



7 on the 7th: Inaugural Low-Hanging Fruit Edition

By: Jeremy Kolassa – January 7, 2013

I've decided to start a new feature here at United Liberty, one that would run on a monthly basis. I'm calling it "7 on the 7th." It will be a list of 7 agencies, on the 7th of the month, that we should get rid of. The purpose is to showcase just how many government agencies that exist, which most Americans just don't realize. While they may think the government does too much stuff, I doubt that many know just *what* the government really does. Most don't know about the ridiculous organizations that are part of our government, and I can say because *I* don't know.

So this will be informative not just for you, dear reader, but also for yours truly. What sort of stupid things can we uncover? Feel free to submit your suggestions for next month's feature in the comments (but please, don't be silly and tell me we *must* get rid of the Department of Defense; we're moderate, sensible libertarians here, not barking-at-the-moon anarcho-capitalists.) Hopefully, if enough on the web read this feature, we may be able to spark a genuine discussion about the role of government and what it should actually be doing, so when some politician says we need more money to fund essential services, we can tell him (or her) that nothing he (or she) is demanding funding for is actually essential.

Now, on to the inaugural list. For this one I've decided to go for the low-hanging fruit, to get them out of the way and remove temptations for future entries. I don't really expect to surprise anyone with these, but that just goes to show you how many folks think a lot of what our government does is rubbish.

1 - Department of Homeland Security

You knew this one was coming, so I'm getting it out of the way immediately: the Department of Homeland Security is a bureaucratic boondoggle that tramples over our civil liberties and wastes more of our tax dollars than it does protecting us from terrorists. In 2011, David Rittgers of the Cato Institute said we had to abolish the department. He wrote:

In creating Homeland Security, Congress lumped together 22 previously unconnected federal agencies under a new Cabinet secretary. That's a problem, not a solution. And while members of Congress routinely clamor for consolidating Homeland Security oversight in one committee, that seems unlikely: 108 congressional committees and subcommittees oversee the department's operations. If aggregating disparate fields of government made any sense in the first place, we long ago would have consolidated all Cabinet responsibilities under one person — the secretary of government.

That's literally all DHS is—a consolidation of various national security agencies into one department under one secretary. But it didn't actually fix any problems. In fact it create a lot more, including spending roughly \$3.4 billion a year in grants to local government agencies for “counterterrorism” even when it's a town inhabited mostly by goats—seriously, Homeland Security gave \$1 million to tiny Poynette Wisconsin, a town of 2500 people in the middle of nowhere—or they go and support local “fusion centers” that then proceed to label everybody in the state a “terrorist.”

This isn't “homeland security,” this is “homeland repression.” I know we want to “stop the terrorists” and “protect America,” but is a department that's wasting over three billion dollars on a new headquarters building doing that? Or a department that is requesting “information” from Google on thousands of users, to see how many times we talk about picking our noses?

No. This is not security, homeland or otherwise. This is a very stupid waste of our time, money, and civil liberties. Junk it.

2 - ~~Transportation Security Administration~~ Teaching Sexual Assault

However, in the grand scheme of Homeland Security things, there is one agency that stands alone. One agency that represents how government has gone so far off the rails. That is, of course, Teaching Sexual Assault. No that's not right, I mean Transportation Security Administration. Except I hate to call it that because it doesn't actually transport anyone anywhere, it doesn't contribute to security, and the only thing it administrates is your genitals.

I mean, let's be honest, how many TSA sex scandals can we come up in a few short minutes?

1. The TSA pat-down of an infant. An *infant*. Yes, because clearly that child was carrying a “dirty bomb” through the airport.
2. The TSA “pat-down” of a three-year old—a *three-year old child*—in a wheelchair, whose father could not comfort him even though the child was extremely ~~distressed~~ terrified.
3. The incident where the TSA removed the breast implant of a breast cancer survivor and humiliated her in front of everybody in the airport.
4. Removing a man's urine bag and leaving him covered in pee and crying in the airport.
5. Removing the adult diaper of a 95-year old woman (more dirty bombs, apparently.)
6. Removing a passenger's nipple rings with a pair of pliers.
7. The sexual assault of conservative activist Dana Loesch.
8. Storing naked pictures of American citizens on their computers.

Oh, and if that wasn't bad enough, there's also the stories where TSA agents stole citizens' personal property. About 400 agents. So not only are these guys violating our bodies, they're violating our property. Perfect symbol for our government.

Although the TSA has pulled the full body scanners from the airports, it needs to go one step farther and just *go the hell away* entirely. Art Carden at the Independent Institute

notes that it actually imperils lives. Do we need a “security administration” that puts us in more danger, while literally sexually assaulting us?

