



County of Hamilton

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Bigger Government and More of It
By Dusty Rhodes, Hamilton County Auditor

In the over four decades that I have had the honor of public service I have never once had a citizen say to me, "Dusty, what we really need is bigger government and more of it". Yet that is exactly what is being offered once again in the Enquirer editorial "Fixing a Dysfunctional Region" (December 7, 2014).

Disguised as a plea for "regional cooperation", "collaboration" and "working together" it's the same old story. Numerous attempts over the years to foist a new world order on our county, cities, villages and townships have failed. A rational person might assume that "nothing ever changes" because (a) people don't want it and (b) we don't need it.

Contrary to the false alarms local government structure here is not in crisis. Changing it seems to be the fervent dream of a small group of self-appointed and unelected activists. Their latest propaganda campaign calls us "dysfunctional". Says who? Our area is equal to and often ahead of most in economic terms as well as the more subjective quality of life indicators including higher education, cultural opportunities and availability of quality medical care.

In spite of extreme reductions in historic and promised state support our local communities and our county continue to "function" quite well, thank you. Just because a government structure is different and conforms to some private enterprise model or some community activist's preference does not mean it is better.

The only possible "dysfunction" may appear when we are compared to corporations in the private sector. Such comparisons fail to recognize the differences between the corporate world and a democratic government. Yet even in the private sector large conglomerates were found to be less than efficient. If efficiency is the prime goal the ultimate solution is a dictatorship.

Strangely missing from possible "benchmarks" to fairly evaluate the differences between our area and the larger, more remote metropolitan governments is detail on local spending, taxes, government employees and voter participation. They tell us their big ideas will save money but never say how. For example, the latest study claims - with no documentation - that Cuyahoga and Summit counties "saved money" by switching to a "county executive" form of government.

Cuyahoga's grand experiment came as a quick fix response to a County Commissioner and County Auditor being sent to prison for corruption. Now they have a County Executive handpicking

officials that used to be controlled by the voters. This year it was revealed that County Executive had driven for over a decade without a driver's license. So much for "reform" and "good government".

We are supposed to be dazzled by the claim that Louisville merged with Jefferson County and "moved from 65th largest city in the country to 16th". But the measure that matters is the Census Bureau's list of Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Our area is 28th and Louisville is 43rd. Boosters of such a "city-county merger" here persist in ignoring that "the city" and "the county" in Ohio are two different governments with different authority, duties, and responsibilities under state law.

When all else fails they resort to derogatory words and phrases like "horse and buggy government". That is supposed to upset everyone because Ohio's local government structures date back to the 1850s. By those standards we should toss out the Constitution and the Bill of Rights because they predate us by sixty or seventy years.

Their dream is to take away the voters right to elect local officials and dilute the power of the ballot box. They know what is best for us even if we don't. Instead of trying to promote something in which we have no interest, no need and will not support, I suggest these folks might busy themselves on some projects which we might welcome.

Here are a few suggestions: a full report on area non-profits, how much they receive from government funds and how much they spend for administration; a review of how well local "economic development" efforts and taxpayer expenditures have worked out; and an investigation of property tax abatements handed out to commercial and residential properties by the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County and other communities.

Or they can continue to waste their time by trying to sell us bigger government and more of it. It should be an easy choice for smart people.

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