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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

**PRESENTATION OF
Mr. Christopher Gates, CEO/President
National League of Cities
January 7, 1998**

Topic: Evaluation of Local Governance Structure in the 21st Century

Commissioner Abel recognized Mr. Mark Pisano of SCAG and a Board Member of the National League of Cities, and Mr. Christopher Gates, CEO/President, National League of Cities. Commissioner Crowley introduced both individuals, noting that the topic of Mr. Gates would be an Evaluation of Local Government Structure in the 21st Century.

Mr. Christopher Gates presented an overview of the history of the National League of Cities which was evolved from the National Municipal League that was created in 1894. At that time local government was a mess. Government had become separated from citizens so that government had to be restructured to meet their needs. In 1910 they came to the conclusion that the Council/Manager Form of local government made the most sense. Prior to that time local government was of the Strong Mayor Type.

The premise of the Council/Manager Form of local government was that there is a hard and fast line dividing political process of policy making from the professional administrative policy of implementing that policy. The role of the professional manager was to seek efficiency and effectiveness in government. This line between policy and implementation is being blurred with both becoming involved in the other's aspects.

In addition to efficiency and effectiveness, a third "E" is being added to the role of the professional manager - equity. The new local government manager must now consider the political influences on his/her role in government - building relationships and constituencies. The real issue of interest is having citizens become empowered at the local level. They have as much information as anyone else and will not defer to anyone and want their voices to be heard. Citizens are now unwilling to give up their proxies. The question now becomes what is the relationship between the elected officials, the appointed managers and the citizens of the community. Any form of government in the future has to take that into account.

Regionalism has become a hot topic in the process of having government figure out how to do its job differently. In the 1970s the answer was to consolidate local government. In one case, with the consolidation proposal for Marion County, IN and Indianapolis, IN, it could not be considered until three items had to be removed from the consolidation discussion; police, fire, and schools. For most jurisdictions consolidation is no longer the answer. Objections to consolidation come from general views of risk aversion, cynicism, and suspicion. The public often questions the motives of the people that propose consolidation. The primary goal is how to retain local autonomy while interacting on broader regional fields.

The key to success is a balance where the elected officials are responsive to both constituent & appointed officials, professional government managers to run governments, and the need to have citizens maintain a

direct voice, to participate, and to control their proxy. The public now views government radically different from those who are directly involved. Government is now viewed as a special interest group. The public perception of "leaders" is now that their motives are self-serving, there is a pervasive element of suspicion of ulterior motives.

The media attitude is becoming increasingly negative. They are developing the viewpoint in that if the media can find no wrong-doing, it's not that wrong-doing doesn't exist, but that the media isn't looking hard enough. Citizens are unwilling to defer to their elected officials. Government is not viewed as the collective US, but rather as THEY, a special interest group. We will have to balance the constituency perspective of elected officials with the professional service delivery perspective of professional managers.

The issue of regionalism also has a racial component. In most cases the reason why most people do not want to consolidate their governments is that they do not want to through their lot in with them, or them, or them. Although people want to have local autonomy, they have to appreciate that the programs from other levels of government will not usually give any consideration to jurisdictional lines. We will have to come up with regional responses and regional solutions. Those solutions may result in such organizations as joint planning agreements, regional service authorities, and/or joint equipment purchases.

A positive example of governmental consolidation is demonstrated by the cities of Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona. These cities have agreements to shared fire services and facilities, which results in reduced cost and increased efficiency. This concept has been expanded to include shared purchasing and shared training facilities. They have also taken action to insure that the equipment and procedures used by the police & fire departments are compatible. This facilitates assisted response. Neither city gave up any autonomy, but both have been able to achieve significant savings.

The Community Charter Concept provides a broader framework for further discussions of the regionalism issue. Currently, governments consider solutions on an ad hoc basis, but unfortunately these ad hoc solutions rarely get folded into a regional framework. The Community Charter provides a vehicle for getting these ad hoc solutions into a regional framework and meet the needs of those constituencies that are at the table.

