

## A NEW FEDERAL CAPITAL FOR THE UNITED STATES?

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As the Bicentennial Year passes and the United States looks forward to its third century, serious consideration should be given to removing the Federal Capital from Washington D.C. to a more central and suitable location. Although this is unlikely to happen, there are good reasons why this move should be undertaken; the reasons are now more compelling than previously.

In the first place a number of the largest countries in the world, for reasons both varied and complex, have moved their capitals in recent times. The switch from Rio de Janeiro to Brasilia in 1960 on the part of Brazil was an attempt to open up the vast hinterland of that country. The site of Canberra as the Federal Capital of Australia, at a distance of "more than one hundred miles" from the largest city, was selected in 1908, but became an effective Federal Capital following World War II. The return of the seat of government of India from Calcutta to Delhi took place in 1912, and that of Russia from Leningrad to Moscow in 1917. More recently the capital of Pakistan has been removed from Karachi to Islamabad. We need not multiply cases but in all of these examples a more central and inland capital replaced a more eccentric and coastal one. If Pakistan can afford the move surely the United States can do so!

America gained true nationhood only when the Appalachians were crossed and the frontier moved rapidly toward the West. Before that time the United States was, to a very large extent, under the influence of the mother countries of Europe across the Atlantic. In view of the great westward expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century, the parochial, historical reasons for an east coast capital no longer apply. If we take population as one criterion the Federal Capital should be in the Middle West (at present the population center of the United States

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is in central Illinois). If we are concerned with area then a more westerly location ought to be selected. The center of the forty-eight coterminous states is, of course, in northcentral Kansas and an argument could be made for a new Federal Capital being established in that state.

However, a much better case could be made for an even more westerly location if we include Alaska and Hawaii (see map). Without striving for great precision in a matter that has some latitude depending how the measurement is made, the geographical center of the fifty states, weighted according to area and distance, is just north of the Black Hills of South Dakota. On the other hand, the center of an azimuthal projection which encircles northern Maine, Key West Florida and the outermost Hawaiian and Aleutian Islands is in the Pacific just off the coast of Cape Mendocino, California--the so-called global center. It is not necessary to locate the Federal Capital precisely in the geographical center and a compromise between distance, population and other factors could be made. In many respects an area near Denver, Colorado would make a better site for a capital of the modern United States than Washington, D.C., Peoria, Illinois, or near Lebanon, Kansas. Denver already has the second greatest aggregation of Federal government installations and the establishment of a new Federal Capital in Colorado would be a natural extension of this process.

A number of other reasons besides centrality argue for a removal of the capital from Washington to the continental interior. These include strategic reasons, although it might be argued that there is now no such thing as a safe area, and climatic ones. Without being deterministic, the summer climate of Washington D.C. is particularly enervating; most people would agree that the weather in central Colorado is superior to that of the mid-Atlantic coast, taking the year as a whole. It is interesting that the largest state in area (Alaska) and the largest in population and wealth, and therefore, in potential if not real political influence (California) are almost the most removed from the present center of administration. People in these distant states would certainly have a feeling of closer attachment to the United States if the seat of the national government were nearer to them.

Even those who would be farther away than at present, should such a move be undertaken (e.g. the Atlantic seaboard states) could not object to the reasonableness of a more central location. Increasingly national organizations are meeting in places other than Washington D.C. to minimize logistical problems and travel costs.

Accordingly, I propose that as a project for its third century and as an aftermath of the recent unpleasantness in Washington with the consequent re-evaluation of the government and government processes, the United States should seriously consider the matter of a new Federal Capital. Such a move would allow a fresh start to be made and many of the old mistakes erased. Even if we do not accept the concept of geographical guilt as, for example, in the case of Dallas, Texas, or Los Angeles, California, the new capital as a product of the U.S. bicentennial, if not of Watergate, would send a breath of fresh (hopefully, mountain) air through the entire government structure. If the move could have coincided with the centennial of Colorado's statehood, it would have underscored the reality of the fact that for much if not most of the United States, the 1976 bicentennial was actually closer to centennial. Colorado, of course, or some other inland state, might not wish to provide the land for this purpose for ecological and other reasons. However, with too many institutions and facilities now concentrated in Megalopolis, pressure would be reduced in that area if a new, more centrally located Federal Capital were established. Washington could still serve as a subsidiary, or second capital.

A further argument for a more central location for the Federal Capital revolves around the increasing importance of the oceans. Certain countries are making extravagant claims of hundreds of miles offshore to include island areas and all of the intervening oceanic fishing and mineral rights. We can no longer afford to think of national territory only in terms of land because, in some instances, the sea is more important economically. A shift toward the Pacific in the national thinking is appropriate because there are no possessions of the United States in the Atlantic comparable to those represented by the islands of the forty-ninth and fiftieth states and the real and potential oceanic

claims extending from their shores. A more westerly Federal Capital would give symbolic if not actual recognition to the concept of the "American Sea," a new frontier in the North Pacific Ocean partially enclosed by Alaska, Hawaii and the Pacific States of the United States.

