

Demanding Performance: Part I

State and Agency Missions

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What does, can, and should government do? This is a fundamental question that harkens back to first principles regarding our republican form of government. Too often, however, this question is not asked. Instead, government is called upon to solve all types of real or perceived social and economic problems. Well-meaning causes generate “mission creep,” whereby almost everything is considered within the government’s responsibility.

Government is often seen as a powerful and almost limitless resource able to call on the collective will and creativity of a rich society to take care of any issue. Indeed, government is powerful, but its resources are not limitless; government has no resources of its own, but can only expropriate resources from the governed. Government is a useful, powerful tool, and a necessary one. Government that is too broadly cast, however, can quickly become more of a burden than a help, partly because no one organization can do very many things well. Government must therefore be limited and its functions carefully considered.

The Importance of Defining Missions

State government and individual state agencies have specific reasons for existing. Whatever that purpose or mission might be, it is important for those who work within government to always keep it in mind and to point their efforts toward its achievement.

Recommendations

- 1) The Legislature should devise a formal process whereby substantive standing committees approve agency mission statements.
- 2) State policymakers should consider codifying a state mission statement that does not change with each new governor.
- 3) Agency mission statements should be:
 - concise,
 - simple,
 - operational,
 - tightly focused,
 - consistent with the state’s overall mission, and
 - achievable.
- 4) Agencies whose missions cannot be defined to meet these criteria should be restructured or abolished.

Mission statements help provide a “central, collective focus” for those who work within agencies.¹ Because there is no profit discipline in government, recognition of central missions is probably even more important than in the private sector, which makes extensive use of mission statements.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

To be sure, mission statements can be exercises in the trivial, full of useless jargon.² However, a well-designed mission statement that gets to the heart of an agency's purpose can serve as a point of reference for every task every agency employee performs and make success more likely. Maurice McTigue, former Member of Parliament and cabinet secretary from New Zealand and an expert in examining government performance, has said that "those organizations with a tight focus on their mission are more likely to be successful in achieving their mission."³ It is difficult to have a tight mission focus if the mission is not known because it is not written down. Conceptually, this has been recognized for a long time in Texas' state government. Agency mission statements have been part of strategic planning processes at least since the early 1990s.

Mission statements also inform interested citizens of what they can expect of their government more explicitly than just the name of an agency. To this end, missions should be well-known and long-standing. One of the problems with the current strategic planning system is that agencies substantially define their own missions and the mission can conceivably change with every new strategic plan.

Ideal Characteristics of Mission Statements

The best advice regarding mission statements is that they should be **concise** and **simple**. The late Peter Drucker, renowned management expert, said a mission statement should be less than a paragraph.⁴ Otherwise, the mission is very likely too broad.

Simplicity demands clarity. There should be no jargon. After reading a mission statement, the reader should know very precisely what the job or purpose of an agency is. The mission statement should not be aimed only at people "in the know" such as agency bureaucrats, legislative staff, or elected officials responsible for the state's budgeting. It should be aimed at a general reader with general knowledge.

Drucker also said that a mission statement should be **operational**—i.e. lead to direct action. His example was a hospital whose mission statement charged it with improving the health of the community. So many different things could have been done to meet this mission that the mission produced stasis. It was

realized that the hospital's real mission was to address immediate health concerns in its emergency room.

Very often, a mission statement is not operational because it is not **tightly focused**. An agency that attempts to do too many things will waste valuable resources and accomplish little or nothing—or worse. Focus alone, though, is not enough. Focusing on the wrong mission might be worse than no focus at all. An ineffective agency is preferred to an effective one that is, nevertheless, doing the wrong thing.

One of the biggest problems in government is that it attempts to do too much. Economists have long recognized problems with diseconomies of scale, for example, a circumstance where size and scope simply become unmanageable, where an enterprise has grown beyond its optimal size. Even with the best of intentions on the part of all managers in such an enterprise, adequate knowledge for proper coordination of efforts and timing cannot exist. This phenomenon is most readily seen in those cases where agencies have followed policies that elected officials only belatedly learn about.

