

the U.S. General Accounting Office.

Block grants provide each state a fixed sum for a broadly defined purpose, and considerable latitude in how to spend it. (The more widely used categorical grants spell out in detail what states must do with the money.) Although they accounted for only about 16 percent of the \$213 billion in federal grants in fiscal year 1995, block grants have been an intermittently popular way of addressing national problems. In 1974, for instance, in response to the perceived failure of urban renewal programs, Congress created the Community Development Block Grant program. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan eliminated almost one in five categorical grants in areas such as public health and certain social services, setting up block grants instead.

"The record shows that states have often maintained a basic continuity in the delivery of block-granted services," Posner and Wrightson observe. Surprisingly, after recovering from the recession of the early '80s, states even used their own funds to make up for federal cuts in long-standing state programs in health and social services.

Yet on some 58 occasions between 1983 and 1991, Congress added new categorical provisions or restrictions to the block grants.

Congress also cut funding even as it provided new categorical grants in the same areas. Why? Members of Congress are able to claim credit for new categorical grants, the authors say, whereas most credit for implementing block grants goes to state and local officials. Also, many interest groups are stronger in Washington than in state capitals, and they like "targeted" grants.

But given the continuing pressure to cut federal spending, block grants are likely to retain their appeal, particularly for open-ended entitlement programs. The federal government can cap spending and shift the painful choices to the states, while the states, in turn, can blame the feds for forcing them to make those choices.

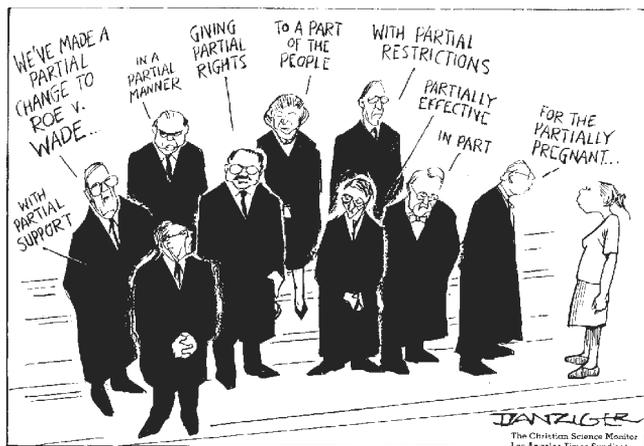
Many observers fear that states will not perform as well with block grants for entitlement programs such as welfare as they did with the block grants initiated in the early 1980s—that they will engage in "a race to the bottom" on benefits. But even if the states do a good job, the authors conclude, unless Congress and interest groups take federalism more to heart, history suggests that in the long run the states could well find themselves faced with reduced federal funding and "creeping requirements."

Conservatives on the Edge

"The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics," a symposium in *First Things* (Nov. 1996), and "The End of Democracy? A Discussion Continued," in *First Things* (Jan. 1997), 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 400, New York, N.Y. 10010.

"Articles on 'judicial arrogance' and the 'judicial usurpation of power' are not new," Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest

who is editor in chief of *First Things*, and his fellow editors note in introducing a symposium that "addresses those questions,



A 1993 cartoon points up the endless problems that *Roe v. Wade* has caused the U.S. Supreme Court.

often in fresh ways, but also moves beyond them." This move beyond, particularly by the editors themselves, has prompted outraged resignations from the journal's editorial board, worried considerations of conservatism's "anti-American temptation," and ill-informed talk of "a full-fledged war" between "necons" and "theocons."

Federal court rulings in such charged matters as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and assisted

An Honorable Calling?

There is no doubt that public respect for American political leaders and institutions has reached new lows in recent years. Yet an article by Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute in the *Public Perspective* (Feb.–March 1997) offers some reminders that Americans have long had a limited enthusiasm for politics. At right, for example, are the responses to an opinion-survey question the Gallup Organization has been asking since 1945. (In 1991, Gallup also began asking the same question about choices people would make for their daughters, yielding essentially the same results.)

“If you had a son, would you like to see him go into politics as a life’s work?”

	Yes	No
1945	21	68
1953	20	70
1955	26	60
1962	23	69
1965	36	54
1973	23	64
1991	24	72
1993	22	70
1994	25	71
1995	32	63

suicide add up to “an entrenched pattern of government by judges that is nothing less than the usurpation of politics,” the *First Things* editors assert. “The question here explored, in full awareness of its far-reaching consequences, is whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime.” They continue: “the question that is the title of this symposium is in no way hyperbolic. The subject before us is the end of democracy.”

But that, the journal’s editors say, is not the only subject: “Law, as it is presently made by the judiciary, has declared its independence from morality. Indeed . . . morality—especially traditional morality, and most especially morality associated with religion—has been declared legally suspect and a threat to the public order. . . . America is not and, please God, will never become Nazi Germany, but it is only blind hubris that denies it can happen here and, in peculiarly American ways, may be happening here. . . . Some of our authors examine possible responses to laws that cannot be obeyed by conscientious citizens—ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution.”

None of the *First Things* writers—who include former judge Robert H. Bork and evangelist Charles W. Colson, as well as professors Russell Hittinger of the University of Tulsa, Hadley Arkes of Amherst College, and Robert P. George of Princeton University—call for revolution, though Colson (of Watergate fame) toys with it. (“We dare not at present despair of America and advocate open rebellion.”)

Responding to the editors along with many others in a later issue of *First Things*, noted conservative author Midge Dector writes that she “could hardly believe my eyes” to encounter the talk of the legitimacy of the United States government, civil disobedience, “and even, for God’s sake, ‘morally justified revolution!’”

It is true, she says, that the courts have usurped power and reached “extraconstitutional and illegitimate decisions.” But the real problem, in her view, is a culture that has lost its moral bearings. “It used to be said of the court that its decisions followed election results. But even in these less than attractive times nothing quite so cynical is the case: what the court actually follows is the *culture*.” Recklessly questioning the legitimacy of the government, she and others suggest, only serves to discredit conservative efforts to change the culture.