

SENATOR ROBERT MORGAN
COUNCIL ON THE AGING OF CLEVELAND
COUNTY, INC.
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I appreciate being given the
opportunity to come here and help dedi-
cate this senior citizens' center which
will be serving Shelby and Cleveland
County.

That we are opening this new center today is a triumph and representative of the strength of the American people and of our federal system of government, of the way in which concerned and active citizens, with the cooperation of the city, county, state and federal governments, can work to provide services to help their neighbors and themselves.

But, while the federal government had a role, mainly by providing 75 percent of the funds through the Older Americans Act, the real initiative, work and planning came from concerned citizens and local government officials. I am glad that this was so, but I am really not surprised. I keep telling my

colleagues in Washington that if we let people around the country do things on their own, they would do them and probably in a way that is more sensitive to the needs and more acceptable to the people themselves. Senator Packwood, of Oregon, expressed this thought very well a couple of years ago when, during a debate on the

floor of the Senate, he said: "What makes you think that the only people in the country who have any compassion or any sense reside in Washington?" As you know, and I know, they do not.

Last year, the Congress passed a bill renewing the Older Americans Act for three more years. Probably the

single biggest controversy during the consideration of this bill was the amount of leeway the state and local governments were to be given in deciding how to spend the money under this Act.

Under the old law, there were separate programs and authorizations for the state and community programs, the

senior citizens' centers and for nutrition services. And, as always happens when related programs are fragmented like this, they were accompanied by a multitude of regulations and excessive bureaucracy.

These programs were consolidated by the Senate on the grounds that the

federal funds spent under this Act would be spent most efficiently in terms of local needs and considerations if the state and local officials had some flexibility. Although there was some resistance to this approach in the House, in the end the Senate prevailed.

Interestingly enough, the Senate is changing other programs, as they come up for renewal, to give more authority to the elected officials back in the states, some times over the opposition of the Washington-based special interest groups and over the opposition of the people who actually administer the

programs in the local communities. We did so earlier this year, with the health planning law, and are in the process of doing it again with the mental health program.

I supported, and am supporting, these changes rather enthusiastically, but it seems to me, that we were reinventing the

wheel. It also struck me that if more of my colleagues, in both the Senate and the House, had more of an opportunity to see the results of the programs we established then we would not go through this same sequence time and time again.

I know that I am not able to either keep track of, or participate in, community

activities as much as I would like to or
as much as I once did. And certainly,
it is difficult for me to keep aware of
how programs that the Congress creates
are implemented in North Carolina.

This problem is much worse for many
of my colleagues. North Carolina is
relatively close to Washington compared

to most states and my family still lives in North Carolina, so I come back to the state at least every weekend. But some of my colleagues go back to their states only once a month, if that often.

It may be that this lack of contact which some Members of Congress have with their districts and states exacerbates

your problem in dealing with Washington.

I still hear speeches on the floor of the Senate which assume that local government lacks competence and fairness, and that the federal government must keep them in line. Such attitudes belong to the dark ages, because they are out of date, and out of touch with reality.

In a sense, when a Congressman holds to that attitude, he is really indicting the very same people who elected him to office, for those are the same people who elect the Mayors, County Commissioners, the state officials and who do the volunteer work in the community.

When we keep the initiative and responsibility for activities such as this at the local level, everything seems to work better. The process of dealing with the federal government is cumbersome and costly. There are 534 federal grant programs to state and local governments, and they generate over 49 million trans-

actions with federal agencies each year.

Frequently, grantees must deal with

several agencies for one project, each

with its own forms and regulations.

We are trying to get away from this
with those programs that serve the elderly
and progress is being made. And we will
continue to make progress in this

direction if the people of this country
keep demanding it, as they are now doing,
but also if you do not get discouraged
and continue your valuable and fruitful
work at the local level. It may not be
as headline grabbing as passing a bill
with a fancy name in Washington, but it
makes a very real difference.

Les Roarke tells me, for example,
that Judge Ward has been doing volunteer
work nearly full time, both as President
of the local Council on Aging and by
helping local residents with their
problems with the Social Security
Administration. In my view, such volun-
teer work keeps the Social Security

Administration working better, and there is no telling how much good it does for individual people. I might say, that I hope the good judge does not get frustrated and will continue his good work for many years to come.

On this point, this senior citizens' center should not only be looked at as a

facility to serve senior citizens, but
it can and should be used as a facility
to allow senior citizens to serve others,
just as Judge Ward is doing in his volun-
teer work.

I am sure that you are going to do
just that, and make this center a great
success. Certainly, I want it to succeed

and if you need help, or if you have problems with the federal government in the future, which is possible since you got some money from it, just ask.

And in the meantime, keep up the good work.