

Congress Shows its Disconnect Again

Citizens and local law enforcement leaders should be outraged. I am embarrassed at the lack of support for local public safety displayed by our US Congress in their most recent decision. In today's public safety environment, we are witnessing so many agencies struggling with funding at the local level. Struggling to keep their fleet fueled, equipment maintained, and fund programs that prevent crime. Many of these challenges are a direct result of growing Federal unfunded mandates, many of which are driven by homeland security, and yet the funding support once provided from the federal government through the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant is being slashed by 67% for the 2008 fiscal cycle. Sadly, these cuts are not taking place to reduce the bloated Federal deficit; they were done to fund local law enforcement efforts in foreign countries. Yes, you read that correctly, foreign countries!

Congress recently passed an emergency spending Bill, (H.R. 2642) which included \$680 million dollars for police in other countries while at the same time reducing funding for U.S. local law enforcement from \$520 million in fiscal year 2007 to \$170 million in 2008. The US Senate attempted to raise the funding to \$490 million, but the House leadership struck the language that would have given local law enforcement across the country the funding needed for multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, much needed equipment, operating supplies and the funding for treatment and prevention programs.

I was floored by the actions of our Congress and my focus transitioned to anger when I found out the funding cuts were to support local law enforcement in Mexico and South America under the auspices of counter-narcotics efforts. Congress is giving money to the Congo Police Department at the expense of U.S. law enforcement. Mexico police will be getting \$400 million taxpayer dollars. Then I became outraged when my daughter told me what she observed during a recent trip to Mazatlan. Mazatlan Police were armed with what she described as M-16 weapons, new tactical vests, new uniforms, and driving new Dodge Chargers, with custom wheels and low profile light bars. Yet in Colorado alone, we have smaller law enforcement agencies that do not have the funding to replace a worn out patrol car and these agencies are actively seeking used police vehicles through donations.

As a citizen, I want to know why our Congressional delegation can be so misguided in their priorities. Why does it continue to be acceptable in the "Beltway" to take a Bill like H.R. 2642, specifically created as emergency war funding, which is much needed support for our soldiers, and "pork" it up with millions of our hard-earned tax dollars for local foreign police. They set aside \$682 million for foreign policing and cut US local policing by \$490 million. These actions are a clear example of the staggering disconnect that exists between them and the communities that elect them.

Unfortunately, this is nothing new with our U.S. Congress. Priorities in the "Beltway" have been turned upside down in the past few years and that is why we the people, will continue to be the victims of inflated fuel costs, an ailing job market, a declining economy and now, we can include the category of diminishing public safety.

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