The same phenomenon can happen within an agency as well as across agencies. In many respects, for example, the Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife suffers from contradictory missions. It is in charge of conservation at the same time it is in charge of exploiting natural surroundings for recreational use. While the two missions are compatible, there are many who see them as diametrically opposed and pull the agency in opposing directions.

Every state agency's mission must be **consistent** with the state's mission. Ideally, there should be a mission associated with every program that must then comport with the agency's mission. Consistency is not easy to achieve in a political environment, but it is still worth striving for. By insisting on consistency of missions from one level of state government to another, the state's overall mission is more likely to be achieved.

This means an agency's mission must be **achievable**. Having a focused mission at the state and agency levels helps. Very often it seems policymakers promise too much. Government is not the solution to

every problem. While this might not be particularly satisfying or glamorous, it is often realistic. Policy-makers must be honest with their constituents and themselves about what government can achieve.⁵

A common trap individuals of goodwill fall into is simply thinking they know more than they really do. We live in a world of confident “experts” whose specialized training can often lead to error due to failure to take other knowledge into account. Economists Ludwig von Mises and Thomas Sowell, among others, have demonstrated how difficult it is to coordinate activities for the benefit of everyone without the knowledge that freely-functioning prices convey.⁶ Pilgrim Governor William Bradford, in the small society of Plymouth Colony, discovered how powerless he was and the remarkable power of private action, when markets were traded for government and the Pilgrims at last were able to feed themselves in abundance.⁷

The Mission of the State of Texas

Texas state government’s mission is not well defined. Of the last three governors, each has proposed a different state mission statement as part of the state’s strategic planning process. Every agency’s multi-year strategic plan is required to begin with a restatement of the state’s mission.

In 1992, Governor Ann Richards’ view of the state’s mission was:

- *To provide educational opportunities for all its people;*
- *To protect and enhance the health, well-being and productivity of all Texans;*
- *To preserve the state’s environment and ensure wise, productive use of the state’s natural resources;*
- *To build a solid foundation for social and economic prosperity; and*
- *To ensure the safety of our communities.*⁸

Under Governor George Bush it was:

*The mission of Texas state government is to support and promote individual and community efforts to achieve and sustain social and economic prosperity for its citizens.*⁹

Governor Rick Perry’s current mission statement for state government under which agencies currently conduct their strategic planning is:

*Texas state government must be limited, efficient, and completely accountable. It should foster opportunity and economic prosperity, focus on critical priorities, and support the creation of strong family environments for our children. The stewards of the public trust must be men and women who administer state government in a fair, just, and responsible manner. To honor the public trust, state officials must seek new and innovative ways to meet state government priorities in a fiscally responsible manner. Aim high... we are not here to achieve inconsequential things!*¹⁰

Each of these mission statements is quite broad. All three statements are open to interpretation, leaving much to the reader’s imagination to determine what each means. A term such as “well-being” is so open to interpretation as to be meaningless, yet it is boundless at the same time. A term like “economic prosperity” has a clear meaning but “social prosperity” is indefinable. A mission statement should help decision makers focus on critical priorities by defining them. A mission statement so broad that government would seem to have free reign to act in any area as long as it is broadly for the people’s good fails to focus on what government can actually accomplish, making it difficult for government to succeed.

In the Texas Public Policy Foundation paper, *Principles for Determining Budget Priorities*, a case was made that since individual liberty is of primary importance in Texas’ history, there is an implied mission for Texas’ state government. Accordingly, a primary mission statement for the state was proposed.¹¹

*The **primary mission** of Texas state government is to ensure individual liberty. The state must therefore protect individuals’ ability to own their own labor and property and employ them to their own personal benefit; support the operation and efficiency of free enterprise activity; provide a framework for efficient local government; and*

*provide for efficient and just civil and criminal justice systems.*¹²

This primary mission can be supplemented with a secondary mission that can be justified by government's ability to call on individuals to participate in collective actions that further the primary mission of preserving individual liberty.

