

## SES CDP: Agency Mission

I would say that the short answer is no, that I haven't been asked to do anything contrary to the mission, but when the mission is taken away from you it presents an interesting challenge. So back in 1995 or 1996, the Bureau of Mines was targeted for closure through the appropriation process so that Congress did not fund its continuation, and my job was to develop a closure plan that would result in more than 2,000 employees being riffed and disposing of the assets of the agency including eight science centers. So that was what I think really put my leadership talents to the test and really consumed a great deal of my time. We earlier talked about health life balances, and this was a job and an outfit that took 18 hours a day, many of the time spent trying to help people sort through how to keep their families together, how to keep their career together, how to keep their life together, to help to give them some sense of hope and some sense of purpose that when this was all said and done they was still life thereafter, there were still jobs, there were still opportunities, and that's a daunting challenge. In any event, I turned to the workforce that was most affected by it, put together a number of teams, and helped them design an implementation plan that would help them work through the issues. It took us about six months. We worked through a number of – if any of you were around back in 1995 or 1996, the government was shut down. We had the contract for America and there was a policy debate between the House and Newt Gingrich and the White House and President Clinton, and consequently they got into a stalemate and we were under continuing resolutions, and so I had to issue rif notices every time they had a continuing resolution, and it sort of puts salt in the wounds of the people who

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were being told that they lost their job. It was just a friendly reminder. And by the way, the RIF (Reduction in Force) notices went out two weeks before Christmas, and it was very challenging and trying process. I had my life threatened, had to explain why there weren't any jobs left. Many of the veterans were very dissatisfied and unhappy. Many of them thought that they would have a job no matter how the RIF was conducted, and that's probably true with the exception of there's no jobs left, and so that was very challenging dealing with the disposition of the assets, cleaning up the laboratories. There's just a whole range of issues that you never even thought of until you're asked to carry that out. What you find out is several things. One is that you need to take care of your own career. You can't rely on the system. It didn't matter how well people performed because at the end of the day when they decided to close the agency the best performers were still out of a job. So the lesson there is do what you can and make sure you take control of your career so that you can deal with things as you see them coming.

I think that as we carry on our responsibilities we are the keepers of our agency mission, we are the keeper of the laws, we are keeper of ethics that underlie everything that we do, and from time to time there are circumstances that come up that may be driven by an individual from higher up. They may be driven by a desire from an outside group to accomplish something that challenges how we might move forward. Your question specifically is have you been asked to do something that was wrong. Well, certainly, but I think that what we need to do as

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good civil servants is to weigh those things that I talked about agency mission, the legalities of the circumstance, and right and wrong, and we have then a responsibility to attempt to do the right thing. If that is pushed back to the individual or group of individuals and say here are the issues. Our agency mission is this. It does not square with that. I've got an alternative solution. It's always good to offer alternative solutions if you can come up with an alternative solution, even if it isn't necessarily a solution in their mind, at least being willing to give what would be the proper solution from an agency mission standpoint. Then think about the policy and the laws, certainly to give the information about why current policy wouldn't allow that, why laws may or may not allow that, and be open in that discussion. At some point an individual perhaps above you that is gonna make that decision needs to weigh all of those things and make that decision. If you can get to a point through those discussions where you're comfortable in making that decision from a mission standpoint and a legal standpoint and a policy standpoint, then that's good. That conversation has worked well and maybe you found a way through. If not, first and foremost I think that you had a responsibility as a civil servant to portray all of the ins and outs and maybe where the opportunities lie and help perhaps plot a different course that might be acceptable, but if you reach a point that it can't be an acceptable outcome then you've done your responsibility as a civil servant. They have received the information that they need to make the decision, and at that point we're all empowered at our different levels to make decisions with certain degrees of risk, and if they want to go forward I think you've done their job, they

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go forward with that decision and they feel comfortable that they have the authority and can own the responsibility of making that decision, everything has been done appropriately, and at that point time will tell, and certainly as the analysis after the fact is done, right from wrong will definitely be ferreted out and we'll know what the right answer was or if the answer was acceptable.