

# WebMemo



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## Grants Should Not Be the Pork to Feed State Homeland Security Spending

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States are slashing budgets as current economic woes put the squeeze on state finances. States' use of homeland security grants to supplant state homeland security spending is widespread even in the rosier of economic times. In the current fiscal climate, however, such toxic misappropriation could explode into an epidemic. Subsequently, Congress must not allow homeland security grants to masquerade as an entitlement program for the states.

**Free Money.** In recent years, DHS has given states a significant amount of grant money—\$23 billion since 9/11—for homeland security projects. Many state and local government representatives will admit off the record that these federal funds are increasingly used to supplant state homeland security spending. This trend is demonstrated by the fact that federal spending on homeland security grants has consistently increased while state homeland security spending has remained flat or maintained the same growth pattern as state spending on transportation, education, and health care.

**Enabling State Addiction.** Effective disaster preparedness begins at the state and local levels. Instead of encouraging states to develop their own programs, Washington acts as an enabler for the state addiction to federal grant dollars, requiring little accountability via matching grants and consistently allocating more money regardless of how past funds have been spent. Such a lack of oversight provides little incentive for the states to accurately mea-

sure risk and make progress toward the development of robust state-based homeland security programs commensurate with that risk. A federalized approach to disaster response not only encourages over-investment in capabilities across the United States, but it also undermines the sovereignty of the states. Jonesing for a quick hit of federal money, states are willing to cede the responsibility of choosing the right course of action for its citizens, a role protected under traditional state police power.

**Reform the Current Approach.** Washington should not become a cash-cow for homeland security spending. Subsequently, Congress should:

- **Conduct a national capabilities assessment.** Grants are entirely useless if not used in a manner that addresses gaps in current capabilities. In order to ensure that grants are allocated on a capability basis, DHS should conduct a national capabilities assessment based on the Target Capabilities List (TCL).
- **Eliminate state minimums and maximums on grant allocation.** Upper and lower limits on grant funding are based on the unfounded idea that each state needs a slice of the homeland

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[www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm1995.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm1995.cfm)

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security grant pie. The fact is that not all states encounter identical levels of threats, so precious dollars should be used to identify and target gaps in capabilities. With \$23 billion already spent, lower risk jurisdictions should have put in place the minimum capabilities they needed. By using the TCL, if remaining gaps in those lower risk jurisdictions remain, then additional federal funds can be awarded.

- **Require matching state contributions.** Congress should require recipients of grant funding to make matching contributions. Such a requirement would ensure that states do not supplant state homeland security funding with federal grants. Furthermore, under a system where they must put some skin in the game, many jurisdic-

tions alleged homeland security needs might suddenly disappear.

**Gap Control.** Congress must not reinforce the perception that grants can be used to supplant homeland security funding. Instead, grants must be targeted to gaps in critical capabilities in our nation's highest risk jurisdictions. Congress must ensure that these grants are not used as pork to feed the states' aching budget bellies.

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