



Fair Funding for Future Security

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

The attacks on September 11, 2001 marked the official start of a war we did not seek, against international terrorism.

Within days, we began working to improve communication among our law enforcement agencies and upgrading airline, transportation, border and port security efforts.

We also created a Department of Homeland Security charged with preventing future attacks and managing disaster responses on American soil. New attention was paid to the long-neglected security of our critical infrastructure, such as electrical grids, water treatment plants, energy pipelines, banking systems and food-supply chains.

In many cases, the federal government has funded these efforts by awarding homeland security grants to individual states. There's been major progress in upgrading infrastructure security.

But the government's initial approach treated homeland security dollars as a "pie" from which all states are able to claim a piece, regardless of their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. We cannot afford this. We must allocate our resources not on the basis of politics, but instead direct them where they are most needed.

This is a matter of great concern in Texas. Our state is headquarters for scores of energy, transportation, agribusiness and technology endeavors. Along with Louisiana, we have some 43 percent of critical U.S. oil refining and petrochemical facilities along our coastline.

Texas also must protect more than 1,200 miles of border that is increasingly acknowledged as a possible entry point for those who wish us harm – from drug runners to potential terrorists.

Texas has 16 vulnerable ports, and they are some of the busiest in the country. Houston handles more foreign tonnage than any U.S. port, and the ports of Beaumont, Corpus Christi and Texas City are also in the top 10 nationally.

Yet, as a point of comparison, in 2006 the State of Texas received just \$4.34 per capita (pop. 22,859,968) versus Vermont (pop. 623,050) and North Dakota (pop. 636,677) which received \$20.03 and \$19.42 per capita, respectively.

The amount of money that flows to Texas is important for many communities. Cities and counties all across the state must make expensive preparations to accommodate refugees and

provide assistance if disaster strikes even far-away population centers. The storms of 2005 made that clear to everyone.

Since 9/11, I have made it a point to sit down with first responders in every area of Texas to discuss their security concerns and what they can expect from the federal government. My most recent visit was to Houston, where business and community leaders joined police, fire and rescue authorities from all over Southeast Texas to outline homeland security needs.

The entire country learned just how important our region is to U.S. economic well-being when energy supplies were interrupted as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Those two hurricanes wreaked enormous damage – both direct and indirect – and the rebuilding and resettlement costs are mounting.

Earlier this month, Sen. Dianne Feinstein and I introduced bipartisan legislation to require that federal homeland security grants for state and local governments be allocated on a risk-based assessment.

Our bill, the Risk-Based Homeland Security Grants Act of 2007, will improve efficiency in distributing homeland security dollars, and ensure funding goes to projects that are most needed. It would establish a formula for these grants based on risk, and would take threat, vulnerability and consequence fully into consideration.

The federal government has distributed more than \$10.5 billion in homeland security grants over the last three years. Most of the money has been expended on worthwhile uses.

But taxpayer dollars are not unlimited. It's imperative that we channel our resources to protect those places across our nation where terrorists are most likely to strike.

Preventing tragedy and disaster is obviously an inexact process, but we owe it our best effort.

Sen. Cornyn is Ranking Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Refugees. He also serves as Vice Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference and a member of the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. He is Vice Chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: www.cornyn.senate.gov/column