

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

STATEMENT OF

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ON BEHALF OF  
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES  
AND  
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

BEFORE THE  
REPUBLICAN CONVENTION COMMITTEE ON RESOLUTIONS (PLATFORM)

LA RONDE ROOM  
FONTAINEBLEAU HOTEL  
MIAMI BEACH

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There is a need for the Federal government and the Republican party to recognize the importance of urban life to the vitality of our nation and the fact that local government is the best instrument of response to urban needs. Americans today look to their local government to cope with the problems of city living. The strength of local government is essential to the strength of the nation. We must fortify the confidence of the American people in government, and the best place to start is local government.

Cities have the capability but not the financial capacity to respond to the urban crisis. We need help from other levels of government and the nation as a whole. The problems of the cities stretch with frightening repetition from border to border, and a national commitment is required for their solution. The Federal government must be a responsive and responsible partner to state and local government.

Cities need help in the form of general fiscal and management support. Recognition of these needs must be reflected by the platform of the Republican party.

The most fundamental problem is the growing gap between revenues and expenditures. The cost of providing necessary and expected services to urban populations is increasing much faster than the revenues from sources normally available to local governments. This revenue gap results from a basic flaw in the tax

structure and revenue distribution system operating between levels of government. Most local governments are tied to static revenue sources that are not responsive to the movement of the economy. Many communities, prevented by archaic state laws and constitutions from tapping progressive revenue sources, must look to a federal solution.

If the Federal system is going to survive, we must apply a substantial share of national resources to the local level where the problems are. Local officials are in the best position to solve local problems, and it is obvious to me as an elected city official that the people demand and expect solutions to their problems from their local governments first.

The general revenue sharing bill now before Congress is the beginning of reform in the revenue distribution system. We ask the Republican party to indicate strong support for general revenue sharing, not as a short-term, stopgap measure but as a permanent feature of the distribution system. We do not seek a finger in the dike; we seek to rebuild the partnership of Federal, state and local government.

At the same time, we ask you to think of revenue sharing as a supplement to, not a substitute for, categorical grant programs. And we ask you to strengthen the categorical programs to make them more effective. General revenue sharing is designed to put new timbers under the sagging floor of general local government. We need funds unrestricted, to help us carry on the traditional -

but most vital - business of local services.

What is needed in the Republican platform is not only the expansion of categorical grant programs but greater emphasis on the block grant approach which allows for local differences within a problem area and for long term planning of solutions.

There is a need to cut away much of the red tape in favor of local decision making. Such safeguards as a careful post audit - to see how well we did - should be substituted for too narrow guidelines and criteria that often put a project in a straight jacket before it has a chance to get into action.

Our second big concern within intergovernmental priorities is the need for support for management efforts. That's our way of saying we need not only financial support, but updated authority to do the job and better operational cooperation from higher levels of government. Your platform must support local planning, policy-making and effective leadership. Efforts in this direction such as President Nixon's Federal Assistance Revenue Program, should be continued. Federal planning and operational activities must be keyed to the plans and strategies of local government to avoid undercutting local government processes. Citizen involvement in federal programs must be improved and expanded but at the same time, it must be channeled through local government where it can impact directly on the decisions of locally elected officials. If it is circuited through Washington, and back to us, the end result can be nothing but chaos and resentment.

Let me underline one thing. The plight of the great cities is not retribution for some past sin. It is the result of a new lifestyle and aspirations. The people of America - many of them now trying for the first foothold on the ladder of economic success - have brought their problems to our doorstep. But, at the same time, much of the economic base that once supported the central cities has moved out of reach. Too many have left town.

Local government has the ability to deal with the problems of the people - on the spot - where the job can be done the most efficient and satisfactory way. But we need the tools. The broad and efficient taxing capacity of the Federal government must be used so the great wealth of America can be effectively harnessed to solve the problems of the people of America. That's what revenue sharing and block grants are all about.

Cities are the government closest to the people and are most sensitive to their problems. We ask for a Republican platform that reaffirms your trust in local government and gives us the tools to make it work.

The problems are on our doorstep. They won't go away. We must let them in and we must have solutions. If we do not, there will be hard consequences. Local government is the foundation of the American governmental structure. If the foundation is weakened it doesn't matter what color you paint your house.