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## A Strategy to Eliminate Wasteful Federal Spending

*The Honorable Sam Brownback*

Federal waste is a grave disservice to hardworking taxpayers across our great nation, and yet our governmental bureaucracies are riddled with it—whether through unnecessary, duplicative, inefficient, outdated, or failed agencies and programs. The Heritage Foundation has done a good job highlighting some of these problems over the years.

One of our problems lies largely with the fact that it is much easier to spend other people's money than one's own. I am afraid that the Congress is not nearly as scrupulous as it ought to be when it comes to spending hardworking taxpayers' dollars. It is absolutely essential that we prioritize and rein in spending.

To illustrate this point, I have a chart showing some scores by department from OMB's fiscal year 2004 Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART). Not all agencies have been reviewed by PART thus far, nor have all programs within those agencies, but I think we're starting to see a trend.

The Median Score on this chart indicates the percentage of programs within each agency meeting their goals. If these scores were children's grades on a report card, there would be some cause for concern. There are no A's and no B's. Defense, which had 12 programs reviewed, scored a C. There were only four scores that would rank within the C range. There were five D's. There were 12 F's. Education—of all departments—had 18 programs reviewed and only scored a 38.7 percent. Are taxpayers really getting their money's worth?

- Federal waste is a grave disservice to hardworking taxpayers across our great nation, and yet our governmental bureaucracies are riddled with it.
- There are too many special interests and too many influences that will prevent us from taking the ax to the root of established agencies and programs—even after they have failed or become obsolete.
- And as President Reagan reminded us: "There is nothing more permanent than a 'temporary' government program."
- The Base Realignment and Closure Commission has been our one successful model for eliminating government programs.
- The Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act—based on the proven model of the military base closing commission—is the antidote to the Congress's general unwillingness to end politicians' pet projects.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/budget/hl806.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/budget/hl806.cfm)

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Prioritizing spending and maximizing the effectiveness of taxpayer dollars is absolutely essential. We must draw the line, realigning programs when necessary and also eliminating failed programs.

President Reagan—when delivering remarks at my alma mater, Kansas State University, in September 1982 at the Landon Lecture Series—quipped: “Balancing the budget is a little like protecting your virtue: You just have to learn to say ‘no.’” His comments are as true now as they were then. We need to say “no” to good, well-intentioned programs that have failed. The only trouble is that it seems Congress has been unwilling to say “no.” The Congress needs to take concrete steps to ensure that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are being efficiently used by the federal government.

From personal experience, I can tell you that few things are more upsetting to my Kansas constituents than to see wasteful federal spending. Kansans often say to me: “I do not mind paying my taxes, but it is infuriating to see my hard-earned money being poorly spent by the federal government. If I am going to work hard to earn this money, I want it spent wisely.” These are real concerns that need to be addressed.

### **Learning from the Past**

If we are to change our mentality and reverse the trend of wasteful, reckless federal spending, we must learn from both our past failures and successes. What can largely be characterized as a failure would be our valiant efforts to take on entire agencies head-on. We have learned that once a program—and especially an entire departmental agency—is in place, you cannot tear it out at the root. Quoting President Reagan again: “There is nothing more permanent than a ‘temporary’ government program.”

The best that you can do is to starve such an establishment by decreasing funds one year at a time. Still, this approach has largely been ineffective. There are too many special interests and too many influences that will prevent us from taking the ax to the root of established agencies and programs—even after they have failed or become obsolete. However, I believe we have had one process that has been successful in the realm of program-elimination and prioritization of spending—the

Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC).

### **A History of BRAC**

BRAC originated in the 1960s under President Kennedy as the Department of Defense (DOD) had to realign its base structure after World War II and the Korean War. At that time the DOD was able to close bases without congressional interference, and 60 bases were closed in the 1960s.

Naturally, Congress was upset with the political and economic ramifications back home, but their efforts to kill BRAC failed until 1977 when President Carter signed legislation allowing the Congress to micro-manage base closings. As a result no major military bases were closed in the 1980s.