The answer to this is obvious. Junk the TSA. Save our liberties. Save our bodies. Save our lives.

3 - Drug Enforcement Administration

The DEA is a rather simple one from a libertarian standpoint. You own your body and your life, correct? Then you should have full control over what you put in it. Therefore, the drug war is immoral and wrong. And therefore the chief agency in executing that war is also immoral and wrong and should be abolished.

It gets even more ridiculous when you consider that last year, two states voted to legalize marijuana, which was originally prohibited so that the alcohol companies could enjoy higher profits. And when you consider that drug prohibition actually increases violent crime, then it’s a no-brainer from every other standpoint as well.

And if you’re not going to have a wasteful, privacy invading, no-knock paramilitary raiding War on Drugs to fight, you won’t have any need of a Drug Enforcement Administration not to fight it. Throw it in the trash, and save our money, our dogs, our houses, and our brain cells. Because just *thinking* about how idiotic the whole thing is is lowering my IQ.

4 - Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms

There’s an old conservative saw that the government agency today known as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Enforcement would, in a purely just world, be a very popular general store in the middle of Texas.

And let’s be honest, is there *any* good reason for the agency that caused Waco? Or that was behind the Fast and Furious scandal? I asked this question last year when I famously declared the ATF to be the government’s appendix:

Let’s read their mission statement:

A unique law enforcement agency in the United States Department of Justice that protects our communities from violent criminals, criminal organizations, the illegal use and trafficking of firearms, the illegal use and storage of explosives, acts of arson and bombings, acts of terrorism, and the illegal diversion of alcohol and tobacco products. We partner with communities, industries, law enforcement, and public safety agencies to safeguard the public we serve through information sharing, training, research, and use of technology.

A “unique” agency? How can unique can that be?

- “protects our communities from violent criminals” – Doesn’t every law enforcement agency do that?
- “criminal organizations” – Sounds more like an FBI job or something for the gang squad of a local PD

- *“the illegal use and trafficking of firearms” – Okay, I can sorta see this one*
- *“the illegal use and storage of explosives” – This one too, sort of, but I would think that other agencies could also handle explosions quite readily*
- *“acts of arson and bombings” – Two words: fire department. Okay, four more: Federal Bureau of Investigation*
- *“acts of terrorism” – Otherwise known as “the purview of every other security agency ever*
- *“the illegal diversion of alcohol and tobacco products” – Now what the hell is that supposed to mean?*

As you can see, there is nothing really unique about ATF, aside from the firearms and possible explosives. So far, I cannot think of any other agency that specializes in those two things.

Well you know, after I wrote that, I started thinking. While there might not be another agency specifically created to deal with explosives, there are dozens of agencies that are specialized in dealing with firearms—your local police department! They have plenty of weapons to go around, and they arrest people with guns all the time. Why do we need an ATF? It’s not like we would lose anything, as Clarice Feldman over at *American Thinker* has written in the past:

For decades , until 1972 the alcohol and tobacco tax division was under IRS control. When it was separated from IRS, it took on control over explosives , and shortly afterward the ATF and its lab became involved in arson investigations. If the ATF as it’s presently constructed is dissolved, there’s no reason why the revenue collection side of the operation shouldn’t return to the Department of the Treasury and the firearms and explosives investigations (and laboratory) shouldn’t be given to the FBI.

I can’t see a single negative from undoing the ATF. Not one. Let’s get rid of it.

5 - Economic Development Administration

It’s not just “security” and “law enforcement” agencies that deserve special seating arrangements at the chopping block. In fact, there would be far more seats reserved for those agencies with the word “economic” in their names. This is because of the simple fact that any time a government meddles in an economy something usually explodes.

Such is the case with the Economic Development Administration. Formed in 1965 under the Public Works and Economic Development Act, it’s role is to provide grants to poorer or “economically distressed” communities so as to spur economic growth and provide jobs. But it doesn’t actually do any of that, and instead is merely engaging in a complicated and mostly hidden shell game that just redirects money from other communities. That’s not creating wealth, that’s just moving it about. This report from the Competitive Enterprise Institute, released last year and written by policy analyst Dave Bier, explains it all:

• *EDA investments do little more than shift resources from one area of the country or the economy to another. Because government has no resources of its own and relies on taxation for revenue, it can only rearrange resources rather than create them. This was vividly illustrated in 2011 by an EDA grant to Visalia, California, which promptly incentivized the relocation of a factory from Brisbane, California. Such redistribution from one town to another is not economic development—it is economically wasteful.*

