

To Promote the General Welfare

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In my previous article, “The Freedom Society: Headwing Thought or Tea Party Politics?”, I said I would next take up the issue of government spending on human services.

The political right advocates for smaller government, addressing domestic issues of poverty and healthcare through private enterprise.

The left advocates for government agencies and programs to provide healthcare, a safety net for people temporarily in need and ongoing support for citizens who cannot

“enjoy the blessings of liberty” independently as social responsibilities.

The right claims that government power should be limited to the common defense, brick and mortar infrastructure, law-making and law enforcement. For them, government’s basic purpose is to protect individual rights and freedoms and should keep its hands off the free market system.

Although there is nothing inherently wrong with this worldview, it is not complete. The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution includes the phrase:

...[To] promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty...

The right argues that protecting the free market system *is* promoting the general welfare. But is there such a thing as equal opportunity in a purely capitalist society? Do the values derived from capitalist principles, such as independence, self-reliance and faith, apply in every circumstance?



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In fact, values such as “justice” and “compassion” (for those who cannot survive independently in civilized society) often conflict. Success and failure, right and wrong, are not as clear cut as some would have us believe.

Reverend Moon frequently uses the metaphor “vertical” and “horizontal” to describe dual aspects of human nature. The vertical dimension refers to absolute obedience to the will and conformity to the unchanging attributes of God. Rev. Moon associates the vertical dimension of human nature with “faith.”

The horizontal axis refers to the immediate present, which does not meet standards of perfection. God is a God of justice and perfection, but God is also a God of mercy and forgiveness. The horizontal axis represents accepting reality without casting moral judgments. Self-sufficiency, good health, supportive families, and access to capital are ideals that everyone should enjoy. But they are currently out of reach for many individuals and families.

In the debate over handling controversial issues with moral implications, upholding strong family standards must be balanced with compassion for those who made regrettable mistakes as well as for their victims, a common theme with families in faith communities.

There must be a balance between self-sufficiency and social responsibility.

First, let’s have a look at federal spending on human services. The U.S. budget for FY 2014 is \$3.65 trillion, where:

- Healthcare represents 27% of the budget, \$969.8 billion. Of that amount, \$519 billion goes to Medicare for seniors. \$308 billion goes to the states for Medicaid and the remainder to Medicare recipients on Social Security Disability.
- Social Security consumes 25% of the federal budget. This includes payments for people with disabilities as well as seniors.

- The 2014 defense budget makes up 22% of the federal budget.
- Welfare makes up 11% of the budget. Roughly half of the welfare budget goes to direct payments to families. The rest goes to supplemental food programs, unemployment and housing assistance.



There is a perception among many Americans that direct welfare payments to people who don't deserve it make up a significant portion of the national budget. In fact, about 5% goes directly to families. The amount increases during recessions and high unemployment, and decreases during economic recovery and low unemployment.

An increasing percentage of funds allocated for human services do not go to direct payments to families. They fund programs to assist people to be as independent as possible. Two examples of

federally funded social service programs are programs for people with disabilities and the foster care system.

Care for People with Cognitive Disabilities

The ratio of the population with disabilities (all inclusive) is 1:5. More accurately, 56.7 million people or 19% of the population are disabled. More than half report the disability as severe. Of people with cognitive disabilities, only 41% are employed. Many of the remaining 60% are capable of working, but not without supported employment.

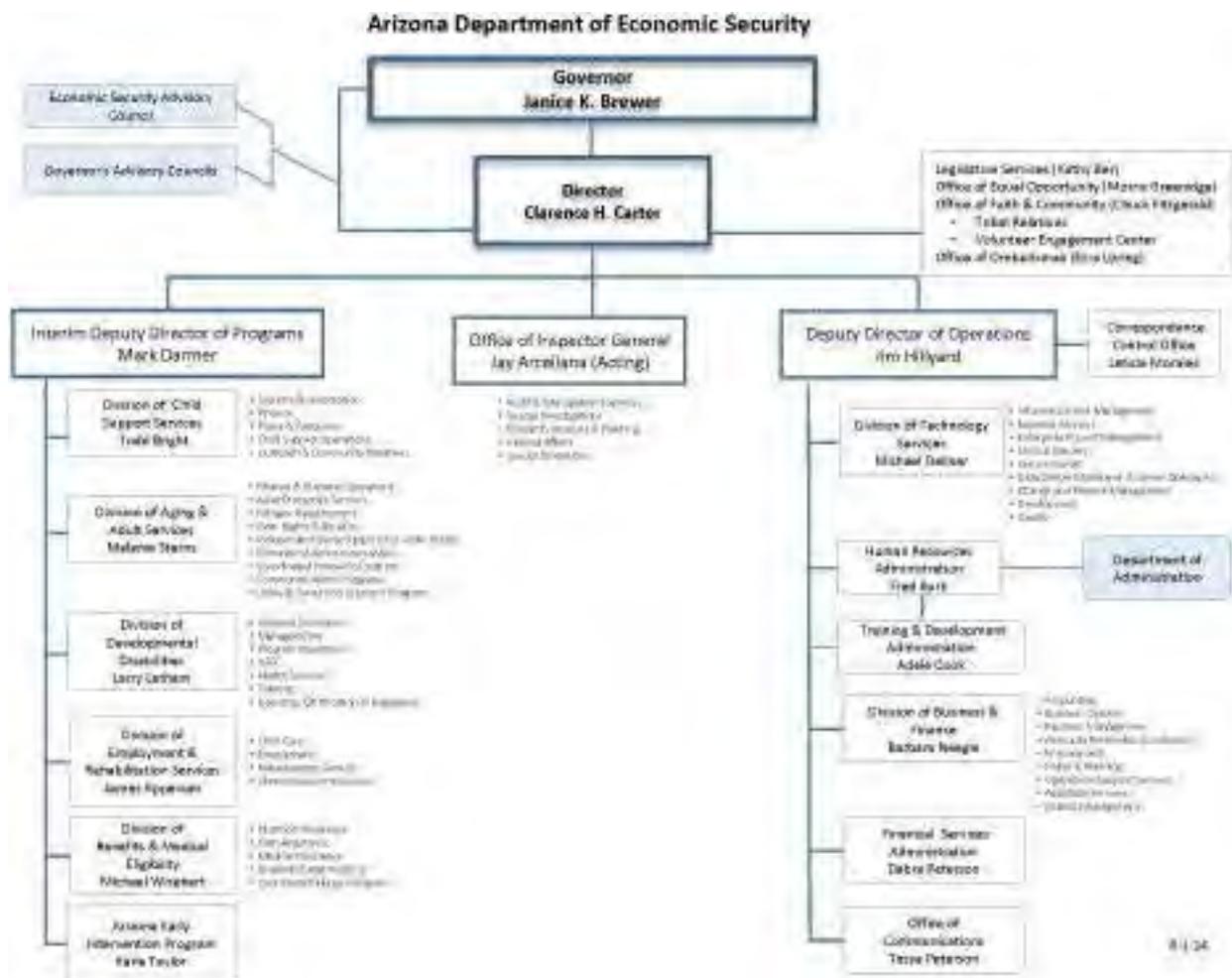
Cognitive disabilities include developmentally delayed (e.g., 12 year-old minds in 32 year-old bodies), people with mental disorders including those on the Autism spectrum, ADHD, borderline personality disorder (BPD) and Down syndrome. It includes people with mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, depression, psychosis, bipolar disorder, and fetal alcohol or substance abuse syndrome. Many people who had led normal lives fell into this category as a result of brain injuries. Behaviors that impede social interaction are associated with cognitive disabilities including Asperger syndrome.