The secondary mission of Texas state government is to provide for the development of basic infrastructure resources for the sake of efficiency in commerce and to provide for education systems as required by the state constitution.

State government does far more than what is implied by either of these statements, more than is necessary or desired in a society that values liberty. However, it seems useful to at least classify the remaining functions of government in some way, if for no other reason than to acknowledge these functions will not go away overnight. One is left casting about, struggling to find a unifying theme for all the state does beyond these primary and secondary missions. The following, however, seems to summarize these functions well, although it reflects an admittedly harsh judgment of a plethora of government programs.

The tertiary mission of Texas state government is to provide an economic safety net to certain individuals or groups whose plight or activity is high profile enough to get the attention of a significant proportion of Texas' policymakers.

This three-tiered mission statement violates the first criterion of a well-constructed mission statement—that it be concise. However, something as important as a mission statement for a state government must also be clear. Early in the state's history, the primary and secondary mission statements fairly consistently characterized the state's activities with the exception that the state did not even provide for infrastructure such as roads. State government's mission has become much less focused since then.

Steven Goldsmith, former Mayor of Indianapolis, was very successful in helping to revive that city's economic prospects and make its government more

effective. He took a more focused approach and based his reforms on four concepts that are very consistent with the primary and secondary mission statements above. In shortened form, they were:

- 1) [Government] should provide only those services that people cannot obtain for themselves through the marketplace.
- 2) Government should create an atmosphere in which businesses can thrive, but it cannot replace the marketplace.
- 3) [M]aximizing the range of choices people have in the free market by maximizing the amount of money they keep for themselves is the best way to guarantee health, happiness and security.
- 4) Government should be measured the same way every other enterprise is measured—by results.¹³

The fact that we must use a three-tiered mission statement to fully account for the actual activities of Texas' state government shows how unfocused its current mission has become. While some might argue that limiting the state's mission to only the primary and secondary statements is unrealistic, not doing so makes it less likely that fundamental functions of government will be accomplished.

One might be tempted to unify the government programs operating under the third tier mission by labeling them the "social safety net" function of state government, but it is broader than this. For example, support of "the arts" is hardly providing a social safety net to the unfortunate. In fact, many of those who are patrons of government-subsidized art are quite well-to-do. What "the arts" have in common with "the homeless," however, are vocal advocates—seemingly the key to getting government involved in providing certain functions.

Similarly, subsidies to large companies that locate plants in Texas cannot be described as a social safety net function. These subsidies are certainly beneficial to some in the state, and especially to stockholders all over the world. The social safety net itself, such as food assistance and other welfare programs, along with programs intended to promote various indus-

tries, only fit well into the tertiary mission of government. None of these functions are consistent with either the primary or secondary missions proposed above.

Agency Missions

Agency missions must be consistent with the mission of the state. Preferably, an agency's mission would be consistent with the primary and secondary missions mentioned above. Virtually anything government does would come under the problematic tertiary mission. Current agencies should be evaluated for their missions and, if an agency's mission is generally consistent only with the state's tertiary mission, that agency should come under heavy scrutiny for elimination or adjustment.

The Legislature and the governor should play a bigger role in determining the missions of state agencies. The Legislature creates agencies, funds them, monitors them, and dictates a number of their functions. Yet, the instructions to agencies for developing their strategic plans make it clear that agencies are expected to define their own missions.¹⁴ Obviously, agencies do this in the context of enabling statutes along with historical precedent as a guide. But, having agencies substantially determine their missions seems remarkably like hiring an employee and leaving it to him to determine his own job description; rarely a wise practice. The Legislature needs to exercise closer oversight in defining agency missions.

Missions can legitimately change over time, but these changes should be carefully considered and at least deliberated by elected representatives.

