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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

SENATE & HOUSE LEADERS UNVEIL LEGISLATION TO ELIMINATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE; PLAN TRANSFERS ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS TO AGENCIES, SAVES TAXPAYER DOLLARS, & MAKES GOVERNMENT BETTER

Some time ago, I said there are "entire cabinet departments where the best thing we could do is turn out the lights, lock the doors, and send the workers home." Today, I am pleased to announce that Senate and House leaders have begun that effort by jointly producing legislation to eliminate the Department of Commerce.

We started our work from a basic understanding: eliminating the deficit and reducing the scope of the federal government are the two most important jobs we face. And it is our responsibility to get those jobs done.

The decision to make the Department of Commerce our first target was not a hard one. The Department of Commerce has been around since 1903. Since that time it has become the basement of the federal bureaucracy -- a storage room for forgotten and misbegotten programs. This is not just my verdict but that of the Commerce Department's own Inspector General, who called it a "loose collection of more than 100 programs."

Putting Our Fiscal House In Order

Disorder in the Commerce Department is not the only problem, however -- the Department forms a barrier to putting our fiscal house in order as well. In 1966, the Department of Commerce spent \$396 million. In 1996 the President's budget estimates that it will spend \$4.1 billion. Over thirty years it will spend \$64 billion. With a budget deficit of \$200 billion and a national debt approaching \$5 trillion, the clutter of the Commerce Department is something we can no longer afford.

While eliminating the Department of Commerce was not a difficult decision, crafting legislation to do so was far from easy. I especially want to commend those who represented the House and Senate in producing one bill.

Working together underscores the serious commitment we have made to continue the reforms the American people called for last November, and reinforces our commitment to see those reforms through to completion.

In the Senate, the work was carried on by the task force I assigned to eliminate four cabinet agencies. Senator Abraham (MI) and Senator Faircloth (NC) co-chair that task force and have done outstanding work in producing this plan. In the House, Representative Chrysler (MI) and Representative Brownback (KS) have led a similar effort, and I commend them for their leadership and cooperation.

Plan Transfers Essential Functions To Existing Agencies

Together we have produced a plan that will save the American taxpayer billions of dollars and make the government better at the same time. Our plan eliminates entirely any redundant or non-essential functions that were in the Department of Commerce. Our plan creates no new agencies. Our plan preserves what is essential by transferring those functions to existing government agencies where they can be handled more efficiently and less expensively.

What we have done with the Department of Commerce is something we should do with the entire federal government. It is something we will do with the Departments of Energy, Education, and Housing and Urban Development.

Thus, this press conference is not to announce that we have finished our efforts, but that we have just begun.

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