

GUEST EDITORIAL

Governor Russell W. Peterson

Reorganizing State Government

One of the biggest obstacles to progress in state government today is an organizational structure that has built-in delays in decision-making.

The Commission form of government is such an organization. It has many autonomous and semi-autonomous groups made up of lay people, most of whom have full-time responsibilities outside government.

These groups meet infrequently — perhaps once a month — and make decisions by vote of a majority — if a majority is present. To reach a decision on even a small problem, especially if it involves more than one organization, can easily take months.

And so at a time when this nation is facing problems of increasing intensity and complexity, a time when quick decisions are needed to prevent problems from log-jamming, most state and local governments are saddled with a governmental structure hopelessly inadequate to meet the demands placed upon it.

LET WASHINGTON DO IT

I am convinced that this is one of the prime reasons for this nation's lack of progress in solving problems, and one of the prime reasons why the federal government in past years has taken over more and more responsibility from the state and local governments.

The hard fact is that the federal government has taken over by default. The decision-making lag at the local government level has created a vacuum in getting action and results, and the people have turned to the federal government not out of choice, but out of necessity.

But the federal government is not the one that

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should be doing the job. It is too large, too far removed from the local problems to be efficiently responsive to local needs. The mayor or the governor knows his problems much better than someone sitting in Washington.

What is the answer?

I doubt if there is "one answer," but there can be no doubt that we must start by reorganizing state and local government so they are more responsive to the people and their problems.

FROM COMMISSION TO CABINET

In Delaware, we have reorganized our government from a commission form with approximately 140 commissions and agencies to a cabinet structure with 10 secretaries, all of whom are responsible to and serve at the pleasure of the governor.

The change has been amazing. Today, the governor of Delaware can gather around one table all of the decision-makers in the Executive Branch of State Government. These people are full-time employees of the people of Delaware, working 12 or more hours a day. Their prime interest and responsibility is with the people.

Now, most key decisions can be made by discussions between two people — decisions that under the commission form of government took months.

Full-time employees. Expertise. Quick decisions. Action. This is what is needed in state government today. This is what the cabinet structure provides.

And for the decision-makers, it also provides more pressure. There is no longer the luxury of referring a problem to a commission or agency. The buck stops where the responsibility is — first in the cabinet secretary's lap, and then on the governor's desk. As the people become more aware of that, the pressure will grow.

So be it. No governor worth his salt would have it any other way.