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Returning to Our First Works

Should the clock be moved forward or back to make America great—again?

“When the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.”

--Thomas Jefferson

What can we add to the voluminous national dialogue concerning the unexpected election of Donald J. Trump to become the 45th President of the United States? Nothing—except perhaps to affirm that we believe “prayer changes things!” But, prayer notwithstanding, it’s very encouraging to see that so many still believe that America can become great again!

To some, America’s greatest era hearkens back to a time when families gathered around their RCA consoles to hear reassuring updates from their Depression and War-era president. To others, great undertakings were evidenced when Eisenhower initiated America’s ambitious nationwide interstate transportation system, forever changing domestic travel and commerce. For boomers, America’s space program comes to mind and JFK’s commitment to put a man on the moon by decade’s end.

Still others proudly remember the exciting Presidential Inauguration in 1981 when Iran’s Ayatollah blinked only moments before Ronald Reagan said “So help me God.” And, when the President called out before the world, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Certainly, these and many more milestones contributed to what is now called *The American Century*.

But, if we are left to conjecture about Donald Trump’s sometimes detailed-challenged endgame for America to become great again, at least we’re not in the dark concerning his start-point.

Behind closed doors in New York City’s upper Manhattan District, the surprise President-elect is conducting up-to-ten exhaustive interviews a day with prospective Executive branch appointees. Mr. Trump well understands that the vision he has cast for America, is essentially “without form and void,” apart from skilled, tested, and proven manager-leaders. And, from what we have witnessed in the past two-weeks, Trump’s early appointments give us reason to be optimistic.

The Executive branch is the uncontested government Goliath in terms of manpower. It employs 97.6 percent of America’s 2.6 million civilian federal employees. At the tip of the spear, is the President, Vice President and 15 federal department heads—or cabinet officials. Corporately, they are overseers in the areas of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Amazingly, the number of civilians working for the President has remained relatively static for more than a generation, while the U.S. population has nearly doubled. John F. Kennedy, for instance, also employed 2-plus million civilians out-of-a national population pool of 186 million people—or 13.3 hires per 1,000 population. With America’s population now close to 323 million, President Obama appears to be a relatively efficient administrator at 8-plus employees per 1,000 citizens.

No doubt technology has whittled away many jobs such as file clerks, stenographers, mail-room staff, and couriers, etc., which were necessary entry-level positions once held by more than a few of our readers. (Also gone are *Underwood* typewriters and six-layers of carbon paper).

This to say, that reducing the number of federal employees may not necessarily rise to the top of Donald Trump's list. But, we do hope the new administration will consider the ever-expanding reach of those two-million bureaucrats. Especially considering that our founders intended their powers to be limited, enumerated, and inferior to that of the "several states."

Some years ago, Joseph Sobran, writing for *The Schwarz Report*,¹ argued that we live in post-Constitutional America. Although everyone professes to respect it, he thinks the Constitution serves the same function as the British royal family: It offers a comforting symbol of tradition and continuity but poses no serious threat to our form of government.

Sobran lamented that our constitutional illiteracy cuts us off from our own national heritage. He said, "One of the great goals of education is to initiate the young into the conversation of their ancestors; to enable them to understand the language of that conversation, in all its subtlety, and maybe even, in their maturity, to add to it some wisdom of their own." ^{Ibid}

The writer is convinced that the modern American educational system no longer teaches us the political language of our ancestors. "In fact," he argues, "our schooling helps widen the gulf of time between our ancestors and ourselves, because much of what we are taught in the name of civics, political science, or American history is really modern liberal propaganda... Our ancestral voices have come to sound alien to us, and therefore our own moral and political language is impoverished. It's as if the people of England could no longer understand Shakespeare, or Germans couldn't comprehend Mozart and Beethoven." ^{Ibid}

Although most people believe that the Constitution was the instrument by which the American people granted, or delegated, specific powers to the federal government, many are less clear in their understanding that any power not delegated was withheld, or reserved. Yet, foreigners in earlier times understood and even marveled at the unique workings of our "federalism." In 1836, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote to his countrymen that "the government of the states remained the rule, and that of the federal government the exception." ²

Unfortunately, the tables have turned.

Arguably, our founders would be horrified that the federal government now routinely assumes thousands of powers—powers never granted, never delegated, never enumerated. Not that the framers expected the Constitution to remain frozen in time or that they failed to provide a mechanism for change when needed. Indeed, new powers have been granted to the federal government since 1790, but remarkably, only 17 times. The rest have been "assumed," including a record-shattering 81,640 pages of new regulations (this year alone) that President Obama has implemented by Federal Register fiat. Such sweeping and non-enumerated assignments should be considered a gross usurpation of power.

While we have high hopes for the Trump administration to get America back on the rails, there is only so much Team Trump can do. But consider this: At one time, the Church was the center of gravity in each community. Besides weekend worship, church facilities also served as the local school house and town hall.

The Word directs us to do three specific things when we find ourselves in a mess like we're in: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works... (Rev 2:5). Your thoughts?

Rick Forcier

¹ Sobran, Joseph, God, Man and Law, *The Schwarz Report*, Vol. 45, August 2005

² de Tocqueville, Alexis, Democracy in America, Harper & Row, 1966