



A 10th amendment party

Insight Kansas

By H. Edward Flentje

In his 1996 bid for the presidency, former Kansas Senator Bob Dole rallied voters to give meaning to the tenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which says simply: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Voters declined then, but Dole may have been ahead of his time. The political landscape has shifted, and emerging forces are creating an opening for change in party alignments.

These forces include an energized Tea Party movement, with its diffuse and confused agenda, but one mostly motivated by anger at intrusive government. Advocates of "constitutional government" are calling for a return to the original meaning of the U.S. Constitution, primarily a national government dramatically more restrained in taxing, spending, and borrowing.

The line between state and national governments is in contention on a number of fronts. State and national authorities are arguing in federal courts over who should be in charge of immigration enforcement, marijuana sales, health insurance, same-sex marriage, environmental regulation, and gun control, among other issues.

Our Kansas-grown Koch brothers are shaping political thinking by jump starting and financing an array of organizations and individuals, such as the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, Freedom Works, state-based think tanks, and university-based academics, dedicated to free markets and limited government.

Public skepticism of overreaching by the national government on bailouts, stimulus funding, mandatory health insurance, and expansive financial regulation, among other matters, is peaking.

This volatile political climate has created the opportunity for a political party that champions self-government through individual freedom and responsibility. Governmentally, a tenth amendment agenda would call for dramatic reduction in the scope of the national action and vitality in governance at state and local levels.

Imagine a national political party that gives real meaning to the language of the tenth amendment by demanding:

· reduced national spending and downsized national bureaucracies accomplished by shedding many of the hundreds of grant-in-aid programs that have grown up over decades, programs in which state and local winners are chosen by officials isolated in the nation's capitol;

· zero tolerance for congressional earmarks or any national action designed for the sole benefit of a single community, state, or even region of the country;

· lower national tax rates achieved by eliminating the gift bag of special tax deals written into the 3,600-page tax code;

· a constitutional amendment granting the power of line-item veto to the president with the commitment that candidates nominated for the office exercise this power to stop special spending and taxing

deals without national benefit; and

• political change initiated by leadership in the fifty states, thousands of local jurisdictions, and tens of thousands of community-based organizations.

Fantasy? Maybe so. The last political party aligned along these lines was the Democratic Party, whose founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, vigorously exercised presidential powers to restrain the national government and laid a foundation for U.S. governance during most of the 19th century. Ronald Reagan made moves in this direction, but reform in time waned.

Implementing a tenth amendment agenda at the start of the 21st century is not unimaginable but would require a degree of discipline not seen for most of the last century. Discipline in restraining the scope of national action. Discipline in resisting pleas from local as well as business constituents for special deals of narrow interest. Discipline in fending off a dominant national media that instinctively urges a quick fix at most every turn. Most importantly, voters will have to abandon a well-ingrained mentality that government should step in to solve every personal, community, or state dilemma.

The opportunity for a 10th amendment party today most likely falls to the Republican Party and its leaders. Whether they rise to the occasion may become visible in the upcoming campaigns but in reality will unfold over many congressional and presidential terms ahead.

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