In the late 1980s, under Congressman Dick Armey’s leadership, BRAC was revived in its present form, with the BRAC commission submitting its recommendations to Congress for the realignment and closure of military bases, with the Congress taking an up-or-down vote to accept or reject the plan as a whole.

### **The CARFA Act**

BRAC has been our one successful model for eliminating government programs—in this case military bases—and with this in mind, I specifically modeled the Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act (S. 1668) after BRAC. Whereas the BRAC Commission examined military bases and the Department of Defense, CARFA would review federal agencies and programs within agencies. The scope of this commission would be directed toward non-DOD discretionary agencies and programs.

For example, the types of programs to be reviewed would include (among many others) the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Programs excluded from the commission’s review include the DOD and entitlement (or mandatory spending) programs such as Social Security, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Federal Direct Student Loan Program, and Medicaid Grants to States.

CARFA is designed for success using a narrow set of criteria, which should produce significant results. The three areas of review are:

- **Duplicative.** Where two or more agencies or programs are performing the same essential function and the function can be consolidated or streamlined into a single agency or program, the commission would recommend that the agency or program be realigned.
- **Wasteful or Inefficient.** Where the commission finds an agency or program to have wasted federal funds by egregious spending, mismanagement of resources or personnel, or use of federal funds for personal benefit or for the benefit of a special interest group, it would recommend that such agency or program be realigned or eliminated.
- **Outdated, Irrelevant, or Failed.** Where the commission finds that an agency or program has completed its intended purpose, become irrelevant, or failed to meet its objectives, it would recommend the elimination of such agency or program.

After completing its evaluation, the commission would submit to Congress both a plan with recommendations of the agencies and programs that should be realigned or eliminated and proposed legislation to implement this plan.

As with the successful BRAC model, the Congress would consider this legislation on an expedited basis with a comment period from the committees of jurisdiction. Within the expedited time frame, the Congress would take an up-or-down vote on the legislation as a whole without amendment. If CARFA's recommendations are enacted, significant savings would likely result. If CARFA's recommendations are rejected, congressional authorizers would have a useful guide, which would bring together into a single source measures such as the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA), the Inspector General (IG) reports, and the OMB's Performance Assessment Rating Tool as well as CARFA's own findings of fact.

## Early Success

The good news is that we have already met with some early success. In this year's budget debate, we were able to work with leadership to have a Sense of the Senate in support of CARFA included in the budget resolution (H.Con.Res. 95) stating:

It is the sense of the Senate that a commission should be established to review Federal domestic agencies, and programs within such agencies, with the express purpose of providing Congress with recommendations, and legislation to implement those recommendations, to realign or eliminate government agencies and programs that are duplicative, wasteful, inefficient, outdated, or irrelevant, or have failed to accomplish their intended purpose.<sup>1</sup>

I am also pleased that momentum continues to build. We recently added our 28th Senate cosponsor. CARFA Act cosponsors include Senators Miller, Alexander, Allard, Allen, Bunning, Burns, Chambliss, Cornyn, Craig, Crapo, Ensign, Enzi, Fitzgerald, L. Graham, Hatch, Hutchison, Inhofe, Kyl, Lott, McCain, Murkowski, Nickles, Santorum, Sessions, Sununu, Talent, Thomas, and Voinovich. Congressman Todd Tiahrt has also just introduced companion legislation to S. 1668 in the House of Representatives—H.R. 3213.

Several outside groups have pledged to help us pass CARFA—notably Paul Weyrich and the Free Congress Foundation, the Family Research Council, and of course The Heritage Foundation has always been enthusiastically supportive of CARFA. Moreover, in recent weeks, we have even received some positive inquiries from groups on the other side of the political spectrum.

