

## Things the U.S. government could do without

Posted By [Roger Kimball](#) On August 31, 2010 @ 5:12 am In [Uncategorized](#) | [50 Comments](#)

Don't worry: I do not propose to give you a complete list. Otherwise we'd be here all day. But really, if government spending is a problem (and it is), why not shut down some agencies that spend money needlessly? A friend suggested we start with the two National Endowments, the one for the Arts (so-called) and the one for the Humanities. An excellent idea, and one which I would heartily support.

Objection one: "Haven't they done good work?" Occasionally. Not very often, really. I thought (and said publicly) that Dana Gioia did excellent work at the NEA. But usually both endowments, and especially the arts endowment, have simply certified and promulgated the establishment, i.e., the left liberal, agenda emanating from Washington. Besides, why should the federal government get involved with the arts and the humanities anyway? That is the critical question. The answer is: it shouldn't. Would you like a museum/opera house/concert hall in your town? Save up the money and go ahead and build it. Why should the taxpayers foot the bill?

Objection two: Europe! The state pays for culture in Europe. Aren't Americans being philistines by not involving the state in culture?

Oh? Have you taken a look a Europe and its state-supported culture recently? Really, this objection is *almost* too embarrassing to answer. What makes you think that state involvement of culture leads to anything other than the growth of the state and its insinuation into areas of life they have no business being in? Take your time.

Objection three: "But the budgets of those agencies are so small, less than \$200 million each. Nancy Pelosi eats that for lunch." True, but you have to start somewhere. A journey of a thousand miles, etc., etc. Besides, getting rid of the Endowments would send a salutary, if largely symbolic, message to deans, arts administrators, and other parasitic busybodies. It would also get the government out of the embarrassing business of supporting "cutting-edge," i.e., meretricious, art and "research." Yes, on balance, I think dispensing with the Endowments would be a good thing all around.

But of course it is only a start. Another prime candidate is the Department of Education. Like so much Washington bureaucracy, this behemoth is essentially one of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" (i.e., statist) institutions, a shell for the teachers' unions and enforcement agency for politically correct ideology. It officially presides over a budget of nearly \$67 billion and another \$96.8 billion in "[discretionary funding provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#)"<sup>[1]</sup>. (Did the person who wrote that smile as he set it down in black and white? "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act," forsooth! "Anti-American Rapine and Redistribution Act" is more like it.)

I've been thinking of making this public service announcement recommending the closure of various governmental agencies for some time. What prompts me into action today is the news that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent around a email urging government employees to attend the rally that "Rev." Al Sharpton organized to compete with Glenn Beck's "restoring honor" tea-party rally last weekend. As [an article in the Washington Examiner notes](#)<sup>[2]</sup>, the email does not violate the [Hatch Act](#)<sup>[3]</sup>, which restricts partisan political activity of federal employees. But it does not look good. As David Boaz of the Cato Institute put it, "It sends a signal that activity on behalf of one side of a political debate is expected within a department. It's highly inappropriate . . . even in the absence of a direct threat." Just imagine, Boaz continued, if a cabinet official in George W. Bush's administration had sent an "e-mail to civil servants asking them to attend a Glenn Beck rally." Hell to pay, what?

I would say that Secretary Duncan should resign, but the more honorable and pragmatic course would be for him to stick around for a month or so while dismantling that counter-productive agency over which he presides.

Next up: the Department of Housing and Urban Development, another legacy from the Lyndon Johnson spend-a-thon. Check out its website [here](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. More governmental boondoggles than you can shake a stick at: it takes a while to spend \$43,718,000,000. One of my favorite pages is "[Making Home Affordable](#)" <sup>[5]</sup>. What it means is "how to get your neighbor to help pay for your house." Nice work if you can get!

Well, it's well before lunch time on a Tuesday morning and I have just saved you a few hundred billion dollars. I know, I know: it's chump change for this profligate administration, but you have to start somewhere. I hope some enterprising souls will lend a hand and help me scrutinize other parts of the federal budget for superfluous expenditures, redistributionist follies, and other example of practical socialism.

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[1] discretionary funding provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/index.html?src=ct>

[2] an article in the *Washington Examiner* notes: [http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Education-secretary-urged-his-employees-to-go-to-Sharpton\\_s-rally-651280-101839293.html](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Education-secretary-urged-his-employees-to-go-to-Sharpton_s-rally-651280-101839293.html)

[3] Hatch Act: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatch\\_Act\\_of\\_1939](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatch_Act_of_1939)

[4] here: <http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD>

[5] Making Home Affordable: <http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/>

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