

## Gov spending in the crosshairs at new Cato website

### DownsizingGovernment.org calls for deep cuts

By [Lydia Sprague](#) Nov 24 2009, 12:08 AM

The Cato Institute lives up to its libertarian ideals with its recently launched website, DownsizingGovernment.org, which aims for full disclosure of spending across the federal government.

As the name suggests, the website offers ways to reduce federal government spending and, thus, the size of the government altogether. But regardless of your political inclinations, [DownsizingGovernment.org](#) is a fine resource for anybody interested in the federal budget and how Uncle Sam spends your tax dollars.



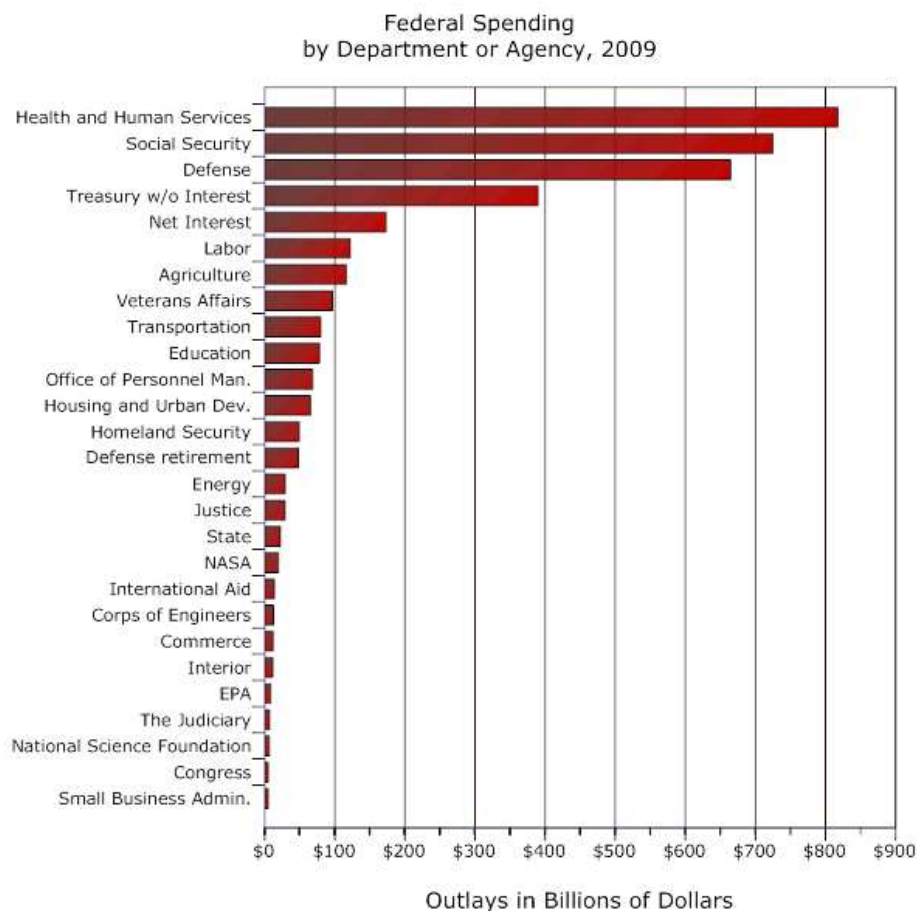
Mercifully uncluttered and easy to navigate (the opposite of the federal budget, you could argue), the site offers a department-by-department guide to the Cabinet agencies. So far only the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, and Housing and Urban Development are available; more are listed as "Coming Soon."

Each department has its own page with an overview explaining what kinds of subsidies it provides, how many workers it employs and how much it will spend for the year of 2009.

From there the reader can click through pages offering proposed spending cuts, a timeline of the department's growth history and links to studies that examine the department's operations.

"Some people have lofty visions about how government spending can help society," note Downsizing's curators Chris Edwards and Tad DeHaven. "But the essays on this website put aside such 'bedtime stories' about how government programs are supposed to work, and instead focuses on how they actually work in the real world."

While the site lays out a great picture of where each department is spending most of its money, it might not be so surprising that the group's spending cut suggestions mostly boil down to abolishing the departments all together.



*Source: DownsizingGovernment.org*

Of the five departments that have been reviewed, the cost-cutting solution for four departments offered by the site's authors is to eliminate the department. The only department that shouldn't be completely abolished is the Department of Agriculture. There the cuts should be limited just to 90 percent of the budget.

"All agricultural and rural subsidies in the Department of Agriculture's budget should be abolished to save taxpayers \$25 billion annually," the site says. "Under the proposal, the USDA would retain responsibility for animal and plant health inspections, food safety, grain and packing inspections, and conservation activities."

DownsizingGovernment.org doesn't specify how cutting agriculture subsidies might affect industries, such as the domestic milk industry which has come to rely on Farm Service Agency help. The site also fails to address the costs that would be passed down to states that would no doubt be forced to pick up the slack if federal departments ceased to exist. While the website advocates killing off the Department of Education to save taxpayers \$78 billion annually, it doesn't say how those costs might be passed on to states, and thus right back to taxpayers.

"It's absolutely legitimate to be concerned about government results at a time when we need so much from our government. But simply shrinking government for the sake of shrinking it is not where we need to go," Partnership for Public Service President Max Stier told the Washington Post. "This is a tired debate about big or small. The real focus ought to be on making government work better."

Can government make itself better *without* getting ever bigger? Taxpayers who remain skeptical will find plenty to chew on over at DownsizingGovernment and the Cato Institute.