• *EDA's measures of success are flawed. They value projects according to how many jobs they create rather than to how much value they bring to the community. This directs EDA grants toward projects with large numbers of jobs, like stadiums, convention centers, or other public works rather than to projects that private investors would consider productive. In 2011, for example, EDA gave Cedar Rapids, Iowa, its largest grant ever, \$35 million, for a convention center slated to lose \$1.3 million by its fifth year. Profitability, not job creation, should be the test for a successful project.*

• *EDA's second measure of success—how much private or public investment a project receives—leads the agency to actively harm local communities by encouraging them to raise “development taxes” to qualify for a matching grant. It actually gave an Economic Adjustment Strategies award to Pueblo, Colorado, for raising taxes by \$88 million. In Cedar Rapids, taxes went up when EDA offered its grant, even after voters rejected the tax increases.*

What is the *point* of all this? Is this how you label “economic development”? Is raising taxes “economic development”?

This goes back to Bastiat's lesson of the “seen and the unseen.” What we see are the numbers in the description of the grant money. What we don't see is what would have happened to private dollars if the government hadn't taxed those dollars and redirected them into these grants. And we don't usually see the closure of plants in other cities to go where the grants are either, because the news camera isn't pointed in that direction.

Government intervention in the economy is always a loser, the only question is *how much* of a loser. The EDA is a big loser. Let's get rid of it.

6 - United States Postal Service

Oh come on, you saw the articles this week about the Post Office cancelling Saturday mailings, you know this would have a front row seat to its own destruction. It has to; the Post Office lost nearly \$16 *billion* last year. If it were a private-sector company, it would have been bought by Bain Capital and eviscerated. There is simply no more demand in the post office's product, snail mail. The only thing you get in the mail nowadays are fliers from your local grocery store, credit card offers you never open, catalogs you've never asked for, other stupid forms of advertisements, your utility bill—no, wait, that's delivered online now—and once in awhile, a little mailer from your representative on how he's wasting your money in Washington (or your state capital). I never get mailed correspondence from my friends or family anymore, and I suspect it's the same for most Americans. That's because of one thing: email. (Okay, social media too.) There's really no need for the mail anymore.

The two areas where I see a lot of opposition to closing the post office coming from are old people and rural areas. As for old people, they like getting the mail, and using the post office as a place to connect with others in their community. (No seriously, that was the argument I saw in a column here in the *Washington Examiner* once.) Well, I'm sorry for you old people, but we're not spending billions of tax dollars so you can have a place to chit-chat. There are private sector bingo halls for that. And anyways, you're already draining my generation's pockets with your Social Security and Medicare, do you really need to take more of our money just so you can talk to people and lick stamps? Really? And as for those rural areas, who might be isolated if the post office were to go—come on, this is the 21st century. This is an argument for more broadband access and cell phone towers, not keeping the post office alive.

What we should do, instead of putting the USPS on life support continually, is to privatize the whole market. I don't mean sell it to a group of investors who will then operate it much as the way it's been done before—just as a “private” company—that's “corporatization,”; I mean actually privatize the market so that Americans can contract with whomever they wish to deliver their mail. Right now the USPS has a monopoly on first class and standard mail. Why not allow anyone to create a business to deliver mail and then pitch their services to consumers? I can contract with IDGAF Delivery Services, you can contract with Greyhair Express, and we can all be happy. Let the USPS compete with these new companies in a truly free market, free of government interference. Naturally, I fully expect the USPS to go bankrupt within a year or two of that, but then people can come in, buy its assets, and then put them to genuinely good use and innovate and come up with ways to make mail worthwhile—or, and I suspect this approach would be more likely, discover that there is no point to physical mail in the 21st century and just leave it to die.

We wouldn't be the first, either. Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, and Argentina have all privatized their postal services, and haven't had any major problems. And we already have a private market in package delivery. Why not mail delivery? Or, should I say, annoying advertisement delivery?

Let's be honest, there is just no point to having a physical mail carrier in the modern 21st century of global telecommunications networks, Facebook, Gmail, cell phones with more computing power than your own brain, and Amazon.com. Maybe it's time we let Schumpeter's creative destruction catch up to the USPS, rid us of a backwards, archaic, obsolete throwback, and let us move on with our lives.

7 - Environmental Protection Agency

This one may be a tad of a surprise, if only for it's audacity. Most people believe that there is some role for environmental regulation. We must have clean air and clean water because polluting those is bad for our health and we can't live on a dirty planet full of toxic chemicals. And, honestly, those people are right—except for the regulation part. The Environmental Protection Agency is not really protecting the environment, and it is a bad example of government regulation in every way.

