

The Oakland Press (theoaklandpress.com), Serving Oakland County

Opinions

Misguided priorities take local crime-fighting funds

Wednesday, July 9, 2008 3:00 AM EDT

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard is angry with the U.S. House of Representatives. So are we, and you should be, too. The House has taken a numbskull action with a large amount of our tax dollars. We don't know what they're thinking or who they're serving, but it certainly isn't the average American citizen.

In what appears to be a bipartisan action, the House failed to include more funding for local law enforcement through the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants in an emergency supplemental bill that passed.

Byrne JAG provides needed funds for multijurisdictional drug task forces and law enforcement efforts to reduce violent crime. Funds for Byrne JAG went from \$520 million for fiscal year 2007 to \$170 million for fiscal year 2008 in an omnibus spending package passed at the end of last year.

Law enforcement and public safety from across the country have been collectively working to restore the funding within the emergency supplemental appropriations bill.

The U.S. Senate had raised the figure to \$490 million but house leadership cut the language that would have given communities the money, leaving only the \$170 million, a 67 percent cut in funding.

"I've moved from frustrated to angry," Bouchard says. "If this was a lean budget (then maybe the cuts would be warranted) - but in this very bill that they dropped the Byrne JAG money, they've funded a bunch of things that I wouldn't call necessary."

So would we.

Approved spending included \$680 million to police agencies in other countries. Of that total, \$400 million is going to Mexico alone.

As Bouchard notes, the funds U.S. law enforcement agencies were seeking would have totaled only \$490 million for the whole nation.

"They're giving money to the Congo Police Department," he says. "I'm reading this and I don't believe it. I'm asking myself, 'Are they really doing this?' but apparently they are."

Dropping the funds just doesn't make sense. Particularly because the programs have been very successful.

In Oakland County, the money helps support the multijurisdictional drug and gang task force known as the Narcotics Enforcement Team.

The 67 percent cut means the elimination of two sergeants, a clerk and three prosecutors from the NET unit.

Chances are small that there will be another bill anytime soon that could reinstate the Byrne JAG funds, so local law enforcement agencies are going to have to do without the extra money.

As Bouchard says, "They set aside \$682 million for police departments in other countries and they cut \$490 million from America's police departments. It's a staggering disconnect with what is going on."

"It's inexcusable," he says. "The Republicans and Democrats in Washington are like kids in a sandbox. Meanwhile, narcotics teams are falling apart."

We agree. Unfortunately, this is nothing new. Priorities in Washington in the past few years have been turned upside down. There's not a lot people can do. They can write their congressmen and have friends and relatives from other states write their representatives.

Somehow, it would be nice if Washington could get the message and be responsible to its citizens. Unfortunately, we can't be sure when or if that will happen.

URL: <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2008/07/09/opinions/20080709-archive.prt>

© 2008 theoaklanpress.com, a **Journal Register** Property