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The National Association
of Regional Councils

The Action Agenda
of Regional
Councils

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Action Agenda in Brief

Transportation and the Environment

Campaign for reauthorization of the Clean Air Act with provisions for a reasoned and realistic process for regional communities to comply with national air quality standards.

Press for reauthorization of Solid Waste Management legislation continuing a federal role and providing for positive incentives to encourage regional decision-making on needed facilities with special attention to landfills and recycling technologies.

Finalize and communicate a NARC-proposed National Surface Transportation Program for the post-Interstate era.

Monitor and act, as necessary, on transportation appropriations and potential for increases in gas taxes for deficit reduction.

Economic Development and Jobs

Work for legislation to assist rural regional communities which are economically depressed.

Continue appropriations for the Economic Development Administration funds for development districts and funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Seek a regional approach to job training and programs to assist work force readiness among the permanent poor.

Human Resources

Encourage regional approaches and adequate resources for prevention and control of drug abuse.

Foster, through federal policy and grass roots activities, regional information and referral services in child care.

Stimulate regional program provisions for affordable housing for moderate

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and low income persons and families with particular attention to job location and transportation.

Monitor effective administration of programs for the elderly and address long term issues and program needs for an aging population.

(Note: The NARC Board will review proposals concerning the Federal Deficit and such issues as Targeted Fiscal Assistance since this question is basic to national resource allocations for domestic programs.)

These items are discussed in more detail in the pages that follow.

Regional Councils and a Washington Action Program

The nation's regional communities are the economic market places for emerging national policies and programs on economic competitiveness, trade policy, domestic needs and Federal budget deficit corrective actions. As the new President and Congress forge solutions to these issues, there must be an awareness not only of the economics but of the social disparities and human equity consequences of these decisions, within and among regions.

At least three groups of priority domestic issues require or can be more cost-effectively managed through regional community approaches.

Transportation and the Environment

In the last few years, there has been a growing concern over the existing condition and future needs for public facilities. It is argued that we have an infrastructure crisis, not only in maintenance but new construction.

Federal programs have provided resources to state and local government with the largest commitment to transportation. The crucial nature of the federal transportation role is demonstrated by the fact it financially supports only 20 percent of the roads, but these roads carry more than 80 percent of total vehicle miles traveled. Regional planning and coordination, for the last 20 years, has been essential to the construction of our surface transportation network. The mobility afforded is a primary reason for the dynamic and growing nature of our economy.

Fundamental to the national infrastructure issue is the future of these transportation programs. The current federal programs expire in the early 1990s. The 43,000-mile Interstate Highway System will be declared completed. There must be a vision and resolve for a future national surface transportation policy and program for the 1990s and beyond.

Another determinative aspect of the infrastructure issue is the accomplishment of federally imposed standards for clean air and water and management of our solid, hazardous and toxic wastes. The question here is who pays for these mandates and who participates in developing implementing policies and plans for their compliance?

The case for federal resources to pay the main cost of complying with

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mandates is simple and straightforward. Once a problem is of the magnitude that national interest demands federal intervention, then the costs of its solution or mitigation also is a national responsibility.

Intergovernmental participation in compliance programs is another issue. We prefer the example set by the Clean Air program where implementation planning is achieved by local governments operating through a designated regional agency and given the opportunity to develop implementation programs in partnership with the state. This model should be applied in other existing and emerging programs, e.g., water quality, hazardous and toxic wastes.

Economic Development and Jobs

There is no general federal policy that encourages states and local governments to develop strategies and programs for realistic and coordinated regional development and public investment. There must be a policy that encourages public-private economic strategies which incorporate state and local community values and aspirations for the future of their regions, whether rural or urban.

Central to any strategy is economic development, jobs, and training. Jobs must relate to labor markets and employment potentials that exist in a regional economy. Even though the current Job Training Partnership Act encourages regional approaches, fragmentation exists. We have regions with high unemployment in the central city and job openings in the suburbs without the ability to match these two conditions. Economic development and jobs must be supported by transportation, housing and community infrastructure. All need to be meaningfully tied together regionally.