We have taken much ground in a relatively short amount of time with CARFA, and it is time to make the next push to get the CARFA Act passed by both Houses of Congress. Momentarily, I will further touch on what can be done to ensure CARFA receives proper consideration before the whole Congress, but first I want to emphasize the bipartisan nature of this concept.

1. H.Con.Res. 95, Section 606, Federal Agency Review Commission.

## CARFA Parallels

Ultimately, this should be a non-partisan issue. Many government reform commission concepts have surfaced on both sides of the legislative aisle over the years. One in particular was sponsored by the late Senator Edmund Muskie, a Democrat from Maine, in 1978. Although the legislation differed from the CARFA Act, I believe that it shared a similar intent.

Senator Muskie's government reform commission passed the Senate 87-1 that year with Senators Biden, Byrd, Domenici, Hatch, Kennedy, Leahy, Lugar, and Stevens numbered among the cosponsors, but the House did not take action on the bill. In the following Congress, Senators Baucus, Cochran, Hollings, Inouye, and Levin were all added as cosponsors, although no vote was taken on the measure.

Thus far, we have one Democrat cosponsor of the CARFA Act, but there is really no reason why we should not have more Democrats on the bill. This is an accountability measure. We all agree that accountability is a very good thing. The CARFA Act is about accountability in the federal government—making sure that taxpayers are getting their money's worth and not being defrauded. This is a bipartisan concept, and it is worthy of broad support across the Congress.

## Intended Results of CARFA

CARFA is about maximizing the benefit of all federal funds. Significant savings could result from CARFA, which could be directed toward higher congressional priorities, such as paying down the national debt.

It is my hope that enactment of CARFA would provide a real tool at the service of the federal government, in order that we can better prioritize spending and shift funds from less beneficial to more beneficial areas. I believe that Americans would greatly benefit from such a commission, which has the real potential to help us truly root out inefficiency in the federal government in such a way that we can more fully realize the benefit of all federal funds. That is the spirit of the CARFA Act.

## Immediate Strategy

Most important to our success right now, it would be a big boost if the Administration were to lend its

support to the CARFA Act. The Senate Leadership has indicated support of the CARFA Act, and it sounds like we may soon have hearings on the measure. While we will keep all amendment options open with CARFA, it is my hope that the bill could pass as a stand-alone measure early in the second session of the 108th Congress. And while the Senate Leadership has indicated support, we need support from the House Leadership too.

I hope that the press will pick up on the CARFA Act as well. Robert Novak and Paul Weyrich have written on earlier versions of the CARFA Act, and there needs to be much more press coverage. We need more cosponsors too. I would like to double the number of Senate cosponsors to the CARFA Act, and Congressman Todd Tiahrt needs more cosponsors for his counterpart legislation in the House.

Perhaps most important though, word needs to get out to the grass roots on what the CARFA Act is and how it would improve the use of their hard-earned tax dollars. Anything that any of you can do to help inform and encourage your bosses or the people with whom you work to support the CARFA Act is greatly appreciated.

## Summary

In closing, the use of hard-earned taxpayer dollars on duplicative, inefficient, and failed federal agencies and programs is a serious problem facing our nation today. Over and over, we see congressionally authorized programs become institutionalized, and then—although no longer necessary—they become permanent fixtures receiving more taxpayer dollars year after year.

The Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act (S. 1668) would change this. The CARFA Act establishes a commission to review federal discretionary agencies and programs, making recommendations for the elimination of unnecessary programs. The Congress would subsequently take an up-or-down vote on these recommendations. The CARFA Act is the antidote to the Congress's general unwillingness to end politicians' pet projects. It is based on the proven model of the military base closing commission (BRAC), and it will work.

It is my hope that we will be able to see the enactment of the CARFA Act in the 108th Congress. If we

do, it will certainly send a positive signal to the American people that the federal government is serious about fiscal accountability and responsibility, and it would set a good example for others to follow.

—*The Honorable Sam Brownback is a United States Senator from Kansas and serves on the Senate Committee on Appropriations.*