

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Cutting the Commerce, Justice, and Science Spending Bill by \$2.6 Billion: A Starting Point

*Michael Sargent and Heritage Experts*

The House Committee on Appropriations has approved a draft that allocates spending for the Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) bill, the third of 12 appropriations bills the House will consider.<sup>1</sup> The proposal would spend \$51.2 billion for 2015, a decline of roughly \$400 million (or less than 1 percent) from the 2014 level.

There is still plenty of room to trim the budget in order to allocate taxpayer dollars for more effective use. Here are some recommendations that could save more than \$2.6 billion.

### **Eliminate Waste and Expand Contracting at NASA: \$417 Million**

Although NASA has endured many cuts over the past couple years, there is still waste and inefficiency in the organization's multi-billion-dollar budget. For example, NASA's Advanced Food Technology Project has used funds to establish a menu for food items for a trip to Mars, despite the fact that NASA has no current plans for a manned Martian expedition.<sup>2</sup>

Congress should also require NASA to expand its contracting with private firms to provide space transportation and rockets. Using the \$4.17 billion the CJS bill provides for space exploration as a benchmark,

even a 10 percent cost reduction from increased contracting would yield \$417 million in savings.

### **Eliminate the National Science Foundation (NSF) Education and Human Resources Spending: \$876 Million**

The NSF has expanded far beyond its initial purpose of conducting basic scientific research. One costly example includes the NSF's forays into education. The Government Accountability Office reports that the NSF is one of five agencies that oversee dozens of teacher-quality programs, illustrating extensive overlap and duplication in the federal government.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) listed the elimination of NSF education spending in its 2013 budget options report.<sup>4</sup>

### **Eliminate the International Trade Administration (ITA): \$473 Million**

The ITA provides taxpayer subsidies for private businesses that promote their products overseas. These companies are capable of promoting their own products in foreign and domestic markets without government assistance. Moreover, the ITA enforces economically harmful anti-dumping and countervailing duty laws.<sup>5</sup> Several other agencies, including the State Department and the Department of Agriculture, also promote American exports.

### **Devolve the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) to the Local Level and Private Sector: \$350 Million**

The LSC is intended to provide legal aid to eligible poor Americans. But instead of helping disadvantaged citizens, the program panders to special

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interests using government funds. The CBO listed the elimination of the LSC in its 2013 budget options report, noting that groups that receive LSC grants already draw funding from state and local governments and private organizations, including pro bono work from attorneys.<sup>6</sup> The CBO emphasized in its 2009 report that the LSC's activities "too often focus on social causes rather than on meeting the needs of poorer people with routine legal problems."<sup>7</sup>

### **Eliminate the Economic Development Administration (EDA): \$247.5 Million**

The EDA provides taxpayer-backed investment to distressed communities in order to save or promote private-sector jobs. These economic development assistance programs are beyond the scope of a limited federal government and are prime examples of federal overreach in local affairs. They duplicate the function of many other federal agencies, including the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Small Business Administration.

As a general principle of good governance, state and local governments should be responsible for funding regional development programs, as it is their citizens who benefit directly from these programs. Devolving these activities would encourage transparency and reduce duplicative federal spending.

### **Eliminate the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership: \$130 Million**

The Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership administers government aid to small and medium-sized businesses to improve their management and operations practices. This program acts as a federal subsidy for specific consultants, business advisors, and U.S. manufacturers, providing them with an upper hand in the marketplace. Improving the efficiency and profitability of U.S. manufacturers is the responsibility of private businesses and industries—not Washington.

### **Eliminate the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA): \$30 Million**

The MBDA promotes the growth and competitiveness of minority-owned businesses through subsidies and consulting services. Any government intervention in the free market that provides a certain business with an unfair advantage over its competitors is inherently wrong—and certainly not a federal priority. The government should not use federal funds to choose winners and losers in the marketplace. Furthermore, the MBDA duplicates some of the services provided by the Small Business Administration.

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  7. Congressional Budget Office, "Budget Options: Volume 2," August 2009, p. 38, <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/102xx/doc10294/08-06-budgetoptions.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2013).

### **Reduce the Budget of the Community Relations Service (CRS): \$4 Million**

The CRS in the Department of Justice (DOJ) is intended to mediate community controversies, yet it only added fuel to the flames during the tense George Zimmerman trial in Florida. While the trial was in session, reports surfaced that CRS personnel attended meetings in the state aimed at promoting unruly protests and stoking racial disharmony. To say the least, this is a blatant violation of the CRS's own mission.

### **Reduce Funding for the DOJ Civil Rights Division: \$14.5 Million<sup>8</sup>**

The Civil Rights Department of the DOJ was the subject of an inspector general review that revealed the disturbing politicization of its ranks and biased handling of its cases.<sup>9</sup> In addition, members of the division have been accused of unchecked harassment and intimidation of employees perceived to be Republicans or conservatives. This is unacceptable for a DOJ body allegedly created to uphold the inalienable rights and equality of all Americans, including federal employees.

### **Defund the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program: \$96.5 Million**

Established during President Bill Clinton's first term, the COPS program was designed to add 100,000 state and local law enforcement officers to the country's force by 2000. Not only did COPS fail to meet this goal, but the program was also ineffective in reducing overall crime rates.<sup>10</sup>

The program also deepens federal involvement in local law enforcement—a responsibility that appro-

priately falls on states and localities. As Heritage expert David Muhlhausen states: "When Congress subsidizes local police departments in this manner, it effectively reassigns to the federal government the powers and responsibilities that fall squarely within the expertise, historical control, and constitutional authority of state and local governments."<sup>11</sup>

### **Total Savings in CJS Appropriations: \$2.64 Billion**

These cuts represent an opportunity for lawmakers to prioritize federal spending within the constraints of the budget agreement. Congress could save taxpayers \$2.6 billion or provide resources for more critical government functions.

Although the government is planning to spend \$1.014 trillion in 2015, this figure is really an upper limit, leaving room for Congress to trim unnecessary spending below that topline and reduce the projected half-trillion-dollar deficit in 2015.<sup>12</sup> Making these changes would be a prudent step to ensure that Americans' tax dollars are spent in a wiser, more cost-effective manner.

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