Human Resources

Human service programs have a great diversity in terms of needs as well as service delivery. Program services are provided not only by public agencies, but the private sector, voluntary, and nonprofit groups. This requires even greater coordination and linkage. Regional approaches are even more crucial here because specialized services and facilities may be spread throughout the region. Information on services and facilities available in the region, in itself, is a confusing maze. Service areas requiring special

Regional Councils and a Washington Action Program

attention include child care, drug and alcohol abuse, health care, youth services, and programs for the elderly.

There is a major federal program targeted to the needs of the elderly. Federal assistance is available and encourages coordinated regional approaches to delivering the needed services. This program provides a model for other programs in this field. There is a new statute on drug control and significant legislation pending in child care.

Transportation and the Environment

Clean Air

The Challenge

More than 70 urban regions in 40 states cannot meet federal air quality standards for ozone and carbon monoxide by the deadline in the Clean Air Act. In most of these areas good faith efforts were made, and subsequent improvements were obtained. But additional time and added efforts are needed if federal sanctions are to be avoided.

The Issue

How can we develop and gain acceptance of a balanced national policy for attaining federal air quality standards without unduly disrupting a region's economy and livelihood, and the life styles of its residents?

What We Must Do

Convince the Congress and Administration that in reauthorizing the Clean Air Act that the objectives can be retained but a more reasoned and measured process for obtaining those goals must be available to each regional community affected.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

- Federal policy should provide for new clean air compliance schedules and deadlines for attainment that are based on a reasonable and practicable balance between public health considerations and the economic and cost implications of attainment.
- As a condition for extending attainment deadlines, non-attainment areas should be required to implement additional but reasonably available control measures to achieve attainment at the earliest practicable date.
- Federal sanctions should be applied only to areas which have not committed to or have failed to implement measures necessary to attain the federal standards.

Transportation and the Environment

- The Administration should establish a discrete policy to guide air quality replanning efforts while clean air legislation is being debated. This policy should provide a firm understanding as to how states and nonattainment areas can proceed with replanning while continuing to accommodate reasonable development. Regional Councils and their governments should have the option to initiate new plans to attain standards. Federal funds should be provided to assist the replanning effort. The federal government should assume an equitable share of the costs since the nation as a whole benefits.

Discussion

The deadline for attaining National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone and carbon monoxide was December 31, 1987. The previous Administration and Congress, working on two separate tracks, were evolving strategies for the earliest practicable attainment of the air quality standards. On one track, EPA has issued a proposed post-1987 attainment strategy and, without legislative guidance, has called on states to begin the process of preparing new attainment plans. On the other track, Congress debated strategies for attainment without specific direction to EPA in the interim.

Efforts to develop a new national strategy to clean up the nation's air should continue to be a top environmental priority. Without legislation to implement a new strategy, purely punitive sanctions will be imposed that will cause economic hardship for many metropolitan areas and states while doing little to assure sustained progress toward achieving air quality standards.

Federal sanctions should only be involved where communities and states fail to take good faith efforts to plan and carry out programs that will seek to attain federal standards at the earliest practicable date. Time schedules and measures for attaining compliance should be reasonable. Deadlines and measures that will cause significant economic hardship and unwarranted life style changes should be carefully planned and staged.

Transportation and the Environment

Solid Waste Management

The Challenge

Each person in the United States generates approximately 3.5 pounds of solid waste each day. In 1986, the nation's total amount of solid waste came to 160 million tons. The bulk of these wastes is disposed of in over 13,500 landfills throughout the country. It is expected that one-third - 4,750 - of these facilities will be closed by 1993. Replacement sites may not be found in most cases, even though this is the least costly method of disposal. Other disposal alternatives are being pushed, particularly recycling of waste materials.

