

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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S. 929: DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE DISMANTLING ACT
STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

A few months 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 update you on that effort, and testify in strong support of S. 929 to eliminate the Department of Commerce.

The proposal for elimination of Commerce has been included in the budget resolution conference report. The bill before this Committee today is a joint product of the Senate and the House. I believe both these actions demonstrate the wide support for the Department of Commerce's elimination. Mr. Chairman, you, along with Senators Abraham and Faircloth are leading a Senate Task Force that produced this legislation and I want to thank you for your help in this important effort. In the House, Representative Chrysler (MI) and Representative Brownback (KS) have led the effort. Together, you have done a great job.

My intention to eliminate four cabinet agencies, and this bill to eliminate the Commerce Department, are the product of one basic understanding: reducing the size of the deficit and reducing the scope of the federal government are the two most important jobs facing this country and therefore this Congress. We must strive to do both. To reduce the deficit, we must reduce the spending, and to reduce the spending we must reduce what does the spending -- the federal government.

Department of Commerce: Basement of Federal Bureaucracy

The decision to make the Department of Commerce the 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 is shared by its own Inspector General, who called Commerce a "loose collection of more than 100 programs," and the General Accounting Office which said that it shares its "mission with at least 71 federal departments, agencies, and offices."

Worse than keeping its own house in disorder, it forms a barrier to putting our fiscal house in order. In 1966, the Department of Commerce spent \$396 million. Thirty years later, in 1996 the President's budget estimates that Commerce will spend \$4.1 billion. Over those thirty years it will have spent \$64 billion. With a budget deficit of \$200 billion and a national debt approaching \$5 trillion, the clutter and expense of the Commerce Department is something we can no longer afford.

Eliminate Department's Duplicative & Non-Essential Functions

In general, this legislation eliminates entirely all duplicative and non-essential functions now done by the Commerce Department. For the functions that are important and still need to be done, this bill transfers them to where they will be done better, thus minimizing overhead and streamlining government. Finally, the bill requires privatization to be explored and user fees to be implemented wherever possible. By so doing, it not only achieves current savings, but future ones as well.

Significantly, it does not create a single new agency -- that is a habit that we are just going to have to try and kick.

With regard to some of the specifics, the Department's unnecessary and downright wasteful functions are eliminated -- functions such as its administrative overhead, the United States Travel and Tourism Administration (USTTA) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA). Its economic statistic functions are moved to the federal reserve so that their integrity is insured. The Census Bureau is moved to the Treasury Department

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with the stipulation that the General Accounting Office's recommendations be implemented and \$1 billion be saved.

The Technology Administration is largely eliminated. The government should not be in the business of "picking winners and losers." In the case of the Advanced Technology Program, having the government instruct the private sector is like a turtle telling a horse how to run. The Patent and Trademark Office is transferred to the Department of Justice as proposed earlier by President Reagan.

I realize that there is a lot of concern about NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and the National Weather Service. Let me reassure you that this bill not only protects the essential functions, but improves them by putting them where they should have been in the first place. The National Marine Fisheries Service is split up among the Coast Guard, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the USDA. The National Ocean Service is transferred to the U.S. Geological Survey and Interior. Most importantly, the National Weather Service is not only transferred to the Department of the Interior, but is strengthened.

Consolidation of Trade Functions

Regarding Commerce's trade functions, in which you have a special interest, these are mostly moved to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. I know you have a longstanding interest in consolidating the government's widely-scattered trade functions. I know the business community has expressed concern about these provisions, lest functions in the trade area be dispersed when they should be kept together. This bill does not disperse the trade functions. They are kept together, consolidated at the Office of the USTR. There may be a few additional changes that need to be made, with a view toward truly streamlining the trade and trade promotion functions of the federal government. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and members of this Committee, and the business community, to refine further this part of the bill. Overall, I believe that what this bill does in the area of trade consolidation is a major step forward.

In general, I believe the most important step we must take in reviewing what the government does is to isolate and shut down what it should not do. It has been all too easy for Washington in the past to promise cuts that never materialize, but to deliver spending that never fails to increase. Washington has been a town for too long of "buy now and pay later." We were given a mission to cut government. Not by me as Republican Leader, but by the American people as taxpayers. It is vital that we not only tell America that we are listening, but that we show them that we heard.

Saving Taxpayer Dollars & Making Government Better

I know that you will hear from all kinds of groups representing all kinds of interests, each telling you that its favorite program cannot be eliminated and cannot be cut. All these groups will claim to speak for the American people. I would just remind you that the American people have already spoken for themselves.

While eliminating the Department of Commerce was not a hard decision, it will be a hard job. It will take a lot of hard work, but it has been made easier because the Senate and House task forces have been working together.

Together we have produced a plan that will save the American taxpayer billions of dollars and make the government better at the same time. I congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your leadership on this important legislation and look forward to working with you and this committee through its enactment into law.

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