As Henry Miller, a former FDA official, notes in an op-ed for the *Daily Caller*:

I found EPA to be relentlessly anti-science, anti-technology and anti-industry. The only thing it seemed to be for was the Europeans' innovation-busting "precautionary principle," the view that until a product or activity has been definitively proven safe, it should be banned or at least smothered with regulation. In fact, during international discussions and negotiations over the harmonization of biotechnology regulations in which I participated, EPA often seemed allied with the European Union and committed to working against U.S. interests.

I was baffled by all this until I realized that EPA was a miasma populated by the most radical, disaffected and anti-industry discards from other agencies, and that because it was supposed to protect Americans from bad things — polluted air and water and dangerous chemicals, for example — there was entrenched institutional paranoia and an oppositional worldview.

During the ensuing three decades, in administrations Democratic and Republican alike, little has changed at EPA. The heads of the agency have ranged from the clueless to the corrupt. The current administrator, Lisa Jackson, seems unaware that regulation has costs, direct and indirect; that regulators should strive to limit the intrusiveness of oversight to the level that is necessary and sufficient; and that her agency has myriad deficiencies in both policies and personnel.

Policy by policy and decision by decision, Jackson and her colleagues (along with their counterparts at other regulatory agencies) have decimated the nation's competitiveness, ability to innovate and capacity to create wealth. A recent analysis from the Competitive Enterprise Institute estimated that the annual cost of compliance with EPA regulations alone is more than a third of a trillion dollars.

Read more: <http://dailycaller.com/2013/02/04/is-it-time-to-get-rid-of-the-epa/#ixzz2KBm1HdOo>

Read that: compliance with the EPA costs more than *a third of a trillion dollars*. That's \$333 billion per year that can be invested into hiring more workers, training more individuals, and developing more advanced technology. And it's wasted dealing with paperwork. And not saving lives, either: further on, Miller explains that the cost of regulation deprives people of money they need to spend on things like medicine and food, and that every \$7.25 million of regulatory costs equals another fatality under this "income effect." So by that token, the EPA has killed 45,931 people a year. That's more deaths than from gun violence.

I can attest to the EPA's anti-science agenda. You may have heard about a little scandal involving Bristol Bay in Alaska. A mining company wanted to open a mine within Bristol Bay's watershed (that's where all the water on land drains, or sheds; so any water landing within the Bristol Bay watershed ends up in Bristol Bay). They conducted an impact assessment, an assessment that had been going on for a few years at that point, and was expected to go on for several more, so that they had a complete and utterly thorough idea of what would happen. Now, in a normal scenario, what would happen next is that the company would then create an action plan for dealing with environmental damage and compensating or cleaning it up, then submit that plan to the EPA in their application for a mining permit, and the EPA could accept or deny the application *based on that action plan*. Instead of that, however, the EPA bizarrely rushed a few folks up there, who spent

maybe two or three months wandering around and talking to local First American tribes, then wrote their own fictitious mining plan, and based on *their own internal, fictitious mining plan*, “denied” a mining permit (to no one but their own “researchers”) and exercised a rare “preemptive veto” over any mining in the region. To add insult to injury, the mining plan they magically came up with was based on South American mines from the 19th century, and then they announced the hearings to receive public comment on a late Friday afternoon when everyone was off getting ready to enjoy the weekend. The best part? Guess where the first hearing was held. Juneau? No. Anchorage? No. Nome? No. Anywhere near Bristol Bay? No. The answer is: Seattle.

They didn’t even hold the hearing in the same state as the project.

That is not science. That is anti-science, anti-industrial demagoguery. It should be painfully apparent to anyone who was involved in this case at any point to realize the EPA’s foundation is built on sand. But, as Miller says, this is a rogue, out-of-control agency who should have been indicted a long time ago. Time to give this agency a death sentence.

If you’re worried about what would happen to our environment without the EPA, there is a simple way to protect the environment without getting government involved: private property rights. If a company dumps toxic waste down a river and it flows onto your property, you have the right to sue them for damages—and enough about the “limited liability laws” that prevent you from suing them for all that they’re worth. (They deserve such pain if they’re stupid enough to dump toxic chemicals into the water.) And before you say “But the poor can’t sue!” of course they can. What public interest legal foundation or hotshot attorney wouldn’t relish the opportunity to slam down a big bad corporation? And it would be easy to get their attention by intriguing some environmental reporter—or any reporter—who get an amazing scoop on yet another instance of corporations behaving badly.

That’s it for our first edition of this hopefully recurring feature. Next month I’ll find seven more agencies that can be done away with, which considering the vast bulk of the federal government, should not be difficult at all. If you have any agency you think should be on the chopping block, leave it in the comments and it may get in the list next time.