The Issue

Congress and the Administration must provide leadership and a national policy on waste management which is a crisis in more and more communities.

What We Must Do

In the reauthorization of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) assure that provisions are included which encourages state/sub-state regional partnerships for siting and joint management approaches, public-private partnerships and management solutions that are economically feasible.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

There is federal policy that calls for a state solid waste management strategy which is the product of substate regional planning and programming. What is required now are the tools and incentives to accomplish this commitment.

Discussion

RCRA and its mandate for more environmentally sound and efficient approaches in managing solid waste is national policy and must continue. More attention must be given to encouraging recycling and developing the

Transportation and the Environment

markets for such materials to make this a more economic undertaking. The intergovernment planning and management scheme in the current law makes sense and must be more effectively supported. Positive incentives must be fashioned for siting needed management facilities in communities where opposition has made solutions impossible.

Surface Transportation: Highways and Transit

The Challenge

We are at the cross-roads for examining and determining the process for future transportation investments in our country. The efficient movement of people and goods is critical to our economy and competitiveness. The federal-aid Interstate Highway program has been the driving force for highway investments since 1956. By 1991 the construction of the Interstate Highway System will be virtually complete. The goal of the Interstate program, connecting our states and major metropolitan areas, has been achieved. Today our greatest emerging transportation needs are intra-regional and intra-state. We are challenged by deteriorating urban and rural infrastructure, urban and suburban congestion, rural isolation, limited financial resources and the need to sustain economic growth. The future federal surface transportation program must focus on these needs.

The Issue

Persuading the Congress and the Administration that continued and increased federal assistance is essential for highway and transit facilities within a new Surface Transportation Act.

What We Must Do

Finalize NARC's transportation proposals in a consensus-building process with other interest groups and educate the public, Congress and Administration to the needs and our recommended program.

Transportation and the Environment

The Federal Role and Responsibilities

Post-interstate federal highway and mass transportation programs should:

- Provide greater program flexibility to enhance cost-effective investments through the consolidation of existing program categories into three components: Interstate Preservation System, Strategic Metropolitan System, and Strategic Inter-regional/Rural System.
- Strengthen the federal/state/local partnership with a commitment to increased state and local program flexibility and control over investments through regional community intergovernmental decision-making.
- Provide greater and stable financial support, through user fees, for current and future needs.

Discussion

The ability of the nation's transit and highway system to provide needed mobility is approaching crisis conditions, even with more state and local resources. During the past 30 years, the federal transportation program has succeeded in building an excellent Interstate highway system promoting commerce and mobility which has fueled our economic growth. But that growth has generated congestion within the large regional communities the interstate system has helped spawn. The result has been a growing disparity between dynamic development patterns and needed public investment in transportation infrastructure, producing gridlock in urban areas and isolation for many rural areas. This in turn threatens the livability and economic viability of these communities.

The challenge before us is not simply to gain acceptance of the need for increased investments in transportation infrastructure. Rather we must realign the current national transportation program into a bold, new approach that relinquishes modal self-preservation and parochial investment decisions. We must do a much better in linking transportation decisions to how we use our land for jobs, housing, commerce, and recreation. There must be a comprehensive approach to moving people and goods through a decision-making process that includes all the stake-

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holders; local elected officials, transit operators, the states, the private sector, and the federal government.

If the United States is to continue to be economically competitive in an international marketplace, it must promote, through mobility economic viability in the regions of our country.

The National Association of Regional Councils is one of twelve associations working together to develop a consensus for the future national highway and mass transportation program. In support of our involvement in the Transportation Alternatives Group, our association has an internal effort underway to develop this new framework.

Economic Development and Jobs

Rural Development

The Challenge

Economic opportunity continues to decline in many rural areas. These regions have not fully participated in the sustained national economic growth of the last eight years. But they are important in sustaining national economic growth through industries such as agriculture and energy, as well as providing a unique American quality of life.

The Issues

Getting the Federal Government to exercise a leadership role for a new National Rural Community Development program within current federal budget limits.