At this point Commissioner Abel discussed the efforts of the Commission in the field of state/local government restructuring, both the fiscal structure and the Commission's proposal for a Metropolitan Community Charter Commission. Mr. Gates responding to Commissioner Abel's comments stated that the fiscal issue is an empty debate, in that local government has been left out of the debate. At the local level it is very frustrating because to block Federal dollars and give it to governors is an empty reform or even a step backwards. In some states, this difficulty is most dramatically demonstrated, not at local levels, but in state capitals. Local governments feel victimized by unfunded mandates. Even though there are no real solution on the horizon, local governments feel that the Federal government has to become more comfortable with giving grants directly to municipalities.

On the issue of the metropolitan charter, although there are conversations in Texas and California, there is little or no discussion in other places. These areas are still caught up in other debates. The National League of Cities is interested in working with anybody who wants to put that model forward to advance the concept.

Mr. Mark Pisano in his capacity as a director of the National League of Cities commented on how the League had for 100 years had concentrated on the issues of governmental structure. In the last five to six years the focus has been on how citizens are engaged within their community. The League is now coming to a point that recognizes an intersection of the two issues. An educational understanding role is the next step for government. Polls show that government is not well respected by its citizens. The further away a citizen is from government the less favorable their opinion.

How government participates in the education process is becoming the most difficult of all challenges. The question is how to develop an understanding of how government is accomplishing something. The National Performance Review has suggested that the Federal Government should be discussing outcomes and how expenditures relate to those outcomes. From this comes the concept of benchmarking and assessment. This is becoming part of the dialog within government. The debate in the public should revolve around outcomes.

Mr. Pisano felt that this is the area in which we come to resolution of these issues.

Mr. Pisano also felt that it is increasing difficult to come to grips with structures of government because the public doesn't understand them. With this lack of understanding they are reluctant to take action to reform. The concept of the Community Charter was that the budget should be structured around outcomes. This approach can be accomplished administratively. Relating outcomes to what people want will become the basis for how we change government.

Commissioner Petak stated that the speakers were sounding almost as cynical as the public appears to be. He went on to state that he also agreed that the educational side was critical to any success of this initiative. Commissioner Crowley commented that constituencies vary with the subject. It is not necessarily geographic, it could be education, transportation, religion, etc. Commissioner Lucente commented that on the surface cynicism of government does exist, but his experience has indicated that people are willing to defer to government to make decisions that need to be made. If they will generally be satisfied with that decision and continue to vote. The willingness to become in government is not generally not there. Mr. Gates responded that turnout for local government elections is on a general decline. People come out if they are not happy, otherwise they have a hands off attitude. Commissioner Lucente had a question on the impact to the professional civil service on outsourcing of services. Mr. Gates responded that local government has been professionalized. Professional delivery of service is a better way to go. Professional positions are becoming essential. Commissioner Fuhrman commented that this professionalism was set in the civil service structure. Mr. Gates responded that the question is open to debate as people try to understand what that means. Innovate solutions are being considered. Commissioner Fuhrman commented that pay for performance seems to be contradictory to a civil service structure. Mr. Pisano commented that outcomes provide the basis for determining what needs to be done by government. Commissioner Abel asked how the speakers want to move people beyond where they are now on the topic of restructuring. Mr. Gates responded that conversations on this topic are unproductive if they are ruled by recrimination and emotion. Don't discuss the structure of government if people are mad at the mayor or the city manager. Take a step back and have a community dialog on the issues. The debate should be on different models of government and on finding ways to have a meaningful dialog. Commissioner Petak questioned whether the speaker was promoting a ward system of local government. Mr. Gates states that the best systems of government within the country seem to be mixed systems, some elected by district and some elected at large.

Mr. Pisano asked the Commissioners what they saw as the next steps in the arena of government restructuring. Commissioner Abel stated that the Commission is currently engaged in the process with the County to develop positions. Mr. Pisano stated that the National League of Cities wants to become involved in discussions on changes in how government operates, with structure being a part of that. The League would like to help the Commission in these efforts.

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