Missions can legitimately change over time, but these changes should be carefully considered and at least deliberated by elected representatives. Current practice is to effectively have the staffs of the Legislative Budget Board and the Office of the Governor oversee restatements of agency missions. Legislators play essentially no role, but they should take greater

ownership and responsibility for guarding against mission creep and to keep agencies properly focused. A formal process for getting mission changes approved by legislative oversight committees should be devised—one that requires public hearings before mission changes can be approved. Legislators would be more likely to ask critical questions about whether a proposed new program or function fits into an agency's mission. This would help to counter the temptation of empire building and mission creep common in any bureaucracy.

What follows is a review of a half-dozen Texas state agency mission statements. All of these agencies were initially under sunset review and up for reauthorization by the 80th Legislature, to meet in 2007. The Texas Education Agency is no longer under sunset due to action by the 79th Legislature during its Third Called Session. Nevertheless, the sheer size of the Texas Education Agency, and the fact that public education is explicitly mentioned in the constitution, makes it an interesting subject for a review of state agency missions.

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

The TEA's mission statement has seen significant evolution in the last eight years and today is one of the better state agency mission statements:

*The mission of the TEA is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students.*¹⁵

This statement is short, concise, and to the point. It recognizes the TEA's role is limited to that of support. Its role is to transmit the wishes of the Legislature and to pass state and federal taxpayer resources through to the public schools across the state. It recognizes that schools, *not* the TEA, are in the best position to meet the educational needs of students.

The TEA's mission statement appears to assume that schools are exclusively responsible for meeting educational needs. Certainly the TEA is in a position to assist parents—i.e. taxpayers—when they need help in dealing with school districts. At best, schools (and taxpayers) can make the resources available for students to be presented with knowledge and then provide incentives for educators to present material and

encourage students to learn. Much is up to parents and students as well.

The TEA's current mission statement is not in statute although the agency mission adopted in its 1999 strategic plan was partially derived from a mission statement for Texas' public education system as a whole, enacted in 1995.[†] The TEA's 1999 mission was:

*The mission of the Texas Education Agency is to build the capacity of the Texas public education system to provide all students a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation.*¹⁶

This mission statement was taken virtually word-for-word from statute, which has a mission statement intended for the public education system in general. The TEA simply added the phrase "build the capacity of" to make the system's mission its own.¹⁷ Thus, the TEA's mission statement became too broad. What would have been better is if the TEA had been tasked in its mission with *checking* to see if the public education system was achieving its mission and then reporting this to the Legislature.

A particularly unsatisfying mission statement for the TEA was that in the 1992 and 1995 strategic plans, to wit:

*The mission of the Central Education Agency is to develop and support a learning environment for students of all ages with the goal of attaining excellence and equity in achievement for everyone served by the Texas public education system.*¹⁸

This mission statement envisions a very muscular TEA. It puts the TEA in the position of "developing" a statewide "learning environment." Just what a

"learning environment" constitutes is a bit of a mystery. If it is schools, then school should be part of the mission statement. No clearer is what "equity in achievement" might mean, though "excellence" implies a very lofty goal that is probably incompatible with achievement equity given that students' abilities vary. This statement is overly broad, promises more than can ever be delivered, and quite frankly, is not clear. It is a good example of how lack of focus leads to no focus at all. This statement leaves a lot of room for almost anything the TEA might attempt to fall within the confines of its mission statement.

Obviously, there will always be some agency to distribute funds to local schools. Any such agency will fit within the secondary mission of state government. However, wholesale social or educational transformation is outside the ken of state government. In addition, the current system of public education is not required in the state constitution. The Legislature could make suitable provision for a wholly different type of system and the TEA's mission would have to adapt accordingly. For example, a system like that of New Zealand's in which parents exercise freedom of choice would be compatible with the state's constitution.

The TEA's current mission statement might best be restated somewhat to read:

The mission of the TEA is to administer the funding system for public education, provide leadership and guidance to assist schools and parents in their efforts to educate students, and administer the school accountability system to ensure taxpayer resources are used efficiently.

