

SIMON SAYS

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If you read the *Atlanta Constitution* in the mornings, then watch and listen to Dan Rather on the evening CBS news, you learn that this country is not only in trouble but getting into deeper trouble by the minute. The implication is that much of this is due to President Reagan and his Republican administration. Apparently, in the opinion of these authorities, our hope for the future lies in the restoration of a liberal Democratic administration. The editorialists of our local Knight-Ridder newspapers generally tend to agree. Unfortunately, there has yet to develop any outstanding leadership among Democrats about which to rally. A weak Mondale, the caricature politician O'Neill, and an increasingly bloated and bombastic Ted Kennedy do not inspire much confidence.

From a conservative viewpoint, if you've read the two books by former Secretary of the Treasury William Simon, (the last one, *A Time for Action*, was written in 1980 during the final months of Carter's administration) you are probably also depressed and pessimistic about the ability of any administration to change or even check the steady decline of our society.

The plain-speaking Simon, who was always described by a generally hostile press as the "controversial William Simon" to such extent he thought he had acquired an additional first name, correctly diagnosed the mood of the electorate. And the subsequent rejection of Carter and the Democrats confirmed his reasoning.

Although Simon holds no public office at present, the Reagan administration has been attempting to carry out most of his recommendations, trying to limit federal spending, deregulating energy, reducing taxes, improving defense, adopting firmness toward Russia and trying to control bureaucracy. But those resisting change are many, and chief among them, in addition to the peculiar coalition of liberal activists and media personalities, are the politicians whose main interest is to stay in office, the federal bureaucracy, which resists curtailment, and an American populace too accustomed to living beyond its means and too reluctant to give up its good life. Everyone agrees in principle that something needs to be done as long as it is done to someone else. Whether or not President Reagan can prevail against these forces remains to be seen.

Envy, greed, political blindness and ideological antagonisms continue to embroil us. And it may be, as Simon says in his more pessimistic moments, that "[T]he deterioration in our society has gone so far that reversal is impossible. Not so much in terms of practical steps that might be taken, but in public willingness and patience to accept them."