Work, sports game, concert, restaurant, park -- who really cares what political jurisdiction they're in?

Sometimes it seems it's only the politicians, the local officeholders, who really care. That the politicians simply suggest all the rest of us are ready to embark on vicious electoral retribution if officials should succumb to an urge to merge.

One class of people who seem less and less interested in parochial city and town lines is the progressive, nationally- and globally-oriented business community. These bottom-line folks recognize, far ahead of other people, that the only regions prepared to cope in the ferocious global economic competition of the years ahead will be those that can plan their physical and human resource futures in unison.

I'm also convinced that the sheer physical growth of our time is behind a lot of today's metropolitan talk. We may remember the 1980s as the era when, from Boston to Miami, across Texas and Arizona, up and down the Pacific Coast, the United States' landscape underwent astoundingly radical change. Corporations -- from industrial giants to its smallest upstart enterprises -- flocked to the suburbs. The suburban bedroom communities; gas stations and waffle

shops of the '50s became passe: the new order was signature office towers, luxury hotels, upscale housing, hi tech firms in clusters ~~what~~^{that} some choose to describe in one of the great oxymorons of our times: "urban villages."

What we were witnessing, of course, was suburbia fast becoming America's prime work place. In 1970, only 25 per cent of the nation's offices were located in suburbs. But the Office Network in Houston tells us that when the construction wave begun in 1989-90 is completed, nearly 60 per cent of the nation's office space will be located in suburbia.

The 1980s wave of suburban and exurban growth was so massive, as Tony Hiss observed in *The New Yorker*, that it could be likened to "the work of the great beasts of the last interglacial period, whose browsing destroyed large areas of thick forest."

Northern New Jersey's 99.1 million square feet of office space, for example, today exceeds the combined volume of downtown Chicago and Los Angeles; by sometime in this decade, it will likely exceed the total of all of Manhattan. New Jersey is finding it may have laid aside its old symbol of oil refineries, pig farms and garbage heaps along the turnpike. But what's the substitute? Ever-lengthening traffic pile ups, deep congestion that's the most visible manifestation of what sprawl brings. "New Jersey doesn't have rush hours anymore," says James Hughes, a professor of planning at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. "We have rush mornings and rush evening punctuated by noontime backups."

The most arresting cry of pain and demand for relief has come from California. There citizen-driven anti-growth ballot initiatives became one of the '80s most dramatic growth industries. To grasp how serious things are out in the West, consider the LA 2000 report, issued in November 1988 by a broadly representative business-citizen-government group initially appointed by Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley.

The issue is that Los Angeles, the Golden State mecca always ready to define the future for the rest of us, the birthplace of the freeway, the subdivision, big aerospace, big entertainment and maybe America's most vicious gangs, is getting scared. Of course Los Angeles is already an economic powerhouse, with bright future prospects. Boosters dream of L.A. the economic epicenter of the Pacific Rim. Or L.A. the crossroads city of a 21st Century that's as polyglot as the dozens of nationalities that already call L.A. home. A lead world city in communications, education, the arts.

But Los Angeles, the city and county, are already cramped, their population spiraling, air quality imperiled, crime rising, roads crumbling. They will gain 6 million new souls by 2000, some by immigration, mostly by births exceeding deaths. There's a grave job and home mismatch-- the great majority of jobs are going into western Los Angeles and Orange Counties, the bulk of new housing into Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, many freeway miles away. Within a few years, rush hour freeway speeds could well sink to five or six miles an hour, threatening an effective end to Los Angeles as a viable economy and workplace.

The L.A. 2000 Committee warned of "a Balkanized landscape of political fortresses, each guarding its own resources in the midst of divisiveness, overcrowded freeways, antiquated sewers, ineffective schools, inadequate human services and a polluted environment."

There's no way under the sun, the group concluded, that Los Angeles and its surrounding counties can cope when 157 local governments jealously protect their prerogatives, with minimal attention to the regional welfare. Glendale sewage ends up in Santa Monica Bay. South Bay industrial emissions throw a pall over the San Gabriel Mountains. South Center drug gangs roam free and wide.

So, said LA 2000, the region needs at least two tough new region-wide agencies able, when need be, to override local governments. The first would be a new Southern California-wide growth management agency, empowered to resolve contradictory land use decisions of contentious local governments. The second, responsible for regional environmental quality, would be able to tie together and enforce regulations over the closely interrelated problems of air quality, pollutants in water, toxic and solid waste dumps.

