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NEAL

Don't Just Talk About Making Government Work

April 12, 1993|By NEAL R. PEIRCE

Washington -- Starting with President Bill Clinton, this town's newest phrase is "reinventing government," a tribute to David Osborne, whose "Reinventing Government," last year, may be the first public administration book ever to make a best-seller list.

But it's not just "the feds" who have the problem of overlapping bureaucracies, antiquated personnel systems and turned-off workers. The best state and local government leaders also know that without radical changes in how they do business, there will be no way to finance the schools, road building, health, criminal justice and the myriad other challenges they face in the '90s.

Enter a new organization to help them out. Its chair is none other than David Osborne, who says governments must now go through the same radical restructuring that is sweeping through American business. His Alliance for Redesigning Government will try to connect the thousands of government reformers who now, in his words, find themselves part of "a movement without a central nervous system."

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Home for the new alliance is the congressionally chartered National Academy for Public Administration, now shifting under a new president, R. Scott Fosler, to the kind of "entrepreneurial" mode Mr. Osborne recommends for government itself. As a journalist "fellow" of NAPA, this writer has been working with Mr. Fosler, Mr. Osborne and Alliance director Barbara Dyer to launch the effort.

As a first move, we decided to assemble a balanced, bipartisan advisory committee of government officials, labor, nonprofit and media leaders. Aiming for 20 acceptances, we sent

- Phillies
- Spirit Halloween
- Halloween Costumes

out 40 invitations. To our astonishment, 37 people accepted.

Just a sampling of the list includes our vice-chairs, Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts (D) and former Indianapolis Mayor William Hudnut (R), U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Govs. William Weld (R-Mass.) and Roy Romer (D-Colo.), and Mayors Sharpe James (Newark) and John Norquist (Milwaukee). We also have such star city managers as Camille Barnett (Austin) and Robert Bobb (Richmond).

Public employee unions, still suspicious about "reinvented government," have also signed on through such leaders as Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers and Gerald McEntee of AFSCME.

An early project suggested for the alliance, in fact, would be a "design lab" bringing together public employee union leaders with state-local level executives to design guidelines for less adversarial management-labor relations.

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