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WHEN AGENCIES GO AWAY, SOME PROGRAMS STAY



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT By Barry Cassidy

The incoming Trump administration will bring changes, which remind me a little bit of the Reagan years. We have been promised wholesale changes in the composition of government agencies.

Agencies can be consolidated, abolished, or merged to save on administrative costs. In many cases, the agency can go away, but the programs that need to be continued will either get a rehaul and a new name or be combined into an agency with a similar focus.

When Lydon Johnson was president, he created the Great Society programs, which were administered by the Community Services Administration (CSA). Reagan disbanded the agency, and the programs were canceled or moved to another agency. When those programs moved to a different agency, the federal government branded them as new.

I managed a weatherization program in Washington County, Pennsylvania, even though it was a passthrough program

through what was then the Department of Community Energy. To implement the new and improved weatherization effort, a new set of guidelines was adopted and approved.

This program served the poorest of the poor — The income limit was 150 percent of the poverty level, which was pretty low at the time. Some houses did not have central heat and had individual gas burners in each room. Houses need repair, and any weatherization effort would be a band-aid.

I found that I could redo the houses I had already done with the clean slate. This usually meant installing aluminum storm windows because they, under the CSA they were not considered eligible costs. The cellulose insulation was in and adequately vented, and the weather stripping customarily needed to be replaced, but installing storm windows was easy. As long as the estimator got the measurements correct, we completed the homes quickly.

We were paid a fixed rate per job completed. All of a sudden, I was rolling in administrative money. By mid-year, I had reached my contract limit and received an amendment for more houses.

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DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

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I had three years' worth of houses to breeze through. Because I was using the program for a dual purpose, the work was being done by people eligible for the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA). Now that I was there to train people, I thought it would be in the employees' best interests to try to place them in private employment.

We had a lot of success placing people in private firms, but I also had a lot of people getting fired from that employment. It was probably because I was a little too loose with my work rules.

The change in the federal administration had an unintended impact on the program, and this will happen again this time. Multiyear authorizations on a federal level sometimes hamper efforts to change things, and there is always a period of adjustment.

This is why it is so difficult to do what the incoming Trump administration wants. Some of these things are so embedded in the system that they may be part of a side deal to gaining approval for funding legislation in the first place. It is a treacherous path woven with hoops to

jump through and circles to complete.

It is a good idea to look at the issues with the government from a new perspective. Not a jaundiced eye but a new eye, clear and focused. The people administering some of these programs sometimes need to catch up on what they are there for. They are there to say "yes" and try to work around what will be a problem.

In the age of social media conflict and complaints, I am sure that people will lose their minds when some of these agencies disappear. Many of these folks will need to learn what they are talking about. If an agency is eliminated, some programs will probably live on but will be repackaged.

We are about to begin chaos as the administrative people will need help adapting if they keep their jobs. There are better times to be aligned with a narrative than now. Too often in recent years, people have been more ideology-oriented than program-oriented. I feel that things are going to change.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.

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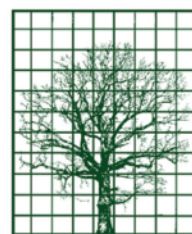
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