

Restructuring State Government

When you get down to it, state government ultimately exists to serve and protect citizens. All three branches of government have their roles spelled out by the state constitution. The legislature makes laws and raises and spends revenues. The judiciary provides for the adjudication and interpretation of the law. And the key role of the governor – as the chief executive of the state – is to carry out the administrative and executive functions of state government apparatus consisting of multiple agencies, departments, and other various divisions.

But herein lies the difficulty. The problem is that the governor in South Carolina is not fully empowered to carry out this primary executive role due to antiquated provisions found in state constitution of 1895. The result is that the governor is hamstrung in many respects and cannot manage state government efficiently and effectively.

This is one reason to restructure state government now, but there are many more:

First, government is too big and costly. For every 10,000 South Carolinians, there are 234 state employees. That's 34% more than the U.S. average. Additionally, South Carolinians currently spend 130% the national average of the cost of government, due in large part to an inefficiently structured government. Add to this the fact that in South Carolina more than 18% of our personal income goes to pay for government. The national average is less than 14%.

Second, government is duplicative and unaccountable. South Carolina's state government is a hodgepodge of some 50 independent agencies and departments. These bureaucracies provide hundreds of public programs or services, many of which are redundant. That is why we believe it's important to streamline and consolidate agencies, thereby continuing the restructuring legacy of Governor Carroll Campbell by increasing accountability and reducing duplication and waste.

For instance, with regard to the area of natural resources and the environment, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Health and Environmental Control's Division of Environmental Protection, and the Clemson Public Service Authority all have water management programs. Bottom line: taxpayers are overcharged millions of dollars for this redundancy. And with a total 27 board or commission members between the three organizations, the lack of accountability is self-evident.

Or consider the area of health, human and rehabilitation services. We currently have five autonomous agencies or departments delivering similar services. Each provides drug treatment services (costing nearly \$41 million), which is wasteful; each has its own administrative arrangements (costing more than \$15 million), which is duplicative and costly; and each has a separate governance board or commission (consisting of a total 35 persons), which results in a lack of accountability.

To streamline administration of health, human and rehabilitation services, we propose merging the majority of agencies and programs, with the exception of the Medicaid program, into two departments: a Department of Health Services and a Department of Rehabilitative Services.

Third, government's constitutional framework is outdated and chaotic. Multiple executive branch officers, as we have now, may appear to empower voters but this structure tends to erode real accountability. Parceling out executive branch power between the governor and eight other elected

statewide constitutional officers often results in our government working at cross-purposes and producing inconsistent public policy. The governor, as the state's leader, must be able to administer the responsibilities of government efficiently and effectively.

That is why we supported legislation that allowed the voters to decide if whether or not they wanted to make the following constitutional officers cabinet positions appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate: the Adjutant General, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the State Superintendent of Education, and the Secretary of State.

That is also why we are proposing making the central administrative functions of government accountable to the governor. We believe a cabinet-level Department of Administration would provide better support services to state agencies. South Carolina is the only state in the country that empowers a quasi-legislative/executive board to oversee the state's administrative support functions. Accountability through a direct line of authority is an essential component for any leader, whether leading a well-run company or a well-run state, and our current system fails in this regard.

Currently, the Budget and Control Board, consisting of more than 1,100 employees, provides nearly every state agency with a variety of services and support, ranging from procurement and mail delivery to human resources and building maintenance.

In addition to a need for a Department of Administration, we also believe that changes are needed at the SC Department of Transportation. Currently, that agency lacks the level of accountability found in other states. Forty-seven governors appoint the director of the Department of Transportation or appoint all Highway Commission members (SC, GA, and MS are the only states that do not).

Another key area ripe for restructuring is education. We believe that the educational funding and services a child receives should be driven by the needs of the child and not the location of the school they attend. Unfortunately, decades of increasingly complex funding mechanisms have created a system of disparities. There are intra-district disparities where two students with the same exact characteristics might receive widely different services based on the amount the district spends on students in their assigned school. This needs to end. There are inter-district disparities where a student in a low-income school in one district may receive limited services while, just across a district line, a completely different situation may exist. This also needs to end. Lastly, we've created a system of disparities between school options with students enrolled in magnet school programs receiving disproportionately higher funding while students enrolled in public charter schools receive disproportionately lower funding.

We also believe that parents deserve to have the freedom to control where and how their child is educated. Of course, if all of our schools were equal in resources, instruction quality and opportunity, there would be no need for choice. But, when more than 29% of our students are trapped in failing schools, when more than 36% of schools receive poor report card ratings, and when our state's high school completion rate continues on a downward spiral stuck at last in the nation, we've got to do something different than offer parents more of the same.

We'd like to see the same sort of scholarships that the state provides four-year-olds through the Child Development Education Program, and college students through the Life and Hope scholarships extended to K-12 students in our state. 12 states across the country have already implemented school choice legislation using similar scholarships.