

Sensible cuts: no more aid for Australian political parties or Caribbean edifices

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In one piece of good news, *The Canberra Times* [reported last week](#) that the Australian Political Parties for Democracy Program is being scrapped. The controversial program, established under the Howard government, was managed by the now-departed AusAID even though only half of its activities involved developing countries.

One of us (Robin) [wrote a post on this blog](#) about the problems with the program late last year (the title of the post, 'The Australian Political Parties for Democracy Program: it covers nobody in glory' gives a pretty good indication of his view). Robin's assessment then was as follows:

"In short, this is a program that was foisted upon AusAID and should not have been. It was poorly designed, in fact not actually designed at all. Its development impact is unknown and unlikely to be significant."

So it's good that this program, which had a reputation as a slush fund for overseas travel and a poison chalice, has been chopped. The program survived for nearly a decade, so its chopping could not be considered a *fait accompli* and is a credit to the government, whose party machine is probably disgruntled.

In another piece of good news for aid effectiveness (though [the ABC and the Opposition](#) saw it differently), Grenada will [no longer receive](#) Australian aid funding to build its new Parliament House. The money (some \$5 million of it) was pledged during Australia's frantic efforts to gather support for its UN Security Council bid. While the decision to cut the funding doesn't seem to have done much for the diplomacy side of things, with Grenada's Foreign Minister [saying](#) his country had been 'blindsided' by Australia, the project really was a questionable use of aid, particularly given Grenada's high Human Development Index (a point Julie Bishop raised in her [speech](#) last week at ANU).

Are there other programs of this nature queuing for the chopping block? Not to our knowledge, or at least not in the multi-million dollar category. We think those above were pretty special – one motivated and sustained by the political parties' self-interest, the other emerging in the fevered environment of the Security Council campaign. Most of the impacts of this year's within-year aid cuts are unlikely to be as welcome.