For the politicians who run Southern California's disjointed, thornily independent cities and counties, these recommendations have of course generated deep shock. But LA 2000, I believe, was immensely significant: a sign that our citizens now recognize, perhaps more than our politicians, that metropolitanism is the only approach that has a ghost of a chance of averting a cluttered, despoiled urban landscape in 2000 and beyond.

The social issues in rapid-paced, typical sprawl development can be very significant. Today's new suburban office development is moving rapidly *away* from, and ignoring, our concentrations of low-income and minority people. You can see it around Atlanta, as vast office and commercial projects, with their thousands of jobs, flow to Buckhead and other developments on the affluent and

overwhelmingly white northern periphery. Growth is moving farther and farther from under- and unemployed, black, poor south Atlanta. In California there's the example of the San Francisco Bay Region, where development is spreading up and over the hills to the east, in fact spilling far out into the Central Valley, while comparatively little is done to revive and make use of grand old downtown Oakland, or offer accessible jobs to Oakland's troubled populations. I call this pervasive national phenomenon our own *American apartheid*. I fear we'll be stuck with it long after South Africa has corrected its.

Last spring in San Francisco, I met with the so-called Bay Vision 2020 Commission, a blue-ribbon group designated by leading elected officials of the region. The group has no less a charge than figuring out how the San Francisco Bay Region can manage and survive under the severe growth pressures it's feeling today, and what form of regional governance would be most acceptable. It's an extraordinarily prestigious group, its members ranging from the retiring Chancellor of UC-Berkeley, Mike Heyman, who's the chair, to CEO A.W. Clausen of the Bank of America to other leading business, environmental, community organization and ethnic group figures. We wanted such a prestigious group, one of the politician-founders told me, so that people would consider it politically dangerous to ignore or undercut it. The objective is to write a new regional vision and blueprint -- quite possibly a consolidated regional government with a council of 15 to 20 members, setting the policy for air, water, large-scale land-use and transportation, and overseeing (but not taking over) the work of special purpose districts in such areas as transit. With a requirement that all localities' activities jibe with a regional master plan.

Bay Vision's tough political challenge will be to figure out how to get the California Legislature, and the next governor, to pass the laws making it possible, or even mandating, full regional governance to come into being. Working with parallel groups in San Diego and Sacramento, the more ambitious backers' objective is nothing less than a state instruction to all California regions: each of you must, however you desire to shape it, come up with a form of regional governance for the resolution of conflicts. Indeed, a report from the California Assembly, carrying Assembly Speaker Willie Brown's weight, calls for a single Regional Development and Infrastructure Agency, with extraordinarily broad powers, in each of the state's air basins. It may be that regional governance, when it suddenly dawns on us, will be in some disguise -- growth management, air quality control, what have you. But once the critical regional powers are focused in one place in a bellwether state like California, metropolitanism in our country will have taken a giant leap forward.

Up the coast, in the Puget Sound area, there has been talk of freeholders petitioning to the ballot a thorough rewrite of the charter of King, the lead county, giving it true region-wide powers. I got pretty familiar with the Seattle situation a year ago when I headed a team doing a series of reports, for *The Seattle Times*, on the present and future of the entire Puget Sound region-- one of the hottest growth areas on the continent today. And in one of the articles we wrote for the paper, we quoted a veteran player in Seattle city government as noting: "All the things people are worked up over, they're 'governance' issues. But most folks don't know it yet."

And indeed it turned out that the issues riling people in the Seattle region - - nightmare traffic jams, air pollution, threatened fresh water quality, rapid-fire physical growth-- all are fundamentally regional, and governmental. We noted: "There's not a ghost of a chance that any of these problems can be dealt with in the absence of a realistic governmental structure, some kind of a mechanism to drive the hard choices." With the Seattle region's four counties and 71 municipalities and a cacophony of special purpose regional bodies, we noted, "No one's in charge." We even added: "A private corporation that operated this way couldn't even manage its way into bankruptcy court."

Nor is this just a Western phenomenon. Within a single week a few months ago, I found myself in Charlotte, North Carolina, in Rochester, New York, and then Columbia, South Carolina, talking with business and civic groups that are inquiring more and more into the potential of coherent area-wide governance. Everywhere one travels around America, metropolitanism, officially "out" of public debate for two or more decades, is decisively "in" again.

