

# WebMemo



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## Don't Let the Good Die Young: Strengthening Homeland Security's Policy Office

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The fiscal year 2009 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spending bill has excluded one integral piece of the funding puzzle: the DHS Office of Policy. Congress's decision to fund the Office of Policy well below the levels requested by the President is a mistake. The Office of Policy plays a vital role within DHS. Therefore, Congress should fully fund its operations.

**Much Better Than Nothing.** When the DHS was created in 2002, the Office of Policy was not part of the initial organization. The need for such an office, however, quickly became apparent. In the years immediately following DHS's founding, the fledgling organization was overwhelmed by the need to integrate the policies and programs of many established government agencies. Additionally, DHS lacked the means to develop a comprehensive strategy under which the new department would operate. In 2005, Congress—recognizing the need to address the policy obstacles facing the Department—created the DHS Office of Policy.

Since its inception, the Office of Policy, headed by Assistant Secretary for Policy Stewart A. Baker, has achieved significant benchmarks with regards to policy strategy, such as increasing the role of the private sector in DHS projects.

Not only has the Office of Policy performed well thus far, but it recently began work on the critical Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR). This review, the first ever for DHS, is modeled after the Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review and will analyze the current state of the DHS

in addition to developing long- and short-term strategies for the DHS based on current assets, capabilities, policies, and financial and legislative restraints.

**Funding Shortage.** The President requested approximately \$43 million in his FY 2009 budget for the Office of Policy. The House, however, did not approve the full amount, leaving a shortage of almost \$1 million. Given the enormous homeland security budget, the deficit between requested and appropriated funds may seem menial. However, this money is significant to integral Office of Policy programs, including the QHSR, the Homeland Security Advisory Council, and other crucial projects related to immigration, international relations, and strategic planning. Furthermore, the deficit raises concerns over a greater problem: Congress fails to recognize the vital role that the Office of Policy plays in DHS operations.

Not only has Congress failed to fully fund the office, but it is also considering actions that might derail implementation of the QHSR. The Senate version of the appropriations bill contains limitations on the QHSR, providing that contractor funds can be used only for administrative and clerical tasks—not for implementation. A successful attempt to

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[www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2012.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2012.cfm)

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limit the use of contractors would constitute a significant setback, as the Office of Policy lacks the in-house capacity to implement projects.

Congress must attempt to remedy this funding disparity in Conference. The right remedy, however, must be more than a quick funding fix. Subsequently, Congress should:

- **Fully Fund the Office of Policy in Accordance with the President's Request.** The President recognized the importance of the work performed by the DHS Office of Policy and subsequently sought to reinforce these efforts through his funding request. Congress should recognize these achievements, as well as the vital role the Office of Policy's projects play in the overall DHS mission, by providing full funding.
- **Hold Contractors Accountable.** Congressional concerns regarding the over-reliance on contractors regarding the QHSR may be well-intentioned. Congress, however, must focus on the positive benefits that the QHSR will produce and recognize that DHS simply lacks the in-house staff to execute the QHSR without contractor support. Congress can ease its concerns over contractor involvement by insisting that contractors chosen are well-qualified and subject to sufficient oversight throughout the QHSR process.
- **Create a Policy Undersecretary.** Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff rightly sought to establish an Undersecretary for Policy

within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to conduct program analysis, perform long-range strategic planning, and undertake net assessments. He has already established a directorate of policy under Assistant Secretary for Policy Stewart Baker. Now, Congress must elevate Baker's position to the undersecretary level.

As part of effective oversight, DHS can encourage Congress to fully fund important DHS initiatives, such as the QHSR, by consulting with Congress throughout the QHSR process. This process should be a dialogue and not just another deliverable. Dialogue will allow Congress and DHS to fully institutionalize the QHSR, identifying lessons learned and effective strategies, thus improving the process for coming years. Finally, such dialogue will allow Congress to guarantee that contractors are subject to sufficient metrics.

**Setting an Example.** The Office of Policy is an example of the right direction for the Department of Homeland Security. The office is forward-thinking and tasked with projects, such as the QHSR, that will have a meaningful impact on the future of the DHS. Congress must not let politics stand in the way of securing the homeland.

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