From the 1980s, the policy for caring for people with disabilities has been to provide support for them to be as independent as possible in communities. Government and public agencies provide residential, independent living, community inclusion and employment services.

The first wave of people to enter the system came out of institutions. Imagine the culture shock: coming from an institution, sleeping dormitory style, sometimes in restraints, on drugs to dull the mind, with no contact with the outside world, then finding yourself sharing a home with two or three housemates, discovering and pursuing interests in the community, and getting paid to work.

Over the course of time, it became evident that the most effective way to mainstream people in the community is through employment. Early jobs were in sheltered work facilities. Workers did piece work and were paid very little based on their production. They sold their widgets and crafts to agency partners, often businesses who took advantage of cheap labor.

Today, people with cognitive disabilities are often diagnosed at a very early age. Rather than becoming social outcasts, they are mainstreamed through programs starting in early education. Early programs focused on learning life skills, cooking, cleaning, budgeting, shopping and getting a low skilled job. Recently, the focus is shifting to prepare people for a career. Service providers take each person through a path of discovery to uncover these assets, then match the person with partnering businesses to do internships.



The organizational chart of the Arizona Department of Economic Security (click to enlarge), an example of how a state manages human services.

There was a time when government supported institutions treated people with disabilities as less than human. History is a process of intellectual, moral and ethical evolution. Today, social service agencies reflect the principle that all people have the right to be free to pursue happiness to the best of their ability. Even the term for the service recipient has evolved over recent decades from patient, to client, to participant, to consumer. The current term is “customer,” which reflects the view that government services are to serve the people and providers should avoid assuming an air of superiority over the people they serve.

Foster Care

The most recent estimate of the number of American children in foster care is close to 400,000. Though staggering, this number has been steadily declining for the past decade.

Through the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process, state performance of child welfare systems is federally monitored on a variety of indicators including safety, permanency, and well-being for children. Safety outcomes measure whether children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect. Children are maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate. Permanency outcomes refer to children having permanent and stable living arrangements. Continuity of family relationships and connections are preserved for children whenever possible. Well-being outcomes measure whether families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs and children receive appropriate and adequate services to meet their educational, physical and mental health needs.

Despite increased efforts of reunification of foster children to biological parents, extended family or other adoptive parents, many American children age out of foster care without stable or permanent connections. These incredibly vulnerable young people are expected to live independently at an age when most of their peers are taking extra time to launch into financial, career and relational responsibility. Recent legislation, such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, have recognized that supports are still needed for youth even after officially aging out of state care.

Sociologists challenge the validity of the commonly held belief in the American Dream: that America is the land of limitless opportunity in which an individual can go as far as their own merit takes them. Stephen J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller, Jr. coined the term “Meritocracy Myth” — the myth that the system distributes resources according to the merit of individuals when in fact there are a variety of non-merit factors that suppress, neutralize, or even negate the effects of merit.

Maybe the time will come when every person is born into and raised by a healthy, intact family, when there will be no such thing as physical and cognitive disabilities. People will work well into their eighties, enjoy the fruits of their labor and inheritance with no need for social security, and remain healthy until their bodies abruptly cease to function and their ascension into the next world is painless accompanied by a celebration of life. That's the ideal, but not the reality. Until the time comes when all people have natural supports to live independently, advanced societies need to compensate with trained professionals in a regulated system based on evolving best practices. That means government will need to big enough to provide services for realities until faith in a better world is realized.

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