

Recently, I was privileged to share breakfast with a very good friend and colleague to discuss the mission of our Association. I felt the need for some wise counsel, and I am glad to report that it was found and received.

The Honorable John Phelps is the former Clerk of the Florida House of Representatives. John was also the President of the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries, the Chair of the Mason's Manual Revision Committee, and the Chair of the National Conference of State Legislators. In addition, John has been sought out by other countries to provide counsel on their legislative procedures and practices.

John and I talked about the institution of state government, its critical function in our federal system of governance, and the essential requisite to uphold its purpose. From that fulfilling conversation comes the following remarks about our mission.

#### Commentary on Our Mission

State legislatures are vestiges of the colonial governments that preceded the founding of our nation and were enshrined as sovereign entities in the Articles of Confederation when we declared our independence. As the need arose to establish a national government to assume certain limited responsibilities, the Founders strictly enumerated those obligations in the US Constitution, reserving all other powers and authority to the several states, thereby codifying state sovereignty and instituting balanced federalism.

The United States is a nation of united, but sovereign, states. As James Madison declared, *"the proposed government cannot be deemed a national one; since its jurisdiction extends to certain enumerated objects only, and leaves to the several states, a residuary and inviolable sovereignty over all other objects"*. What we have is a federal government with a constitution that divides, by consent, the powers between the national government and the several states.

It is from this foundation that we derive our mission; **to uphold the durable institution of state government by advocating for the principles of state sovereignty, balanced federalism, and representative governance.**

As the national government instinctively continues to consolidate its dominance within the federal government compact, a predisposition anticipated by the Founders, state sovereignty is consequently being violated. However, the several states have been authorized and given the means to keep their wayward partner, and its breaches of power, checked and balanced.

With enumerated exceptions, the Founders rejected the notion of an overall centralized form of national governance but, instead, embraced a balanced federalism where the national government, according to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black, has *“a proper respect for state functions, a recognition of the fact that the entire country is made up of a Union of separate State governments, and a continuance of the belief that the National Government will fare best if the States and their institutions are left free to perform their separate functions in their separate ways.”*

State legislators are the ultimate guardians of principled governance and the individual freedom that is secured by maintaining those doctrines. Protecting and preserving the institution of state government, our aptly called “laboratories of democracy”, requires the unceasing vigilance of state legislators.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James Kallinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "K".

James Kallinger, President  
National Association of Former State Legislators