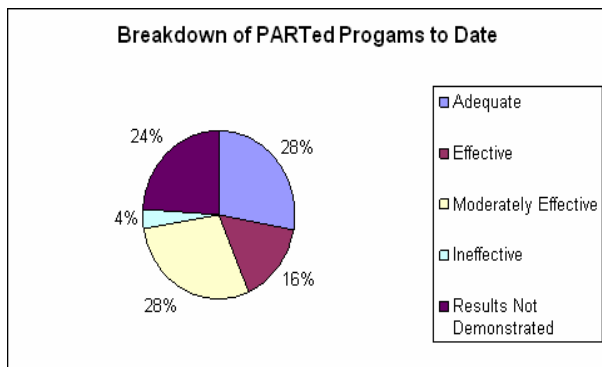




The Program Assessment Rating Tool and the FY '06 Federal Budget

The Office of Management and Budget has been claiming to measure federal programs' performance over the last four years using the Program Assessment Rating Tool. The PART, a crude and simplistic tool, measures program performance by requiring agency staff to answer a series of yes/no questions on program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, and results. The OMB scores the responses and ultimately gives each program a rating of effective, moderately effective, adequate, ineffective, or results not demonstrated.

The OMB evaluates approximately 20 percent of all federal programs each year (they have identified approximately 1150 programs as being federal programs); so far 793 programs have undergone evaluation. Below is a breakdown of how all federal programs have been rated to date.



PART and the President's FY '06 Budget

OMB Watch has analyzed the much-publicized list of 154 programs and other sections of the FY 2006 budget and compared program funding requests to the ratings received under the PART. This analysis has yielded some inconsistent and puzzling results. Out of the list of 154 programs to be cut or eliminated, more than two-thirds have never even been reviewed by the PART. It is unclear what kinds of determinations, if any, the president used to identify these failing programs when the White House budget staff has yet to assess them.

A quick review of programs rated under PART since its inception finds no logical or consistent connections with budget requests.

- Of the 85 programs receiving a top PART score, the president proposed cutting the budgets of more than 38 percent, including the National Center for Education Statistics and a land management program run by the Tennessee Valley Authority.
- Of all the programs on that list of 154 that have been reviewed, nearly 20 percent of programs receiving an “effective” or “moderately effective” PART score — the two highest ratings — were targeted for elimination. Further, 46 percent of programs receiving the middle rating of “adequate” were slated for elimination.
- Even stranger, some programs receiving the lowest score were not cut. For instance, the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant, a program that provides grants to states to address addiction problems, was given the lowest possible rating of “ineffective” but received no reduction in funding. Moreover, the Earned Income Tax Credit Compliance Program — which targets poor people who have claimed the EITC and double-checks their eligibility for the credit — was rated ineffective, yet it received a funding increase.

In the PART results in the 2006 budget, programs rated “ineffective” apparently were targeted for elimination if they were housed in HUD or the Department of Education; of the 22 programs rated ineffective, nine (41 percent) had their budgets completely cut, and seven of those were either HUD programs or Education programs.

Conclusion

There is little evidence in the FY 2006 budget to support the presidential rhetoric that results are the basis of funding decisions. The president’s rhetorical focus on performance and results seem to be just that — merely a smokescreen providing political cover for a Bush agenda that seeks to promote particular ideological policies while drastically reducing the size of the federal government.

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