But when reform gets mentioned these days, it's with a distinct difference from the past. Today nobody even seems to *think* about such straightforward suggestions as a single, all-powerful metropolitan government to would expunge the cities and towns below. Everyone recognizes that's simply unsellable politically-- and probably unwise, anyway. We know the vast majority of city-county consolidations have lost at the polls. And that people *do* feel a very real need for government close to them-- generally their own city or town government, sometimes authority devolved all the way to the neighborhood level.

We may, indeed, face a promising era of devolution of service-providing, and a good number of policy decisions, right down to neighborhoods. Especially to troubled neighborhoods where there are community organizations that can act as mediators with large social service bureaucracies. The alienation between poor

communities and the middle-class service providers has become so vast that a rebuilding from the grassroots, employing community development corporations, churches and other entities to work person-to-person and family-to-family, may be our much wiser way to go. Pushing tenant-managed housing, intensive neighborhood-based counseling for troubled young parents, peer-to-peer drug education and recovery programs, neighborhood-run schools, community-based policing and much more. If I were to give a one-sentence prescription for where we need to head in our socially troubled areas, I would say toward radical *decentralization* and radical *personalization* of government's services and outreach.

But coherence at the regional, the metropolitan level is just as compelling. Only a limited set of functions are appropriate for *exclusive* attention by a single city or suburb -- one might list, for example, street maintenance, fire and community police services, codes and inspections, and detailed zoning decisions. But not many more. More and more of the *critical* issues, ranging from air quality to mass transit, highways to land use, workforce preparedness to economic development, need in significant measure to be seen as *regional, metropolitan-wide* concerns.

A year ago last fall in Denver, the 94-year old National Civic League for the first time in its history endorsed metropolitan-wide governance. A sort of eclectic bunch of us sat down to draft it, in fact, before the full board approval. The group included, for example, Phoenix Terry Goddard, then president of the National League of Cities and now a candidate for governor of Arizona. Curtis Johnson, executive director of the Citizens League in the Twin Cities. Plus Iowa State Rep. Jack Hatch, who's been very interested in making Polk County, around Des Moines, a far stronger entity, and indeed is pushing a city-county consolidation measure that's on the ballot this November. Despite the differences of background, our entire drafting group found the core issue compelling and straightforward.

As the National Civic League board approved it, the statement began with a prediction that life in urban and suburban America, in the 1990s and into the next century, will decline seriously if the "big" governance issues, from education to social services to land use patterns to assuring a quality work force for the future, are *not* guided and ultimately directed on a region-wide basis. The League said a two-tier type system was essential, most existing subunits left in place, but new metropolitan authorities formed with the power to plan regionally, and resolve conflicts between existing cities and counties.

One asks: Does regional authority threaten individual municipalities? Not necessarily, the League suggested: "City leadership, beset with shrinking tax bases, rising costs, and development forces playing one municipality off against another, should not just welcome, but demand some effective regional rule-setting and governance."

What's more, the two-tier structure of the metropolitanism now being discussed makes it clear that very few local governments are going to find themselves merged or dissolved out of existence. All that's being said is that there need to be, for the pressing issues of our environment and society, responses at the appropriate geographic level. That does not mean that an immense amount of administration, and entirely locally-oriented decision-making, should not and will not continue. For government professionals such as yourselves, this simply means we are trying to rationalize government service delivery to serve your customers -- the citizens -- more effectively.

But should regional governance embrace exclusively physical issues -- roads, airports, air and water pollution, waste dumps, land use and the like? The National Civic League statement says no, that education, social services, workforce preparedness require true regional attention as well.

Saying that, of course, is a hell of a lot simpler than making it come true. Move from the obvious issues of transportation coordination, environmental protection and the like and into the social arena, and you can find yourself on political quicksand. Principally, I believe, because of peoples' fears of integration by class or race.

Yet you have to ask -- In the long run, can suburbs really afford to let the center cities go to hell in a hand basket? Many think and act so. As if their border to the city were a Berlin Wall, behind which to hide, hopefully in perpetuity. Of course their prescription is foolhardy. Because in fact political boundaries do *not* seal off problems of ignorance, poverty, inferior child care, teenage pregnancies, delinquency, crime, intergenerational dependency and all their ugly, onrolling consequences. Progressive policies to attack these maladies, viewing them as true regional challenges, need not be offered on grounds of altruism alone. Just let them fester and we *know* the inevitable result: added regionwide crime, decayed investments, physical abandonment, and broad devaluation of equity. When one part of the metropolitan fabric is torn -- a major piece allowed to deteriorate or decline, fall into discouragement and human failure -- the future prospects of every jurisdiction, every neighborhood, every family

