

THE STATES' ROLE IN MEETING THE URBAN CRISIS—
POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?¹

Urban areas, we are reminded time and again, are where the action is. They are also where the problems are—enough problems to challenge all of our resources, and then some. State governments are an important part of these resources, but there is a general feeling that they have not been a very effective part.

What *should* the states do to play an effective part in attacking the pressing problems of our urban areas? How well will they fill that role in the future? These are critical questions for the American federal system as we begin the last third of the twentieth century.

WANTED: AN ACTIVE, POSITIVE ROLE

In its studies and deliberations since being established by Congress in 1959, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) has expressed a firm belief that the states should play an active, positive role in meeting the problems of local communities. Two general reasons underlie this conviction: (1) the desirability of strong state government generally as an essential feature of effective federalism, as a vital instrument for helping to carry out at the state and local levels the increasing number of federal grant-in-aid programs, and as a way of continuing to insure diversity, innovation, broad citizen involvement, and a broad-based political system; and (2) the need for harnessing maximum resources in attacking the tough problems of our

urban areas—education, housing, employment, recreation, and culture.

The states have a number of unique qualifications for playing a leading role in urban affairs. By law they are the parents of local government, the source of localities' authority to tackle their problems—whether it is the authority to organize and reorganize, perform functions, or raise money.

The states have legal power to step in and direct local governments to act in certain ways if they feel such action is necessary.

In most cases, they have ample geographic spread to provide directly, or to set up machinery to render services and activities that cannot be administered or only inadequately administered by individual localities within the governmental mosaic of the average metropolitan area.

They have greater taxable resources upon which to draw, the capacity to equalize resources and services among their local units, and they do not have the same handicaps of tax competition that confront individual local governments.

Finally, states have the administrative structure and personnel to offer technical assistance to their local governments, especially the smaller ones, in many functional fields—welfare, engineering, education, and planning are examples.

PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

With this built-in capacity, states can and should move in a number of posi-

¹ Walker & Richter, *The States' Role in Meeting the Urban Crisis—Positive or Negative?* ² METROPOLITAN VIEWPOINTS 2 (May 1967). Reprinted by permission.