Forging Rural Community Development legislation to build a bottoms up approach for formulation of realistic state and substate regional strategies for rural development in a national and global economy.

What We Must Do

Agree to a practical legislative program, gain public, Congressional, and Administrative support for meaningful policies and funding.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

Federal leadership is indispensable if we are to cope with rural decline and stagnation. Recognizing limits on federal domestic spending, the program should provide adequate new funding and emphasize the efficient use of existing federal assistance for rural areas in need. The program must build on grass root commitment through pragmatic state and substate regional community development strategies. The Appalachian Regional Commission approach of joining state and local efforts through development districts (regional councils) for planning and coordination serves as a proven and effective process.

Economic Development and Jobs

Discussion

To remain viable and prosper, rural communities require:

- basic community infrastructure such as water and sewer facilities, housing and coordinated transportation facilities and services;
- a targeted public-private investment strategy for economic and community development;
- a financial safety net that enables communities to maintain their way of life or additional incentives to enhance those communities' economic viability; and,
- human services such as education, child and elder care, health care and education programs which stress job eligibility and community leadership.

A national rural community policy must be centered around two goals. The first is preserving and maintaining the rural community way of life. The second is enhancing economic stability and growth potential. Even though these goals are not mutually exclusive, achieving the first goal does not mean that every community may be able to achieve the second.

Programs to achieve the first goal would include a government safety net to ensure a basic level of services, i.e. maintaining basic community infrastructure, both physical and human service. Also needed is a leadership capacity building program that identifies potential leaders, brings them together, and develops their abilities. Enhancing these public private leadership abilities and coalitions is the best hope for communities to chart and achieve economic viability.

National policy should encourage the rural community way of life and enhance the potential for economic viability and development through a regional community focus built on partnerships of community leaders. Many communities face the prospect of maintaining a rural way of life that may or may not get any better, while other communities have the potential for stability and even significant economic gain, given the right opportunities. Local elected officials and community leaders may lack the expertise to assess what tools and opportunities are available. The role of the regional council in achieving this goal is that of broker, facilitator and planner in developing public/private partnerships that assemble grass roots resources and expertise.

Economic Development and Jobs

For rural communities to take advantage of economic opportunities—the second goal—they must be able to improve their existing physical and human service infrastructure, not simply maintain it. These communities also need technical assistance so that they can identify and pursue realistic economic development strategies in the community.

To achieve both goals, a regional community organization based on a modified Appalachian Regional Commission model makes sense and works. In the ARC model, a partnership exists between the state and its regional councils, the latter working with the state on development programs which leads to funding allocations for their substate regions.

Jobs And Work Force Readiness

The Challenge

To achieve federal policies which more realistically track regional labor markets and programs which coordinate job training for the permanent poor.

The Issues

On a regional community basis, jobs and training must be more effectively matched and jobs must have better linkage to housing and efficient use of transportation.

More attention and coordination of job preparation of the permanent poor.

What We Must Do

Search for legislative opportunities and changes in federal policies to deal with these issues.

Economic Development and Jobs

The Federal Role and Responsibilities

The existing Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) should be amended to better promote program coordination, through incentives, on a regional labor market basis.

Title III of JTPA is the most important source for assisting displaced workers but improvements can be made such as:

- Eligibility requirements should be expanded to include all displaced workers regardless of the cause of displacement.
- Local governments and their regional councils should identify, analyze, and address potential opportunities for displaced workers in the region.
- The JTPA should be amended to better target services to welfare youth and the permanent poor that have traditionally been the most difficult to employ or are seriously underpaid or underemployed.
- There should be the flexibility and resources in designing programs that match disadvantaged youth with employment opportunities. This should be emphasized in communities where jurisdictional lines separate opportunities and unemployed youth.
- The Summer Youth Employment Program should be flexible as a year round program or operate as a traditional summer youth program or both.

