

Can Government Be Reinvented?

"Reinventing Public Administration" by James Q. Wilson, in *PS: Political Science & Politics* (Dec. 1994), American Political Science Association, 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

"Reinventing" the executive branch of the federal government so that it "works better and costs less," as Vice President Al Gore's National Performance Review is supposed to do, is a very laudable goal, says political scientist Wilson, of



A skeptic's view of the Gore initiative to reorganize government.

the University of California, Los Angeles. Impractical, too, without getting rid of big government.

The Gore report, issued in 1993, would not do that. Although the vice president and his review staff regard the government's reliance on "large, top-down, centralized bureaucracies" as its "root problem," their solution is to make government more "entrepreneurial." They would retain almost all government programs and agencies, but "empower" government workers and "put customers first."

That is much easier said than done, Wilson observes. "The kind of sweeping cultural changes that are possible in some corporations are not possible in government agencies, precisely because they *are* government agencies. They are agencies invested with awesome powers of compulsion—to tax, regulate, inspect, arrest—and attractive powers of reward—to subsidize, purchase, and protect." And they are typically immune from competition. "To make them accountable, we enshroud them in a maze of laws, regulations, and court rulings; to keep

them responsive, we expose them to access by endless reporters, lawyers, committees, and investigators. The result, inevitably, is a culture of risk aversion that cannot readily be altered."

To truly empower government workers, they would have to be allowed—by interest groups, the news media, and congressional watchdogs—to make honest mistakes that get some people upset. "When a culture of forbearance and forgiveness descends on Washington," Wilson says, "please alert the FBI at once, for it will be evidence that somebody has kidnapped or anesthetized the entire legislative and judicial branches of government."

The prospects for putting "customers" first seem equally dim. "A 19-year-old high school dropout working at McDonald's will be prompt and courteous if the alternative is being fired," Wilson notes. The franchise manager will labor to see that employees measure up, if that means more money in his or her pockets. "But those conditions do not exist in the Postal Service or the IRS or the Social Security Administration. As a result, gains in customer satisfaction will have to be achieved

largely by means of exhortation." They are not likely to be large.

"When we and our elected representatives authorize the government to perform a task that once was performed in the private sector or not at all," Wilson says, "we are declaring, in effect, that we value some goal more highly than customer satisfaction or employee empowerment." The only way to really "reinvent" big government, he suspects, would be to dismantle it.

Toward a Passionate House

"A Madisonian Compromise" by James R. Stoner, Jr., in *Policy Review* (Winter 1995), The Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4999.

Conservatives seem to be of two minds about term limits, especially now that the Republicans have taken command of Congress. Enthusiasts argue that limiting lawmakers' terms would end

Back to the Future?

Contemplating the state of the Union from the other side of the Atlantic, novelist, essayist, liberal, and sometime political candidate Gore Vidal proposes, in *New Statesman & Society* (Jan. 6, 1995), a different sort of contract with America.

As the people get nothing much back from the money that they give the government—social security is not federal income—why not just eliminate federal income tax? How? Eliminate Washington, D.C. Allow the states and municipalities to keep what revenue they can raise. I know that tens, if not hundreds of thousands of lobbyist lawyers and hired media gurus will have a million objections. But let us pursue the notion.

Why not divide the country into several reasonably homogeneous sections, more or less on the Swiss cantonal system? Each region would tax its citizens and provide the services those citizens wanted, particularly education and health. Washington would then become a ceremonial capital with certain functions. We shall always need some sort of modest defense system, a common currency, and a Supreme Court to adjudicate between the regions, as well as to maintain the Bill of Rights—a novelty for the present court.

How to pay for what's left of Washington? Each region will make its own treaty with the central government and send what it feels should be spent on painting the White House, and on our common defense, which will, for lack of money, cease to be what it is now—all-out-offense on everyone on Earth. The result will be no money to waste either on pork or on those imperial pretensions that have left us \$4.7 trillion in debt. Wasteful, venal, tyrannous Washington will be no more than a federal theme park administered by Michael Eisner. . . .

People want to be rid of arbitrary capitals and faraway rulers: so let the people go. . . . But also, simultaneously, as we see in Europe, while this centrifugal force is at work—a rushing away from the center—there is also a centripetal one, a coming together of small polities in order to have better trade, defense, culture—so we are back, if by chance, to our original Articles of Confederation, a group of loosely confederated states rather than a United States, which has proved to be every bit as unwieldy and ultimately tyrannous as Jefferson warned. After all, to make so many of 'Many into One' you must use force, as we experienced in the Civil War. So let us make new arrangements to conform with new realities.

prevent the public from keeping good legislators indefinitely in office. Stoner, a political scientist at Louisiana State University, proposes a compromise: term limits for the House of Representatives but not the Senate.

