



That “Trump kills Meals on Wheels” story didn’t hold up for long

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It was the biggest, juiciest story of the week, complete with everything that the mainstream media loves to latch onto. “*Trump budget kills Meals on Wheels program!*” New jobs would soon be coming available for people willing to push handcarts through towns and cities across the nation, collecting the bodies of starving senior citizens who had fallen victim to the Trump presidency. Heck, I even fell for it myself. After seeing it blasted across social media by so many news outlets it was easy to do. Then came the much less widely reported wrinkle to the story: *it wasn’t true.*

Walter Olson at National Review did the work that most of the rest of us apparently forgot about and dug into the details. He explains how Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) actually work and why they aren’t as closely tied to Meals on Wheels as the press (or pork barrel loving politicians) would have you believe.

“So where do the federal block grant programs come in? Well, they give states and localities a lot of discretion on where to allocate the money. One option is to add money to supplement Meals on Wheels funding. Some do use it for that purpose.

But as Scott Shackford makes clear in his new piece for Reason, that isn’t what CDBG is mostly about. CDBG funds regularly go into pork-barrel and business-subsidy schemes with a cronyish flavor. That’s why the program has been a prime target for budget-cutters for decades, in administration after administration.

It’s important to the CDBG program’s political durability that its grantees wind up sprinkling a bit of extra money on popular programs mostly funded by other means. That way, defenders can argue that the block grants ‘fund programs like Meals on Wheels.’”

Following the author’s advice, I went to the Meals on Wheels website and found that he pretty much nailed it. This popular program does a lot of good for a lot of people but the structure in terms of how it is organized and funded is complicated to say the least. My mother volunteered as a driver and home checkup person for decades until she was no longer able to do it and she

couldn't say enough good things about it. But the program varies from state to state and city to city in terms of how they get their work done.

Those block grants which could theoretically be on the chopping block if President Trump's budget were adopted in whole cloth (spoiler alert: it won't be) do, in some cases, channel some funding to Meals on Wheels. In other locations that money goes to other purposes. One consistent factor is that the program derives its largest portion of federal funding in all locations from money provided through the Older Americans Act. Much of the rest of it comes from private donations and other sources.

We still have no idea if Congress will go along with the proposal to reduce or eliminate the block grants in question. It's a politically suicidal move, but then again President Trump has never been one to pay much attention to conventional political wisdom. Even if these grants do make their way onto the chopping block, the Meals on Wheels program will no doubt survive, albeit with even more challenges on the funding front. The program is already providing far fewer meals than it was just 10 years ago which, by the way, was long before Donald Trump came to town.

This is yet another instance where the generosity of Americans can come into play. Rather than fretting over whether or not one line item in the President's proposed budget will come to pass, the media could spend their time highlighting the need for more donations from private citizens who are willing and able to help. It's not nearly as exciting of a story in terms of click bait, but it might actually wind up helping people. Imagine that.