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“Consolidating Government’s Third Tier”

We are in a 21st century world full of information and communications innovative technologies. Arguably, the best is yet to come. However, it often takes time for us to absorb, and benefit fully from, innovations.

Today, this is no more true than in the way the US third tier of government has failed to benefit from available technologies. Back in the day, many of the nation’s older states agreed to configure themselves into numerous relatively small counties because of time and distance difficulties. Quite often, roads and communications systems were poor and there were no thoughts about today’s reality—excellent transportation and communications networks.

Take selected counties in Florida’s panhandle as an example. Consider Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, and Liberty counties just west of the state capitol, Tallahassee (Leon County). These six counties are comprised of a population of 139,410 and span an area of 3,934 square miles. By comparison, Alachua County, which is located in the north central part of Florida, has a population of 278,464 in 874 square miles. Another contrasting reality is that Gadsden County, with a population of 43,824 in 516 square miles, appears anomalous

against Duval County with Jacksonville as its county seat, which covers 774 square miles and has a population of 995,567.¹ The aforementioned six counties are operating as archaic relics of a bygone era.

The current configuration of these six counties represents considerable inefficiency and waste. It may be possible to use available technologies to configure and facilitate the functioning of one county that encompasses the six—or some subset thereof. That one county would feature one county seat with its concomitant administration as opposed to six county seats and six administrative bureaucracies. The consolidation could be achieved without reducing the collection of relevant tax revenues. The saving (fiscal surplus) that would result from this consolidation would be a fiscal boon to the associated populations and, potentially, to the state.

Granted, citizens residing at the perimeter of the newly configured county(ies) might face a distance-from-the-county-seat disadvantage when compared with the current configuration. On the other hand, increased use of virtual technology could eliminate this disadvantage altogether.

¹ The counties’ population and square mile statistics are from Wikipedia: “List of Counties in Florida;” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_counties_in_Fl

[orida](#) (Ret. 112821). The population statistics are from the 2020 Decennial Census.

This Florida example is undoubtedly relevant elsewhere around the country. Consequently, it should be possible to perform extensive consolidation of the third tier of government by employing readily available technologies, thereby generating significant fiscal surpluses. It is possible that the consolidation may result in decisions to reduce taxes in certain cases.

The one caveat worth considering from a BlackEconomics perspective is that certain small counties (in population and land area) that might be rolled up with other counties as part of the consolidation may reflect Black

American majorities. These Black majority counties that provide Black Americans with rare opportunities to enjoy some independence and self-governance might be at risk under consolidation. While this independence and self-governance may be lost, consolidating the third tier of US government should serve to produce significant benefits to all populations involved—irrespective of race/ethnicity.

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