Though longer than its current mission statement, this proposed statement does serve to provide even greater focus. It also makes it clear that the TEA is not the benefactor of Texas schools. It is only an administrator and monitor of funding that passes through it, ultimately from taxpayers.

[†]Section 4.001(a), "Texas Education Code states: The mission of the public education system of this state is to ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation. That mission is grounded on the conviction that a general diffusion of knowledge is essential for the welfare of this state and for the preservation of the liberties and rights of citizens. It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to a strong, dedicated, and supportive family and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child."

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)

Section 493.001 of the Texas Government Code specifies the mission of the TDCJ, maybe the only instance of where this is done by the Legislature:

The mission of the department is to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society, and assist victims of crime.

If an uninformed reader were only given the name of the agency and this mission statement, he could almost be excused for still not knowing the TDCJ is in charge of the state's jails. The TDCJ mission statement is too general, saying it is to provide "public safety." Texas has an entirely separate Department of *Public Safety*. The TDCJ mission statement therefore appears to duplicate another agency's mission. While it is true that jailing felons protects the public, the term "public safety" has a different connotation and would seem to encourage the TDCJ to broaden its true mission into solving crimes.

Victim assistance may also broaden the TDCJ mission excessively. It is difficult to conceive that an agency focused on incarcerating law violators could ever assist crime victims effectively, although it is important for the TDCJ to cooperate with efforts to assist crime victims. The Attorney General's office has a crime victims' assistance section. Given the Attorney General's charge to represent the people, its legal staff that can work to have sentencing changed for the sake of victim assistance, and the fact that the Attorney General is elected and likely to bow to pressure to assist victims, it seems most appropriate to have an elected official fully oversee such a function.

The TDCJ would probably be better served by its mission statement from its 1992-98 strategic plan, which was also based on the Government Code. It stated the TDCJ was responsible for:

- *The confinement, supervision and rehabilitation of felons.*
- *The development of a system of state and local punishment, supervision and rehabilitation programs and facilities.*
- *The reintegration of felons into society after release from confinement.*¹⁹

This is far more focused and meaningful, getting to the heart of what the TDCJ is all about. Nevertheless, it is true that the job of the TDCJ is broader than just being in charge of incarcerating law breakers. Increasingly, there is interest in exploring new ways to punish these individuals as well as more effective ways to make them contributing members of society.²⁰ To that end, the TDCJ mission statement might better be stated as:

The mission of the department is to administer and carry out punishments of criminal offenders as specified by Texas' system of criminal justice, to administer a secure incarceration system that promotes the reintegration of felons into society after release from confinement, and to cooperate in assisting victims of crime.

This mission statement provides for the full gamut of punishments including parole and probation (though probation is currently locally administered but with pass-through funding from the TDCJ, another issue in itself).²¹ It also takes primary responsibility for victim assistance away from the TDCJ, a responsibility that is not likely to get the attention it needs from an agency mostly concerned with administering criminal punishment, though that punishment might include work programs that require restitution payments to victims that the TDCJ would have to administer.

Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC)

Although the TABC's current mission derives from statute and past mission statements, its mission is not explicitly defined in statute:

*The mission of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission is to supervise and regulate all phases of the alcoholic beverage industry to ensure the protection of the welfare, health, peace, temperance, and safety of the people of Texas, while facilitating fairness, balanced competition, and responsible behavior through voluntary compliance.*²²

This mission statement appears to basically agree with the jobs the Legislature has given the TABC in statute. Section 1.03 of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Code yields the responsibility to "ensure the protection of the welfare, health, peace, temperance, and

safety” of Texans.²³ The rest of the mission statement succinctly sums up statutes that govern the department.