Discussion

After World War II, the location of jobs in a community was based on several factors including the availability of a labor pool to fill the requirements of a given industry. Thus, many industries located in urban areas where the labor pool was also located. The shift of the nation's economy from manufacturing to information and services with cheap suburban/rural land and transportation has had a tremendous impact upon the location that industries chose and where jobs are created within a metropolitan regional community.

High-technology and service industries do not have to be near rail spurs or

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ports to have access to their markets. In an age of inexpensive truck transportation and highly flexible telecommunications, being located in the central city or hub community is no longer a primary consideration. In some cities, crime, cost of services, and the high cost of rental space have led many businesses to locate in the suburbs where rents are cheaper and office parks serve as a more pleasant environment. George Sternlieb of the Center for Urban Research at Rutgers University states: "For better or for worse, America's job places are decentralizing at a rate that has no precedent in history. The real band of development in major metropolitan America is 30 to 50 miles out. This holds true in Chicago as much as it does in New York, and certainly, in Washington."

A major result of these shifts has been a serious labor shortage within regional communities. Shortages tend to appear in high-growth suburban areas while inner cities continue to be plagued with high unemployment. Thus while opportunities for employment may be increasing, in many cases hard-core jobless are left behind, not just in skills, but geography.

The problem is, how can existing employment and training programs in regional communities be improved to more effectively utilize the unemployed and underemployed in older urban areas while high growth suburban areas are experiencing labor shortages. Moreover, what can be done to better focus attention on the hard-core unemployed among youth in the central city.

Human Resources

Drug Control

The Challenge

Most Americans believe that substance abuse is the country's principal problem. The problem now pervades all economic levels of our society, and the crime it has produced is not restricted by geographical boundaries. Congress enacted major legislation last year to tackle this challenge while appropriating limited funds. This multifaceted problem requires a coordinated response from all sectors of society and from Washington to the neighborhood and family. Our national strategy must recognize and reflect this fact.

The Issue

How can regional councils be a coordinating force as a forum and catalyst for state and local drug prevention and enforcement programs that can most effectively use limited federal assistance?

What We Must Do

Seek the support of federal agencies in policies and techniques to gain regional cooperation and coordination in substance abuse activities.

Federal Role and Responsibility

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 provides for coordination of national drug policy through the appointment of a "Drug Czar" in the Office of the President. This legislation also establishes within this office a Bureau of State and Local Affairs to cooperate with NARC and the other associations representing local government. This is a place to focus efforts for federal leadership for interagency cooperation. Most importantly, the Congress must provide adequate appropriations to accomplish its mandates.

Discussion

Drug use permeates every level of our society, and engulfs urban, suburban and rural communities. The problem has no simple solution; it can be

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controlled but not wholly eradicated. Despite popular belief, it also cannot be effectively managed just through law enforcement. Reduction in demand is a more effective intervention. And this approach takes a comprehensive community-based effort. Prevention requires education as well as legal sanction. Rehabilitation requires coordinated intervention and treatment facilities. Recognizing the geographical mobility of the problem and the modest resources available, federal and state officials should encourage substate regional community approaches wherever practical.

Child Care

The Challenge

Children are America's future. We will maintain our competitive edge and leadership in the world economy if we assure the full potential of our children. Changes in lifestyles and family member roles have major implication for public education and the delivery of human services. Basic to the family is the rearing of children in terms of health, education and work force readiness. This ranges from job readiness to human services for teen age pregnancy, pre-natal care, Head Start educational opportunities, quality public education, and substance abuse prevention and/or treatment. Affordable child care is critical not only in child development but to the economic well being of disadvantaged families. Child care and other programs for children are key regional community concerns.

The Issues

At the national level, bring the Administration and Congress together to achieve a mutually acceptable federal program on child care. Current proposals differ on delivery system, i.e. tax credits versus a programmatic and regulatory approach.

