

TOWARD SELF-RELIANCE: the Rationale

by Vic Berecz

Last year, in a newspaper op-ed column, I wrote: *Personally, I believe the necessary services should be provided by the lowest level of government that can do the job effectively, with respect to both quality and cost.* The overall direction for eight decades has been toward centralization of power and responsibility at the national level. This was not all bad. We live longer, we live better, and perhaps the greatest legacy of this era was bringing to *all* Americans the opportunity to excel ... whatever their sex, race, or religion.

Too much of a good thing always has its downside. We've reached a point where many of us believe that, despite opportunities, incentives to excel have been pushed aside and too many Americans lack a vested interest in their communities. We're approaching what some call *the nanny state*. But, we're not children, we shouldn't need a nanny! So how do we counter the status quo? By gradually moving some power and responsibility back to the states, to local governments, to our various communities and organizations, and finally to individuals ... without giving up the good stuff we've accomplished. All of these represent a move toward self-reliance. How do we achieve this movement? Without forgetting that quality and cost of services are critical, a whole host of approaches are needed ... that's why this is a series of articles. But, first let's examine the underlying issues and rationale that led to our gut-feeling that the time has come for a focus on localization of power, services and responsibility based on personal freedom and self-reliance..

In the last quarter century, two shattering events have remarkably changed the world in which we live. They were the *Fall of the Wall* and the terrorist attack we call *9-11*. The first ended (at least for the foreseeable future) the threat of national rivalry culminating in all-out war that so dominated the history of the modern era. The second defined a new type of global threat ... I hate to use the word *warfare* in this context. This new threat does not necessarily involve nation-states. It's based on small, technology-empowered groups of fanatics raising havoc intended primarily to incapacitate by harassment and instilling fear. In this insidious new world, we don't know who the enemy is or where he will strike next. Today the "enemy" are largely Islamic fanatics. Who knows what sort of fanatic will come along next? Therefore, by definition there cannot be an ultimate victory over this type of threat. As a result, we must reexamine our vulnerabilities, mitigate risks, and subjugate the threat sufficiently that we can continue to live, prosper and pursue the *American dream*.

Our dependencies point to our vulnerabilities. We are dependent upon: foreign oil, an electric power grid, intelligence-gathering, the Internet, clean air and water, our natural resources, our schools and universities ... the list goes on and on. And obviously, we are dependent upon us ... the American people 300 million strong. Over the next few months I will discuss several of these dependencies and the vulnerabilities they produce. My hope is to explore how we can mitigate the risks associated with these vulnerabilities through technology, through localization of control, and through greater self-reliance on the part of those American people ... starting with you and me!