This, he argues, would be in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution. The House, whose members face the voters every two years, was supposed to be the site of democratic ferment. In *The Federalist*, James Madison wrote that the House "should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with the people," since "it is essential to liberty that the government in general, should have a common interest with the people." That, Stoner says, is precisely the sentiment that has made term limits so popular today.

The Senate, he points out, was intended to be "a depository of experience and stability." Madison wrote that "such an institution may be sometimes necessary, as a defence to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions." For example, Stoner asks: Would the long U.S. commitment to the containment of communism have been maintained during "the heady days of détente in the 1970s, [if] the Senate had been purged by term limits of the Cold Warriors who remembered Stalin's and Khrushchev's threats?"

The original difference in the character of the two chambers was blurred by the 17th Amendment (1913). Senators thereafter were elected directly by the people instead of by state legislatures. Imposing term limits on the House but not the Senate, Stoner

political careerism and free citizen-legislators to act in the public interest; skeptics note that term limits were rejected by the Founding Fathers and would

thereafter were elected directly by the people instead of by state legislatures. Imposing term limits on the House but not the Senate, Stoner

argues, would restore "something of the original distinction" between the two bodies.

The Making of LBJ

"Lyndon Johnson's Victory in the 1948 Texas Senate Race: A Reappraisal" by Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Fall 1994), Academy of Political Science, 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115-1274.

"Landslide Lyndon" they called Lyndon Johnson, after he won a 1948 run-off Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate by only 87 votes out of 988,295. In explaining LBJ's razor-thin victory (tantamount to election since Texas was then a virtual one-party state), Robert A. Caro, author of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (1990), and other historians have focused on this remarkable occurrence in one precinct in the South Texas town of Alice: 202 Mexican-American voters, some of them dead or out of the county that election day, lined up in alphabetical order at the very last minute to cast their ballots overwhelmingly for Johnson. Caro and others see that as part of a pattern of deceit that runs through LBJ's long political career. The Alice vote was indeed a mite suspicious, note Baum and Hailey, a historian and graduate student, respectively, at Texas A&M University. Nevertheless, they contend, fraud was not the chief reason for the future president's narrow victory.

In the July primary that preceded the runoff, former governor Coke Stevenson, a West Texas rancher, got 40 percent of the vote to Johnson's 34 percent, while George E. B. Peddy, a decorated

World War II hero, got 20 percent. Peddy was a conservative and it was thought that his supporters would flock to fellow conservative Stevenson rather than to the more liberal Johnson. LBJ moved right, but, according to an analysis of the voting returns by Baum and Hailey, got little more than one-fifth of the Peddy voters. Nor did he make any significant inroads among Stevenson's original voters. LBJ did do extremely well at attracting new voters and those who had supported minor candidates. But that was not enough to offset the advantage Stevenson had with Peddy voters.

How then did Johnson win? The answer, according to the authors: he did an extraordinary job of getting almost all of his July supporters to turn out and vote for him again in August, while Stevenson abysmally failed to do likewise. An estimated 113,523 Texans who cast ballots for Stevenson in July stayed home in August, whereas only 4,054 LBJ voters did not return to the polls. In two West Texas counties—Hansford and Kinney—Stevenson's local supporters, believing their votes would not add significantly to his statewide margin of victory, complacently decided not even to hold run-off elections. By Baum and Hailey's calculations, their votes alone could have made all the difference for Stevenson.

Despite the "many thousands" of votes that Robert Caro believes were stolen for Johnson (and, it should be noted, numerous votes may also have been stolen for Stevenson), the authors say that if "Calculatin' Coke" had gotten just eight out of every 10 of his July supporters to cast ballots for him again in August, Lyndon Johnson would have had a very different political career.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Ethnic Equations

"Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System" by Ted Robert Gurr, in *International Studies Quarterly* (Sept. 1994), Dept. of Political Science, Ohio State Univ., 154 North Oval Mall, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

Civil wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Azerbaijan; genocidal massacres in Burundi; clan fighting

in Somalia. . . . Since the Cold War ended, there seems to have been a veritable explosion of bloody ethnic conflicts around the world. But appearances deceive, says Gurr, a political scientist at the University of Maryland.

"Ethnopolitical conflicts were relatively common, and increased steadily, throughout the Cold War," he reports. The greatest in-