What We Must Do

Assure in pending federal legislation that there are provisions encouraging and supporting organizations like regional councils in serving as the re-

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source and referral clearinghouse for the regional community as well as coordination among nonprofit and private sector agencies and business to provide child care information and referral services for employees.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

The federal government has an important role in providing child care opportunities, especially to those families and individuals that cannot afford such care. This can be accomplished by either direct federal support to each person or through a programmatic approach. A federal program should also consider the development of additional child care providers. Congress should enact child care legislation ensuring that regional councils, including those in interstate metropolitan areas, are eligible for designation and funding as resource and referral agencies and for training grants. Last year, a provision of this type was in both House and Senate legislation.

Discussion

Last year, progress was made toward passage of affordable, quality child care legislation. The new Administration and Congress should support legislation that will provide such assistance either through a tax credit or a direct block grant funding mechanism on a combination of both approaches. It also should encourage private-sector employer investment and partnership in the provision of child care.

Legislation last year also included in the state planning process the participation of local policy and elected officials to decide how child care funds will be used in their communities.

New child care legislation must also recognize the 37 interstate metropolitan areas which contain more one third of the U.S. population. These interstate areas function as one social and economic unit, notwithstanding state lines. Interstate metropolitan areas are also labor market areas and most jobs are filled by people who live in one jurisdiction and work in another. A structured program should reflect this fact by encouraging governors to recognize interstate metropolitan areas in designating resource and referral agencies and allocating state block grant funds.

Human Resources

Housing

The Challenge

Decent, safe, and sanitary housing and shelter is a basic human need. The bulk of housing for all income levels is provided by the private sector. But federal policy is necessary to encourage the preservation of existing low- and moderate-income housing stock and production of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income persons and families. Federal leadership is essential for the nation to meet its historic commitment to equal opportunity and access to housing for all citizens.

The Issue

Federal housing programs have been cut at a rate which is higher than spending reductions in other domestic programs. The affordable housing problem is critical, and resources must be increased with new program options which will secure adequate affordable housing.

What We Must Do

Urge Congress and the Administration to provide programs and resources for affordable housing in pending legislation. New federal housing programs must acknowledge that housing markets are regional, and program investments must respond to job location and efficient use of transportation.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

Congress should enact housing legislation that provides seed money through a federal block grant program to leverage private, state and local dollars to substantially rehabilitate or construct new low- and moderate-income housing where needed. This legislation also should include incentives for undertaking regional housing programs and reducing unnecessary housing regulation at the local level. Existing tax incentives to encourage private investment should be extended and expanded. To assist first-time home buyers, an individual's pension funds should be available for mortgage down-payments.

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Discussion

NARC supports the concept of a housing block grant program to replace the present categorical grant program. A block grant program should recognize that housing markets are metropolitan or regional in nature and a regional community mechanism provides the most equitable and cost-effective distribution of housing funds. Regional councils, with their strong analytical and administrative capabilities, should have a major role in assisting their local communities in allocating housing resources. This process should be included in a housing block grant program. Funding for the housing block grant program should be on a long-term and stable basis to facilitate investment and continuity.

The use of tax-exempt financing has helped many local governments increase the supply of affordable housing in their jurisdictions and finance rehabilitation efforts in downtown areas. However, NARC recommends that the funds obtained through such financing be used mainly to assist low- and moderate-income households. NARC also supports the extension of the federal tax exemption for state and local mortgage revenue bonds.

The Elderly

The Challenge

The reauthorization of the Older Americans Act in 1988 presents a number of challenges for regional councils and Areawide Agencies on Aging. There must be opportunity for innovation in programmatic terms in meeting all the needs of the elderly. Currently program flexibility is limited. Secondly, questions posed as to statute language on regional council designation should not be used to require a complete redesignation process of areawide agencies at the state level.

The Issue

Identify and communicate the longer-term needs and issues of the elderly as they impact local governments in regional communities.

Human Resources

What We Must Do

Work with federal and state agencies to keep a sound and flexible regional community approach to the needs of the growing elderly population while addressing longer-term issues of housing and health care.

