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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 10, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

JIM CANNON

FROM:

JAMES E. CONNOR



The attached was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

-- Do we check to see justification of such research? Can agencies defend?

Please follow-up with the appropriate action.

cc: Don Rumsfeld

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 9, 1975

MR. PRESIDENT:

Attached is the latest Reagan
Column.

MC

Don

*Do we check to see
justification for such research?
can agencies defend?*

THE RONALD REAGAN COLUMN
(For Release In Papers Of Friday, June 6, And Thereafter)

By RONALD REAGAN

Copley News Service

Despite the economic slump of recent months, the federal "boondoggle" business is still booming.

Awhile back, the federal government gave a grant to some researchers to study something called "The Demography of Happiness." They wanted to find out why some people lead happier lives than others. They discovered that younger people were happier than older people. Those with money were happier than those who were broke; and healthy people were happier than ill people. The cost: \$249,000. Nearly a quarter of a million dollars to find out that it's better to be young, rich and healthy than old, sick and poor!

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In another case, a magazine receiving funds from the National Foundation on the Arts published a one-word poem, for which it paid the author \$500. The word was "Lighght." That would be hilarious if it weren't for the fact that some Americans go to bed hungry or without jobs while the federal arbiters of taste hand out frivolous gifts from the public purse.

The Food and Drug Administration paid a Buffalo, N.Y., firm to study why children fall off tricycles. The research engineers made these profound conclusions: children fall off tricycles because they lose their balance or collide with an object! They also learned that children's legs grow longer as they grow older, thus complicating tricycle riding.

The purpose behind the study was to help the FDA decide if it should issue safety design standards for tricycles. If the government has any business considering such things, it should only be after someone has shown that a lot of kids are injured riding tricycles. No word of such a problem preceded the study.

The venerable Smithsonian Institution (federally funded, of course) puts in for some of the most exotic boondoggles. One shopping list it sent Congress included the following research projects: Reproductive Rhythms of Catfish in India; How Fishing Boat Crews Cause Conflicts in Yugoslavian Peasant Towns; and a study of Polish Bisexual Frogs.

Such studies may serve a larger, more serious purpose, but one can only wonder why private research sources, colleges and universities aren't taking these projects on for themselves. The frog study, for example, was intended to test some new methods of distinguishing between one species of animal and another. That seems like a legitimate objective of scientific research, but is that what we have a federal government for?

While the auto and housing industries decline, there is a relatively new cottage industry that is thriving. It takes advantage of federal boondoggles in the name of science and culture.

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It consists of a small army of bright wordsmiths who will--for a fee--help prospective grantees dream up serious-sounding titles and rationale for their projects in order to impress Congress and federal agencies.

That Congress takes such stuff seriously at all is a measure of how far we have strayed from the original purposes of federal government. There are a few congressmen who battle the boondoggles, who say, in effect, "Hey, wait a minute--what business does government have paying for this? Where's the benefit to the taxpayers?" If only we had a few hundred more like them.

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