

WebMemo



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More Byrne JAG and COPS Funding Will Not Stimulate the Economy

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While the “economic stimulus” legislation (H.R. 1) developed by Congress was originally intended to stimulate the economy, the legislation has now become a political Christmas tree filled with goodies for special interest groups.¹

With \$550 billion in new spending up for grabs, special interest groups—including governors, big city mayors, and other local officials—have lined up for their share of the new funding. For example, the U.S. Conference of Mayors published a wish list of over 1,500 pork barrel public safety projects that should be funded by state and local governments and not the federal government.² In response, the U.S. House of Representatives allocated \$3 billion for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program and \$1 billion for the hiring or rehiring of additional police officers under the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). Both of these grant programs subsidize the routine operations of local law enforcement and do not fund law enforcement activities that are the responsibility of the federal government.

First, adding Byrne JAG and COPS grant funding to the economic stimulus package will do little to stimulate the economy, let alone reduce crime. Instead, these additions will encourage state and local governments to shirk their responsibility for funding public safety programs and become more dependent on funding from the federal government. Furthermore, additional COPS funding is unlikely to produce a net gain in officer staffing

levels, and Byrne JAG grants do not fund critical drug enforcement activities.

More Byrne JAG and COPS Funding Will Not Stimulate the Economy. The activities funded by grant programs such as Byrne JAG and COPS are not the types of activities that will provide a stimulus or a “shock” to the economy. Instead, these grants may actually reduce economic growth. An analysis of the effect of intergovernmental revenues and combined transportation and public safety expenditures on economic growth revealed negative effects.³ This study found intergovernmental revenues and total expenditures for transportation and public safety to be negatively associated with economic growth on the state-level. While establishing legal institutions to protect property rights and enforce the rule of law and contracts are vital to supporting economic activity, our nation has already developed these institutions. Thus, massive increases in funding for federal law enforcement intergovernmental grant programs are unlikely to stimulate economic growth and may actually produce negative results.

More COPS Funding Is Unlikely to Produce a Net Gain in Officer Staffing Levels. Proponents of

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additional COPS hiring grants claim that funding will be used to increase the number of middle-class jobs.⁴ However, this assumed effect is unlikely to occur. COPS hiring grants will be used to supplant local funding. Audits by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General found that cities failed to hire the number of officers required and did not comply with other grant conditions.⁵ In addition to finding COPS hiring grants had little to no impact on crime rates, a 2006 Heritage Foundation Center for Data Analysis evaluation of COPS for 58 large cities revealed that these cities substituted COPS grants for local funding.⁶

Based on past experience, there is no reason to believe that new COPS funding will not be wasted. First, instead of hiring additional officers, many cities will use the grants to pay for the salaries of currently employed officers. Second, other cities will hire the additional grant-funded officers, but these new officers will not raise staffing levels due to the attrition of officers through retirement and transfers. Thus, the COPS hiring grants are unlikely to result in a net gain in officers.

Byrne JAG Grants Do Not Fund Vital Drug Enforcement Activities. The major argument for increasing funding for Byrne JAG grants is that multi-jurisdictional drug task forces operated by state and local governments will cease to exist with-

out an increase in grant funding. Last year, special interest groups seeking their share of federal taxpayer dollars sent a letter to the chairs and ranking members of the appropriations committees in Congress stating that, without an infusion of new Byrne JAG grant funding, most multi-jurisdictional drug task forces “will be forced to close within the coming months.”⁷ In addition, the president of the National Narcotics Officers’ Associations Coalition testified in 2006 that any reduction in funding for Byrne JAG grants “will effectively cripple multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement at the local and regional levels.”⁸ But if these multi-jurisdictional drug task forces are so important to public safety, then why are state and local officials unwilling to fund these programs without the federal government footing the bill? If these task forces are so vital, then state and local officials would be willing to fund them without federal subsidies.

Encouraging Dependency. The inclusion of Byrne JAG and COPS funding in the economic stimulus package will be exceedingly unlikely to produce any stimulus for an economic recovery. Further, Byrne JAG and COPS grants subsidize the routine activities of local law enforcement. The activities funded by these grants assign to the federal government functions that fall within the expertise, jurisdiction, and constitutional responsi-

1. To review the contents of H.R. 1, see <http://www.readthestimulus.org>.
2. Manuel A. Diaz and Tom Cochran, “Mainstreet Economic Recovery: ‘Ready to Go’ Jobs and Infrastructure Projects,” U.S. Conference of Mayors, January 17, 2009, at <http://www.usmayors.org/mainstreeteconomicrecovery/documents/mser-report-200901.pdf> (January 26, 2009).
3. Stephen M. Miller and Frank S. Russek, “Fiscal Structures and Economic Growth at the State and Local Level,” *Public Finance Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1997), pp. 213–237.
4. Hearings, *Helping State and Local Law Enforcement in an Economic Downturn: Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy*, Judiciary Committee, U.S. Senate, 111th Cong., 1st Sess., January 8, 2009, at http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=3611&wit_id=2629 (January 27, 2009).
5. For a discussion of the Inspector General audits, see David B. Muhlhausen, “Impact Evaluation of COPS Grants in Large Cities,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA06-03, May 26, 2006, pp. 16–18, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/cda06-03.cfm>.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Robert E. Brooks, *et al.*, “Restoration of Funding for the Byrne Justice Grant (JAG) Program,” letter to chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, April 17, 2008, at <http://www.ncja.org/Content/NavigationMenu/GovernmentAffairs/Appropriations/SpreadthewordaboutcutstoJAG/Byrne-JAGCoalitionRestorationLetter4-17-08.pdf> (January 27, 2009).
8. Ron Brooks, testimony before Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, May 23, 2006.

bilities of state and local governments. Additional grant funding would encourage state and local officials to become even more dependent on federal grant funding by shifting accountability for local crime away from state and local governments and toward the federal government.

Combating ordinary crime is the principal responsibility of the state and local governments. If

Congress wants to aid in the fight against crime, it should limit itself to unique roles that only the federal government can play. The federal government should not become a crutch on which local law enforcement becomes dependent.

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