

anti-statism prevail over special-interest politicking? Yes, if courageous political and intellectual leaders make it possible. Once the process of devolution begins—through cutting taxes, abolishing agencies, and repealing regulations—the momentum may prove difficult to contain. What happened to Mr. Gorbachev's *perestroika* may happen to Mr. Gingrich's Contract With America, another half measure. That prospect is keeping the elites of both parties awake at night. ■

Questions for Republicans

by L.H.R., Jr.

For thirty years, the GOP has complained about liberal welfare schemes. Now, when they could put their votes where their mouths have been, they're drafting a plan to entrench these programs, despite the clear wishes of the taxpayers.

The Republican plan would transfer most means-tested entitlement programs to the states in the name of "federalism," but this is hardly what James Madison had in mind. For the GOP would have the federal government collect the money and dictate how it is spent.

This plan could generate 50 photocopies of the horrible welfare state the feds now run. What's the point? If welfare is wrong—if it produces dependency, irresponsibility, crime,

and sloth—why isn't it wrong no matter what level of government is superficially in charge? And just how would "federalist" welfare curb the social chaos of the current scheme?

Does the Republican elite seek to shift responsibility and blame to the states, while allowing their Washington to wash its hands of one of the touchiest issues in American politics? It would take political pressure off Congress—no good thing—while keeping the pressure on the taxpayers.

An authentic federalism would do more than transfer administrative functions. It would eliminate the central state's welfare taxing and spending, including "block grants."

The plan's drafters say it will allow policy experimentation at the state level—the "laboratories of democracy" theory. This is doubtful. Let's say a principled governor wants to cut taxes and use the block grant to replace existing spending. Will this be allowed? Of course not.

Instead, governors will be forced to create mini-versions of D.C., plus add the Republican scheme of "workfare": government jobs for those who are demonstrably the least work-inclined in society. In fact, there is to be a twenty-fold expansion of taxpayer-funded, government-run "work" by the year 2003.

The GOP governors elected this past November weren't put in office to build Shalala-lands from Mississippi to Mas-

sachusetts, especially when this could end up as the biggest interference in states' rights since Reconstruction.

How is this money to be allocated? Is every state equal? North Dakota and Wyoming will appreciate the cash. If it's on a per capita basis, the demographics won't check out, because population and poverty are not causally related.

Or will the money be distributed on the basis of existing poverty, defined as those qualified for welfare now? That rewards the present recipients, whom, presumably, Republicans want to make independent of welfare. It would also reward the most socialist-oriented states with even more subsidies.

We're told that the plan will save 12%. Will present federal welfare workers be laid off? Or will D.C. itself be treated as a state? Also, does this figure take account of the costs of erecting new bureaucracies in state capitals?

Even if cut initially, that 12% will be re-spent in three years or less, if history is our guide. Worst of all, the plan may justify spending increases in the first two years as necessary for savings in the future.

The Republican elite has devised an esoteric teaching for the restless 73 freshmen. It runs as follows: the current system of welfare is an entitlement, which means nothing can be done to cut it. But block grants to the states are yearly appropriations, and can be cut or even voted out of existence.

Don't believe it, guys. Annual appropriations for education, foreign aid, and highways have proven more impervious to trimming or repeal. When was the last time the party voted as a bloc against such things?

And if there is some idea of abolishing all this next year, as freshmen are being told, why does the plan contain phased-in regulations applying 10 years hence? Let's say the Republican elite really does have a secret plan to abolish even the block grants. Why hide it? The public is ready for radical measures, and the liberals are going to object to anything the GOP comes up with, if only on partisan grounds. Or is the real secret plan to do one thing and say another, to shore-up the welfare state while convincing Americans that it is being trimmed?

Restructuring is not the answer, especially if it involves bullying the states. The only solution is to cut and abolish welfare. If not now, when? If not this Congress, who?

James Madison didn't envision a central government able to foist billion-dollar welfare programs on the states. Otherwise, he'd have torn up the Federalist Papers and joined Patrick Henry in defending the Articles of Confederation. ■

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Death by Vouchers

by L.H.R., Jr.

Washington conservatives think the election of Republican governors will bring new life to school vouchers. For example, they are the centerpiece of New York governor George Pataki's education plan. But if history and demographics are our guide, support for vouchers is less likely to revive them than to kill their sponsors.

Sure, liberal groups oppose vouchers, viewing public subsidies to private education as a threat to state schools. Teachers' unions don't like them for obvious reasons. Voucher advocates dismiss these groups as "special interests."

But what about the special interests of the pro-voucher movement? The Catholic bishops, more liberal than Hillary Clinton, are vociferous supporters. They welcome government subsidies for their schools just as they do for their charities. Another predictable group: low-income parents of kids in inner-city schools, who'd like the taxpayers to pick up the tab for private education in the suburbs. They'd also like free health care, a big house, and a new car. Whatever happened to working hard and saving money as the key to upward mobility?

Much more interesting is widespread conservative opposition to school vouchers.

Every major conservative publication has printed skeptical articles, and Republican voters and taxpayers have voiced opposition when they've had the chance.

With California's voucher initiative, suburban voters tallied up the costs (very high) and considered the likely effects (state control of private education, among others), and said forget it by a wide margin. Yet this smashing failure is only the most obvious example.

New Jersey Governor Christine Whitman has pushed vouchers for nearly two years. But she can't get Republican legislators interested. Opinion ranges from indifference to hostility. In retrospect, every dime of political capital she's put into the issue has been a waste.

In New Jersey as elsewhere, parents of students currently attending private schools are the most opposed. Sure they'd like a subsidy, but not at the expense of the school's autonomy, and they know that government control always follows government money.

The evidence from abroad is alarming. Under the Debre Act, France uses tax money to subsidize private schools. But over the years, this law has become a bane. It stipulates that private schools must adopt the government's curriculum, must not discriminate in admissions or discipline, and must not teach religion. In fact, voucher-taking schools must actively promote "freedom of conscience," and we know what that means.