Federal Role and Responsibilities

The Act's reauthorization firmly establishes the primary role of the federal government in meeting critical needs of elderly Americans. Funding levels and providing program flexibility are the dominant questions confronting the new Administration and state and Areawide Agencies on Aging.

Discussion

The loss of traditional family roles as informal dependent caregivers for older family members will continue to obscure the distinction between public and private responsibilities. Regional community concerns and strategies should guarantee that the needs of the elderly are considered in the planning of transportation, housing, health, nutrition, recreation, jobs, and community services. Solutions other than institutionalization should be sought to provide community-based services for the elderly that promote and/or accommodate independence with economic security. Regional councils should be the preferred organizations to be the Areawide Agency on Aging and should be eligible for federal and state funding for the planning and management of such programs. They should coordinate with area private sector institutions to provide elder care information and referral to employees.

Regional councils should not be required to go through a redesignation process to fulfill provisions in recent Amendments to the Act designed for program visibility from other programs administered by the regional council. The new Administration should clarify this situation.

The Regional Community: The Need for Partnerships

For more and more leaders, public and private, there is growing recognition that the arena for public and private decision-making is a regional community. This realization is based on the reality of business activity, the mobility of people and jobs, and the need for a geographic scale to assemble resources and take advantage of cost efficient technology. In today's world, people are mobile and seek opportunities where they can find them. This has resulted in residency and place of employment usually being in different cities or counties. The local community is subsumed within a larger family of neighboring communities - the region. These regions are the real communities because they are the economic marketplaces and social and cultural centers that lead America into the future.

The real community is not just Los Angeles, but Southern California; not Cook County, but a much larger Chicago metropolitan area; and not Boston, but eastern Massachusetts with portions of southern New Hampshire and Maine. We have become a nation of metropolitan and regional rural communities. Forty of them are in two or more states, and home to more than 25 percent of the nation's population. These regional communities can range in scale from the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area of five counties with more than 10 million people, to the Androscoggin Valley of Maine and its 200,000 residents in three counties, and the Texas panhandle with 25 counties and 400,000 citizens.

We do have a profusion of local communities which are organized as cities, counties, and towns. In fact, there are some 39,000 local governments, not including school districts and special service districts. Some have argued over the years that there are too many governments and we should encourage consolidation. But they miss the point, for this multiplicity and diversity of local communities is an embodiment of a cherished American principle and ethic: "local homerule."

Our challenge over the last two decades has been to build partnerships and programs which reflect these real regional communities. For, we know that economic activities (the business marketplace), and environmental systems (water and air and solid wastes), and even crime do not respect or conform to existing political boundaries. Human service and social equity needs require larger geographic solutions than a city or town can provide to meaningfully address affordable housing, employment, educational opportunities and adequate tax resources.

Regional Councils: A Beginning in Governance Partnerships

Partnerships for solving regional issues are not new. In the early 1960s, regional leaders and many states began organizing regional councils in metropolitan and rural areas. Most councils have continued and grown with governing bodies composed of elected officials from the neighboring cities and counties. These regional councils were and are voluntary with a mission to develop policies and coordinate their local governments' efforts to address issues in transportation, environmental quality, public safety, housing, economic and physical development, human resources, and joint provision of public services.

During the '60s the problems of metropolitan America and economically declining rural regions were more obvious and of crisis dimensions. Two national commissions – Douglas and Kerner – recognized, among other things, that many of the problems in urban America had to be addressed on a metropolitan basis if they were to be fairly and equitably ameliorated. There was a new resolve at the national level – to renew our declining urban and rural areas and encourage economic development. The hope was that economically vibrant communities would help the poor and disadvantaged.