Economic theory and reasoning bring into question the wisdom of a mission of any agency to essentially manage an entire industry. “Fairness” and “balanced competition” are often code words for actions taken to favor the regulated industry, often in a way that limits competition and harms consumers. The phrase “responsible behavior through voluntary compliance” was added in recent years; its meaning is unclear.

The TABC is supposed to control and regulate both the demand and supply of the alcoholic beverage industry. Its job is to enforce the law with regard to whom alcoholic beverages are sold and by whom they are consumed. At the same time, it is in charge of regulating who sells alcoholic beverages. Potentially, both sides of the market can be regulated in a way that favors one and harms the other.

The TABC’s mission is most compatible with the state’s tertiary mission. An argument can be made that the primary mission is satisfied due to people’s lives being protected. This might be true, but strict laws punishing the consequences of abusing alcohol and then, for example, driving while intoxicated, presumably serve the same purpose without recourse to a completely different law-enforcement agency and without an industry-specific, tax-supported agency being necessary. The TABC did not exist prior to the United States’ prohibition era and was only created after the repeal of prohibition. This history begs the question of whether the TABC is really necessary.

Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA)

Judging from past mission statements, the TCA appears to have been an agency in search of a mission. As stated in its strategic plan for 1992-98, its mission statement was:

The mission of the Texas Commission on the Arts is to ensure that the arts continue as a major contributor to the aesthetic, cultural, creative, and economic well-being of all citizens of Texas.

For the TCA’s existence to be justified under this statement, there would have to be some evidence that the arts were in danger of *not* continuing to be important in Texas. Then, in the 1995-99 strategic plan the mission became:

The mission of the Texas Commission on the Arts is:

- *to preserve and develop the arts and cultural industries of Texas*
- *to expand the artistic, educational, and cultural opportunities for all Texans*
- *to conserve Texas’ rich and diverse artistic and cultural heritage*
- *to encourage the utilization of the arts towards the discovery of creative solutions to address the challenges facing Texas, as we approach the 21st Century, thus ensuring that the arts continue and grow as a major contributor to the cultural and economic well-being of each and every Texan.*

The first bullet gives the first hint of the TCA’s true mission—support of the arts and cultural industries. The TCA’s mission changed again in its 1997-2001 strategic plan to:

Our mission is to conserve Texas’ rich and diverse heritage through the advancement of the arts and cultural industries. The TCA is the public sector advocate which makes possible artistic, educational, and cultural opportunities for all Texans, thus ensuring that the arts continue and grow as a major contributor to the cultural and economic well-being of our citizenry.

Except for overly-ambitious language about economic well-being, this is probably the clearest mission statement the TCA has had. It is certainly an advocate for a particular industry—the arts industry. And today, starting with the 2001-05 strategic plan:

The mission of the Texas Commission on the Arts is to develop a receptive climate for the arts through the conservation and advancement of our rich and diverse arts and cultural industries.

Here, the real mission of the TCA can still be discerned—to advance and subsidize the (non-profit) arts and cultural industries in the state. Each of the mission statements in the TCA’s history have obfuscated this fact with lofty phrases, impossible aspirations, and meaningless platitudes (“*creative solutions...as we approach the 21st Century...*”).

The TCA primarily passes out grants, some of which go to public schools. Much of the funding for the public school grants comes from the federal government. One agency that could be in charge of making the grants to schools is the TEA which already handles a good deal of federal funding, including grants, to schools.

The TCA fulfills only the tertiary mission of the state. Only a relatively few Texans benefit from its grants—those who are part of the arts community. The TCA’s function is not a critical function of state government, thereby removing the focus on critical priorities Governor Perry’s mission statement seeks. Much art is of a nature that only a limited number of people can benefit from it, making it unlikely that a cogent argument could be made that the TCA provides a general benefit to all Texans. This is an especially hard case to make when there are very healthy private art industries.

What would a TCA mission statement consistent with the proposed primary and secondary missions look like? Perhaps the TCA could serve as a clearing house of information for artists and those supporting their efforts with private contributions. This hardly seems a necessary function of government, though, and it runs the risk of having an agency push for mission creep. It is not entirely clear that an agency promoting “arts” can ensure individual liberty and provide for the development of basic infrastructure.

