

ISSUE BRIEF

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Proposed Revisions to Homeland Security Grants Make Sense

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The Obama Administration's adoption of much of the previous Administration's policies on fighting the war against terrorists is well known. Less well known is the increasing move toward other homeland security grant policies formulated in 2005 and early 2006.¹ These moves, including the adoption of a risk and need model for allocating homeland security grants, are to be rightly applauded, as these reforms ultimately increase the security of America.

“Reforms” Mirror Previous Policies. First, in April 2011, the Obama Administration released Presidential Policy Directive-8 (PPD-8) claiming to update national preparedness policy. PPD-8 merely restated what President George W. Bush had articulated in December 2003 in Homeland

Security Presidential Directive-8. PPD-8 called for a national preparedness goal and a focus on capabilities, which mirrored the Interim National Preparedness Goal and the Target Capabilities List (TCL) released in 2005.

Next, in May 2011, the Obama Administration finally reversed the indefensible growth of cities receiving Urban Areas Security Initiative funding. It reduced the number of cities from 63 to 31, which closely matched the level of 35 fully eligible cities announced in January 2006 by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff.² Unfortunately, after the reduction in 2006 to 35 cities, the number of cities expanded each year until last year.

Now, this latest “reform” to the homeland security grants program represents a reformulation of yet another previous Administration policy. Though nearly \$40 billion already has escaped out the proverbial barn door, allocating future funding based on the “new” vision will increase the security and accountability of the programs and, more importantly, better secure the United States.

Imitation Is the Highest Form of Flattery. On January 3, 2006,

DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff held a press conference announcing significant reforms to the homeland security grant program. Here is the core message he delivered six years ago:

What we have to do is drive these decisions by looking at where the major risks are and allocating our priorities accordingly. We have to invest our federal money strategically, protecting those communities where there are national and regional implications, using a disciplined analytical method that properly evaluates the risks... .

Anybody who looked at what happened, for example, in Katrina and Rita understood that even if the hurricane was directed at a particular jurisdiction, the effects were felt within the entire region. The whole region had to chip in, in terms of assisting. And of course, the region bore the brunt of the evacuations. So we're going to use this regional approach to be more sensible in terms of how we allocate money, focusing on where we think threats naturally occur in

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terms of geography, as opposed to where political jurisdictional lines happen to be drawn... .

And the analysis then has to consider what are the needs you're going to be addressing with the particular investments you want to make ... [t]hat makes sure that not only are we allocating funding based on risk, but that the funding is being used to build the kinds of nationally critical capabilities that we've identified based on experience.³

More specifically, the need element required each jurisdiction to identify "needs and (outline) the intended security enhancement plan to be addressed with funding, to meet the target capabilities outlined in the National Preparedness Goal."⁴

That sounds similar to what was stated in the FY 2013 National Preparedness Grant Program Vision Document released February 13:⁵

FEMA will base funding allocations on prioritized core capabilities as well as comprehensive threat/risk assessments and gap analyses. Specifically, allocations will consider current threat data (including domestic extremist

threat input from the FBI), the needs identified in each state's Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, the Strategic National Risk Assessment and National Preparedness Report, and a regional risk assessment of gaps in national core capabilities (the FEMA Regional THIRA). Emphasis will be placed on building core capabilities that can be utilized nationally and regionally.

This new focus is nearly identical to the focus outlined in 2006, and we vigorously applaud DHS's adoption of it and of the recommendations made by The Heritage Foundation over the past five years. As they say, better late than never.

Highlights of the New Direction. We applaud other elements of the new grant program. The Administration's new focus does the following:

- **Makes the grant program multi-year.** First, as we advised with the transition from grants to cooperative agreements (an additional move not made by DHS), making the grant program a multi-year program will allow greater consistency and focus among state and local

governments and reduce the paperwork that does little to improve security.

- **Allows for changing threats.** The decision to reserve a portion of funding in a competitive pool for the "development of new capabilities for which a need is identified" allows for adjustments to be made as threats change over time. After Hurricane Katrina, DHS added several new capabilities to the TCL based on lessons learned from that event, so we know new capabilities will emerge as time passes.
- **Protects critical infrastructure.** Another important focus is on "critical infrastructure and key resource protection and long-term vulnerability reduction." As the threat of homegrown terrorists increases, a recommitment to protecting vulnerable assets that could result in severe consequences in terms of life and property is wise.
- **Prioritizes local responders.** Finally, DHS's decision to prioritize support to local counterterrorism activities is a critical one. With more than 1 million state

1. The Bush Administration policies noted herein were developed during the author's tenure as head of homeland security grants from February 2005 to January 2006. He joined Secretary Michael Chertoff at the January 3, 2006, press conference and briefed reporters on the reforms.

2. Jena Baker McNeill and Matt A. Mayer, "Homeland Security Grant Guidelines Make Security and Fiscal Sense," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3263, May 19, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/05/homeland-security-grant-guidelines-make-security-and-fiscal-sense>.

3. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Remarks at a Press Conference on the Fiscal Year 2006 Urban Areas Security Initiative Grants, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, January 3, 2006, at http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press_release_0825.shtm (February 13, 2012).

4. Press Release, "DHS Introduces Risk-based Formula for Urban Areas Security Initiative Grants," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, January 3, 2006, at http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press_release_0824.shtm (February 13, 2012).

5. "FY 2013 National Preparedness Grant Program Vision Document," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, February 2012, at http://www.wsema.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/FY_2013_National_Preparedness_Grant_Program_Overview_2-10-12_FINAL.pdf (February 14, 2012).

and local first preventers who have the experience and relationships in our communities to detect and prevent terror attacks, a federal acknowledgement of that role and pledge to support it is long overdue.

More Can Be Done. There are two elements, however, that should be revised.

First, continuing the misguided practice of giving each state and territory “a base level of funding allocated in accordance with a population driven formula” no longer makes sense. Every state and territory already has received enough foundational funding since 2003. All future

funding should be allocated based purely on risk and need.

Next, consolidating grants into a single program is the right move, but the exclusion of the Emergency Management Performance Grants and the Fire Grants is a continued concession to pork-barrel politics and utterly inconsistent with the new vision. Those programs and any funding in those programs should be consolidated into the National Preparedness Grant Program, as those programs aim to build capabilities, too.

Congress should eliminate any statutory requirements that prevent DHS from making these additional reforms.

Better Late Than Never.

Although it has taken far too long for DHS to come back to the model articulated by Secretary Chertoff in January of 2006, we must unequivocally applaud these reforms as better late than never. As long as DHS adheres to the vision outlined during the grant evaluation process, these reforms undoubtedly will increase our security and elevate the accountability of DHS and grant recipients in their use of taxpayer funds.

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