
THE FEDERAL

House GOP Issues Plan for

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Eliminating Departments

Commerce Becomes Effort's First Target

By Stephen Barr
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Congressional Republicans issued a blueprint for dismantling the Commerce Department yesterday, saying they would eliminate six major programs, scatter the remainder across the government and save nearly \$8 billion over five years.

"The Commerce Department is history. Put a fork in it," House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) said. "It's dead."

House Republicans, led by a freshmen coalition, have pledged to eliminate four Cabinet departments. Commerce is the GOP's first target, and the House task force seeking to kill the department plans to introduce its legislation within a week, aides said.

The Republican proposal would break up the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which makes up more than 40 percent of Commerce's \$4.2 billion budget, and terminate the Economic Development Administration, the Travel and Tourism Administration and the Minority Business Development Agency.

Commerce Secretary Ronald H. Brown in a statement called the proposal "ill-conceived and dangerous to America's economic growth and competitiveness." Commerce officials said they were skeptical about the cost savings claimed by Republicans and feared the proposed agency consolidations might blur or undercut programs promoting trade exports.

But the Republicans said the government is too big and that cutting bureaucracy will help balance the budget by 2002 and provide Americans with tax relief. Yesterday's announcement won endorsements from Kasich and another top House leader, Rules Committee Chairman Gerald B.H. Solomon (R-N.Y.), and from Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.).

Dole thanked House members for taking the lead on the department's elimination, saying that "if there was any message last November, it was to downsize, rein in the federal government, make it smaller. . . . We believe we can do that without taking away vital services to the American people."

The preview of "The Department of Commerce Dismantling Act" was presented by Reps. Dick Chrysler (R-Mich.) and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.).

Dismantling

Highlights of the legislation to dismantle the Commerce Department as described by Rep. Dick Chrysler (R-Mich.):



TERMINATED: Economic Development Administration and grant programs; Minority Business Development Agency, including 98 field offices; Travel and Tourism Administration; Technology Administration; and National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

CONSOLIDATED: Patent and Trademark Office would transfer to the Justice Department, requiring the office to be supported through user fees.

Bureau of the Census would transfer to the Treasury Department and the Bureau of Economic Analysis would shift to the Federal Reserve System. Remainder of Economics and Statistics Administration would be eliminated.

Bureau of Export Administration duties would be transferred to the State Department and to the Customs Service.

International Trade Administration duties would be transferred to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Offices handling international economic policy and trade development would be terminated.

BROKEN APART: The main parts of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration would be spread across the government:

National Marine Fisheries Service enforcement duties would go to the Coast Guard and scientific duties would be transferred to the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service. Seafood inspections would shift to the Agriculture Department.

National Ocean Service geodesy duties would transfer to the U.S. Geological Survey. Marine and estuarine sanctuary management would shift to Interior Department. Nautical and aeronautical charting would be "privatized." Coastal and water pollution research duplicated by the Environmental Protection Agency would be terminated.

Weather satellites of the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service would transfer to the National Weather Service. Data centers would be "privatized."

Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research would be terminated, but some labs would be sold and remainder would be transferred to Interior Department.

NOAA Corps would be terminated and its vessels sold to the private sector.

Under the proposal, terminations, consolidations and transfers would be completed over three years under the direction of a temporary Commerce Programs Resolution Agency.

"This is not just a reckless effort to slash programs for the sake of cutting government," Chrysler said. "Our plan is well thought-out and clear. . . ."

Robert A. Mosbacher, a Bush administration Commerce secretary, endorsed the House plan, saying the department's mission to enhance economic opportunity for Americans had been "diluted by more than a hundred programs and shared authorities with 71 other federal agencies."

Mosbacher was not the only ex-Cabinet official endorsing plans to

abolish departments. Two other Republicans, former Energy secretaries Donald P. Hodel and John S. Herrington, called for the elimination of Energy at a House hearing.

A third former Energy secretary, retired Adm. James D. Watkins, did not take a position, but urged House members to proceed cautiously and avoid hampering programs that ensure the safety of nuclear weapons.

Congressional aides would not predict how many federal jobs would be lost if the departments are eliminated. The Senate balked yesterday when asked to endorse an amendment to its budget resolution that would have cut 200,000 more federal workers than currently planned.

Education Officials Confront the Question: Why Should Their Department Exist?

By Rene Sanchez
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Republicans opened debate yesterday on the Education Department's future by raising concerns about the size of its staff, the growth of its budget and the scope of its work. But they really had only one question in mind: Why should it exist at all?

In the first formal round of debate on the department's fate, the House Government Reform and Oversight subcommittee on government management heard testimony from Education officials who made their case for the department's survival and critics who said that closing the department would liberate public schools.

The House Budget Committee has recommended that the department be abolished and is backed by the Christian Coalition and a wide range of politically conservative groups. Today, House freshmen will outline their plan for eliminating the department and transferring more education authority to the states.

At yesterday's hearing, Marshall S. Smith, the department's undersecretary, came armed with national opinion polls that bolstered support for the department. Smith told House members that the department has streamlined its bureaucracy to play a more vital, though limited, role in improving the nation's schools.

Smith argued that abolishing the department would be foolish because its primary jobs—from funding and regulating the massive tuition loan system for college students to policing discrimination and compiling education research—would all still exist and inevitably have to be splintered across the federal government.

"The likeliest outcome will be dislocation and disruption of services . . . along with the loss of a central voice for education," Smith said.

But critics told the subcommittee that the Education Department should be abolished because the federal role in education has grown too large and burdensome to state

and local school districts. They said the most important federal tasks in education were already being managed long before the Cabinet-level department was created 15 years ago.

"It is a meddlesome, bullying force," said Chester E. Finn Jr., a fellow at the Hudson Institute who was an assistant secretary of education in the Reagan administration. "It impedes more reform than it fosters."

The department, which has more than 5,000 employees and an annual budget of about \$32 billion, is among the smallest in the president's Cabinet. But its work has long been the focus of sharp ideological debate because education has been handled on the local level since the nation was founded. Local school districts receive only about 6 percent of their budgets from the federal government.

House Republican leaders say they are worried that some of the department's most prominent initiatives—such as the Goals 2000 program to improve academic standards—are an attempt to assert too much federal control over classrooms. The department denies that charge and contends that the Republican proposal to abolish it will only hurt schools.

Some Republican lawmakers, particularly freshmen, say they are eager to see the department shut down because its influence far exceeds the share of money it sends to local schools.

"Why should 6 percent be telling 94 percent what to do?" House freshman Michael Patrick Flanagan (R-Ill.) said during yesterday's hearing.

Other Republicans, however, are expressing reservations about the plan. Rep. Steve Horn (R-Calif.), the subcommittee chairman, said yesterday that there may be value simply in having a department, and a member of the president's Cabinet, with a single-minded focus on the nation's education problems.

"The president has a lot of other things to do besides go out and make bully-pulpit speeches about education," Horn said.