Texas Historical Commission (THC)

The THC has had the same mission statement at least since its 1995-99 strategic plan, which is:

*To protect and preserve the state’s historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, economic benefit, and enjoyment of present and future generations.*²⁴

This mission statement, now more than 10 years old, is one that should be emulated for its focus, its brevity, and clear meaning. The THC might arguably fulfill the secondary mission of the state. It can be said it helps to build the tourism infrastructure. However, while there are symbols of Texas’ heritage from which arguably all Texans benefit, few are under control of the THC. Those not under THC control include the Alamo, San Jacinto monument, and the Battleship Texas. If there were no other entity in Texas working to fulfill the THC’s mission, perhaps there would be a need for the agency.

As it is, the THC appears to be repetitive of other efforts to “protect and preserve the state’s historic and prehistoric resources.” These include the efforts of local governments, universities, and even private efforts, as well as efforts by other state agencies such as Parks & Wildlife. The courthouse restoration program that THC oversees *should* be local. It should be up to counties to preserve their historical courthouses. In addition, the Texas Main Street program is another subsidy to rural Texas that is more appropriately assigned to the Office of Rural Community Affairs. This program, however, mainly serves the tertiary mission of the state and should be eliminated.

It is a toss-up as to whether or not the THC should continue in existence. Its mission would seem to lend it to a very different use than that to which it is currently being put. Many historical properties are controlled by agencies whose primary missions have little or nothing to do with historical preservation. Parks & Wildlife, for example, controls the historical sites in Goliad. The THC, it seems, has a mission better oriented to promoting visits to that important historical site than does Parks & Wildlife which often sees even camping services as a drain on its resources.²⁵ Historical preservation and promotion are certainly not part of Parks & Wildlife’s mission.

Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA)

Created in 2001, the ORCA has never changed its mission statement from:

To assist rural Texans who seek to enhance their quality of life by facilitating, with integrity, the use of the resources of our state

*so that sustained economic growth will enrich the rural Texas experience for the benefit of all.*²⁶

This mission statement is very open-ended. It is also very unclear. It pledges the use of state resources, that is, the resources of all taxpayers, rural or otherwise—to sustain economic growth—presumably in rural areas—for the sake of rural Texans who want to enhance their quality of life. In short this is an urban to rural income and wealth redistribution program. It seems to presume rural Texans have a special claim on everyone else's resources in order to enhance their own quality of life.

Conclusion

Only a small sample of agency mission statements in Texas has been presented here. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of the mission statements for the agencies presented are probably not uncommon. Agency mission statements need to be concise, operational, focused, consistent with the state's mission, and achievable. Much depends on the state's mission being the same.

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Defining the state's mission is currently the responsibility of the governor. It is one way the governor is able to set the priorities of state government despite a generally weak position vis-à-vis the Legislature. If the state's mission were to be codified, the governor would be made weaker. On the other hand, state government would be more consistent from one governor to the next. No matter what the state's mission is, priorities can be set within it. Unfortunately, some past mission statements lent themselves to obscurity.

First and foremost, the Legislature, and state government, is to serve Texans as taxpayers—producers and property owners who shoulder the real responsibility for enhancing our standard of living.

The Legislature should play a bigger part in the adoption of agency mission statements. Agency missions should be approved by the substantive committees in charge of oversight for particular agencies. The general appropriations act is not where agency missions should be finally approved or established. There is already enough content handled by the appropriations process which, by default, ratifies most agencies' mission statements by accepting their strategic plans. First and foremost, the Legislature, and state government, is to serve Texans as taxpayers—producers and property owners who shoulder the real responsibility for enhancing our standard of living. With well-defined state and agency missions, that mission will be better satisfied. ★

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Endnotes

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²For a humorous look at mission jargon in the private sector, see <http://www.dilbert.com/comics/dilbert/games/career/bin/ms.cgi>.