across that metropolitan region, will be in some measure dimmed. Permanently poor, dependent jurisdictions, neighborhoods, families are not simply local failures, civic embarrassments. They can make us into Third World-like places of bitter confrontation between a monied elite on one side, and an embittered, increasingly dangerous underclass on the other. The ultimate price -- social, fiscal, in terms of shattered public safety -- becomes astronomical. Plus the fact that a large underclass creates an intolerable burden in the fiercely competitive new international economy which finds aggressive regions across the globe, from Oslo to Ottawa to Osaka, out to eat our lunch.

Can local governments be counted on to lead a march toward truer regional government? Not often or easily, I'd suggest. It's a task officeholders are rarely able to lead. In the political dynamic of our time, there must be other driving forces to gain popular and political support for shared and focused metropolitan governance. Citizen leagues, neighborhood and environmental coalitions, corporate leaders and community foundations. Only citizen power can set the political groundwork, so that politicians can then respond.

On the other hand, only the experts in the management of government, people like yourselves, can lay the factual groundwork, the rationale for metropolitan cohesion. Your efforts are desperately needed to give *credibility* to the citizen- and business-led campaigns. It may be time to put aside some of the city manager's traditional coyness, avoidance of all risk, and at least take the step of gathering colleagues at the metropolitan level to ~~fr~~ash out some of the issues of regional governance. To talk the issue out among yourselves, so that you, as the professionals at the business of governance, are in a position to lay the options and realities in front of elected officials, and the public. You need, in short, to be thinking about the strategic needs of your communities and regions in the 21st century, and then communicating your conclusions.

Let me suggest what happens if you don't: Like many politicians, you will find yourselves the object of broad citizen hostility against all government, starting with government the closest to home. There's a lot of politician and government bashing going on right now, people immensely frustrated with government's inability to attack the core problems. Last Tuesday, for the first time in our history, state legislators' terms got limited, by an initiative that won overwhelmingly in Oklahoma. California has two such resolutions on the ballot in November. The anti-politician political flack can get ugly and you do well to stay out of the crossfire as much as you can. And your best protection, I'd submit, is to work constantly for government improvement -- not just in day-to-day

administration, but looking to change government so that, among other things, regional issues can be handled on a truly regional scale.

Along the way, please do not compromise with vague, generalized calls for service coordination between jurisdictions. That was brave, gutsy, advanced stuff in 1960 or 1970. It's still nice, but beside the point of our central need, for true metropolitan-wide decision-making, in 1990, 2000 or beyond.

A couple of mechanical points on regional authorities, as I wind up:

Metropolitan structures may be devised by local citizen-business-government commissions, aided by experts like you. But remember that state legislative blessing of that process, in fact authorizing and mandating state legislation, is a prerequisite. Otherwise, some municipalities will simply "opt out" and make a travesty of the process.

A critical issue will be whether the governing councils of metropolitan entities are to be appointed by the governor or other state officials, directly elected, or comprised of officials already elected to other local government bodies. Eventually I believe they will have to be elected, if they are to enjoy ongoing power, not be nibbled to death. As for the idea of simply appointing officials of the political subunits to make up the governing body, it seems patently unconstitutional, based on the Supreme Court's decision in the New York case, *Board of Estimate v. Morris*. Because such an arrangement, almost by definition, is a flagrant violation of the one-man, one-vote principle.

The same issues of at-large versus district elections that govern other municipal elections across the country would seem to apply. A possible approach, it seems to me, is to make local mayors and other officials *ex officio* members of the committees and council of a metropolitan-style government.

As for metropolitan governance in interstate regions, I see no alternative to accomplishing that through interstate compact. In a talk to Washington's COG last November, I proposed just such a compact to create a metropolitan government for the national capital area. The result of negotiation between four sovereign powers-- Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the United States Congress. So far there's been no rush to embrace that idea. But a stronger interstate authority on transportation *has* been embraced by a number of local officials. Ex-Virginia Gov. Gerald Baliles suggested my route of the interstate compact would be the way to formalize it.

Let me conclude by saying that metropolitanism, as an issue for the 1990s, goes far beyond debate over ideal governmental form or efficiency -- as critically important as that debate may be. Ultimately, it seems to me, the discussion about metropolitanism reaches the question behind all others: the kind of society we hope ourselves, and our children, to live in.