

By the people

Donald N. Anderson, PhD

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“By the people” or “To the people”?

As shown by polls of Americans in recent years, respect for and confidence in our federal government's quality and utility has eroded. Unlike the “us” and “them” relations between ruled and rulers present in most European societies, Americans have often felt that our government is truly working in our interest and we were truly citizens and not subjects of our great Republic.

This feeling of participation and the accompanying loyalty to our Republic weakened as the federal government became more complex and pervasive. Rather than confining itself primarily to defense and protecting our natural rights, it has intruded in many new areas. Funds spent on local needs are not always obtained locally, so a disconnect between taxation and spending occurs.

People use political power to grab other people's money rather than use their own. Now people must lobby, write grants and petitions to get federal funds to address local needs. The federal government has become every state and local government's “sugar daddy.” This tends to disconnect some people dependent on federal funds from responsibility to the local taxpayers. It is no wonder that many now view the federal government as a permanent occupying power, intrusive, dangerous, and making a poor match to local needs.

The federal government has regulated more and more aspects of our lives – the capacity of our toilets – the flow of our showers – the type of light bulbs we should buy. It bankrupted hospitals by forcing them to provide unpaid service, even to illegals, and promised seniors medical care, but then underpaid sufficiently that many couldn't get that care. As it tried to do away with personal responsibility as a criteria for credit, it drained respect and support for its activities.

The EPA rules that it can regulate a vital plant food – CO₂ – in spite of its own scientists' warning that it poses no danger. The FDA discusses regulation of an ingredient used in 100 over-the-counter cough medicines. If this ingredient is brought under regulation, expensive prescriptions would be needed to use these currently over-the-counter medicines. Federal bureaucrats are permitted to fine airlines up to \$27,500 per passenger for delayed flights. Airlines cancel flights rather than face these fines.

We now have a law that would force an employer to buy health insurance for its employees or pay a fine. The current administration still pushes cap-and-trade legislation, which may cause a \$3 trillion dollar loss to the economy, a major loss of jobs and further transfer of jobs to foreign countries.

This is a tiny sample of the many activities by the federal government, the effect of which will impoverish American citizens. Is it any wonder that many Americans feel their government has become their worst enemy?

Private business consumers are normally faced with cheerful folk who go out of their way to be helpful. When we have to deal with government, we often observe a very different attitude. A significant part of the less helpful attitude because the government worker is not dependant on your 'business' for his income. Another portion of a bureaucrat's attitude may be a result of unfamiliarity with a privately employed person's goals and problems. He may never have experienced the challenges people outside the government sphere face.¹

In previous columns I suggested ways to reconnect our elected representatives with their fellow citizens. Now it is time to suggest a way to connect federal employees more closely to the citizens they serve.

Is this a government by the people or one dictating to the people?

Employment limits for civilian federal employees?

With term-limits for our elected Congressional representatives, their long-term staff, because of greater governmental experience, could dominate legislative proceedings. It may be possible to limit this effect if staff are required to meet certain requirements.

Prior private business experience outside government would be very valuable in providing Congress with seasoned connections to the world beyond the beltway. It might also help in filling positions requiring seious experience. Too many of us have encountered suggested government regulations that appeared to have been written by a summer intern who had dropped out of high school.

If this prior employment is coupled with a limited number of years of government employment, the staff would feel more connected to the private economy. A 12-year limit on federal service might ensure that the staff consider these jobs temporary and perhaps their final job after a lifetime in private industry.

To accommodate the highest degree of skill possible for national defense and security, years spent as uniformed personnel or covert foreign security agents would not count toward the 12 year limit or require the prior experience in private industry.

An amendment requiring experience and limiting federal employment

An amendment that might reduce the disconnect between federal staff and the citizens is:

At least four-fifths of the employees of each government department, Congressman's office, committee staff, independent federal agency must meet a requirement that they have 20 or more years of prior work experience in a profit-seeking private business. This requirement shall not apply to federal judges, uniformed members of our Armed Forces, or covert security agents on foreign assignment.

The United States government may employ no person for longer than a cumulative 12 years with the following exceptions. Employment not accumulated within the 12 year limit include: Supreme Court justices, uniformed members of our Armed Forces, or covert security agents on foreign assignment.

This amendment will go into effect on 01 January following the ratification of this amendment. For current employees, accumulation of years against the 12 year limit shall begin at that point. Current employees shall be treated as if they had met the business experience requirement.

This amendment should gradually, over a 12-year period, increase the experience of federal employees with private business and reduce their disconnect from the ordinary economy. Some agencies may find they cannot get particular skills given these limitations. If this is the case, they can contract with private businesses to provide those skills.

ⁱ In an article in “The Synergist,” Marthe Kent, OSHA’s director of safety standards was quoted as saying “I love it; I absolutely love it. I was born to regulate. I don’t know why, but that’s very true. So long as I’m regulating, I’m happy.” Some of us who have been the targets of her regulations may have a far different opinion.