³See Note 1.

⁴Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices*, audio recording, HarperCollins (1992).

⁵For a recent discussion of this issue from non-theoretical perspective see Peggy Noonan, “The Complexity Crisis,” *Opinion Journal of the Wall Street Journal*, 13 July 2006, <http://www.opinionjournal.com/columnists/pnoonan/?id=110008644>.

⁶Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (Ludwig von Mises Institute: Auburn, AL, 1998) and Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge & Decisions* (Basic Books: New York, 1980).

⁷William Bradford, *History of the Plymouth Settlement: 1608-1650*, rendered into modern English by Harold Paget and published in 1909, originally titled *Of Plymouth Plantation*, reprint by Mantle Ministries: San Antonio, TX (1988) 115-116 and 141-142.

⁸This mission statement is in all agency strategic plans. See, for example, Texas Department of Transportation, *Strategic Plan, 1992-1997*, State of Texas: Austin (1992).

⁹See, for example, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, *Strategic Plan, 2001-2005*, State of Texas: Austin (2001) <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/pubs/stratplan01-05/govvision.html>.

¹⁰Governor’s Office of Budget, Planning and Policy; Legislative Budget Board, *Instructions for Preparing and Submitting Agency Strategic Plans, Fiscal Years 2007-2011*, State of Texas: Austin (Mar. 2006) 33, <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/bpp/files/2007splaninst.pdf>.

¹¹Talmadge Heflin and Byron Schломach, *Principles for Determining Budget Priorities*, Texas Public Policy Foundation, (June 2006) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2006-07-PP-budgetpriorities-bsth.pdf>.

¹²Ibid, 2.

¹³Bob Williams & Lynn Harsh, “Determining Core Functions,” *Stewardship Project*, Evergreen Freedom Foundation (2003) 1-6, <http://www.effwa.org/pdfs/stewardship2003.pdf>.

¹⁴Governor’s Office of Budget, Planning and Policy; Legislative Budget Board, 5.

¹⁵Texas Education Agency, *Agency Strategic Plan, 2007-2011*, State of Texas: Austin (July 2006) 12, http://www.tea.state.tx.us/stplan/0711_stratplan.doc.

¹⁶Texas Education Agency, *Agency Strategic Plan, 1999-2003*, State of Texas: Austin (June 1998).

¹⁷Section 4.001(a), Texas Education Code.

¹⁸Texas Education Agency, *Agency Strategic Plan, 1992-1998*, State of Texas: Austin (Apr. 1992).

¹⁹Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *Agency Strategic Plan, 1992-1998*, State of Texas: Austin (Apr. 1992).

²⁰Marc Levin, *Not Just for Criminals: Overcriminalization in the Lone Star State*, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Apr. 2005) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2005-04-pp-overcrim.pdf>.

²¹For a discussion of some of the issues surrounding the current state of Texas’ probation system see: Marc Levin, *Restorative Justice in Texas: Past, Present and Future*, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Sep. 2005) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2005-09-restorativejustice.pdf>.

²²Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, *Agency Strategic Plan, 2007-2011*, State of Texas: Austin (July 2006) 9, <http://www.tabc.state.tx.us/publications/strategicPlan07.pdf>.

²³Section 1.03, Texas Alcoholic Beverage Code, <http://www.tabc.state.tx.us/leginfo/code/79th/AllTitles.PDF>.

²⁴Texas Historical Commission, *Agency Strategic Plan, 2007-2011*, State of Texas: Austin, <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/aboutus/abtpdfs/THCStrategicPlan07.pdf>.

²⁵It is often stated that camping is a “money loser” for Parks & Wildlife. Part of this is due to the structure imposed on the agency by the Legislature and the lack of incentives to develop practices that would make camping more self-sufficient.

²⁶See the Office of Rural Community Affairs website at <http://www.orca.state.tx.us/>.

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