Federal programs resulted from this commitment. Regional planning and coordination was required or encouraged in those programs where the best or only solution required crossing local boundaries, as is evident in transportation, environmental, and human service programs. In small urban and rural areas, a national public works investment program was provided for necessary infrastructure to encourage regional development. Programs in clean air, housing, and assistance to the elderly had regional provisions. Looking back, these programs may have been too narrowly focused, onerous to local and state government, poorly conceived, or lacking commitment. As the federal deficit worsened and the national economy improved generally, the perceived need, as well as federal government role in these programs, has changed. Many of these programs no longer exist, go unfunded, or are reduced in funding.

The reduction of federal programs and interest has not diminished regional approaches or the need for them. There are 450 councils in metropolitan and rural regions throughout most of the country. They are supported through the commitment of their participating local governments and the support of a number of states. In addition, there is private sector, foundation and civic interest. Critical federal programs continue which emphasize regional

Regional Councils: A Beginning in Governance Partnerships

approaches in highways and transit, rural economic development, clean air and water, and services for older Americans.

The governance systems and partnerships we have developed to manage these regional communities are a significant beginning. But these partnerships can be fragmented, ad hoc, have a single-issue focus, or unable to handle the tough volatile political decisions that need to be made and implemented. These issues involve economic and social distress and inequities, growing congestion, a deteriorating environment, and allocating services and resources.

Regional Partnerships: Future Roles That Must Be Played

As we move into the 1990s new and re-enforced regional partnerships are needed. This requires leadership and support not only at the local level but at the federal and state levels. It also demands new partners from the business, labor, independent, nonprofit and academic sectors. America will move ahead and be competitive if our regional community partnerships can meet crucial domestic issues and challenges playing these key roles:

- Advocate of the concept of the regional community as the arena for significant economic and governance issues.
- Engineer coalitions with key regional private/business/labor sectors and community/civic groups to address regional issues and needs.
- Identify and cultivate potential public and private leaders and as advocates and decision-makers for the regional community.
- Develop regional economic development strategies which emphasize capital formation, jobs, and technological innovation.
- Assemble the region's data base and analyze that data to forecast economic and demographic trends and changes.
- Planner/programmer/broker for transportation, water, wastes, housing, and land-use.
- Planner/partner/broker in human service needs and service delivery.
- Steward for the regional community by building and unifying the local government constituency.
- Furnish processes for conflict resolution of public-public or private-public regional issues.
- Broker state and local government approaches on regional issues and represent local government regional interests to the state.

Federal and state policies and programs should further refine and re-enforce these roles in our regional communities.

The National Association of Regional Councils

In 1967, with America developing a new regional perspective for solving its social and economic difficulties, the National Association of Regional Councils was established to foster city-county cooperation. More than 20 years later, NARC has grown into a full-service association whose continuing commitment is to provide its members with the best service and support to meet the ever-changing needs and challenges of regional governance. NARC promotes understanding of regional councils, represents its members in Washington with Congress and the federal government, provides technical assistance and educational services, and fosters the exchange of information through a variety of conferences and publications. This is accomplished with a staff of 12 and an annual budget of \$1.2 million.

Member regional councils are rural, suburban, and metropolitan with diversity in their programs and resources. Regional councils may be called councils of governments, regional planning commissions, development districts, metropolitan councils or a mix of these names. Their common ground is their purpose of enhancing the ability of local governments to meet multi-jurisdictional public needs, address regional issues, and help communities preserve public dollars.

NARC is organized into three activity centers:

- **The Center for Regional Action** provides NARC's liaison with Congress and the Administration regarding priorities and programs of interest to regional councils. It sponsors an annual Washington Policy Conference to involve members directly in the development of national policies.
- **The Center for Regional Council Assistance** is the membership service core of the association, with publications, a communications network, training, conferences, workshops, a resource library, and technical assistance. Three membership sections - Rural, Medium Metro, and Major Metro - are organized, each with its own staff resource person, to facilitate networking among councils of similar size and configuration.
- **The Center for the Future Regional Community** is establishing new lines of communication in the public and private sectors to explore trends and future directions that have implications on current regional issues, including demonstration and model projects.

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