

**Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**  
**“An Oversight Hearing on Reduced Federal Funding For  
Law Enforcement and the Rise in Violent Crime”**

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July 10, 2006

I am pleased to be here alongside law enforcement representatives from communities around the country. While I personally do not work the streets like these men, I do reside and work in Boston, a city that is currently facing an alarming increase in gun violence and homicide, especially related to youth and gang activity.

Misery loves company, they say. And for whatever consolation it is supposed to be — and I’m not sure there is any — Boston has lots of miserable company, based on the recently-released FBI report on crime trends for 2005.

Bostonians saw a 20 percent jump in murder for 2005 over 2004, I can only imagine how residents in St. Louis are feeling. The murder toll in the Gateway to the West increased 16 percent over 2004 but a whopping 80 percent since 2003. Cities like Nashville, Charlotte, Milwaukee and Kansas City all saw their murder counts jump more than 40 percent in one year. Even though some municipalities, such as New York and San Diego, continue to enjoy improvements in their murder rates, most American cities are struggling against the frightening tide of bloodshed.

Of course, one should not make too much of one-year changes in local crime levels-- especially murder, because of the usual fluctuations in these figures. For example, Kansas City, following the reported 40 percent surge in murder for 2005 is down for the first half of 2006. One might call it a law of crime gravity: what goes up, typically comes down.

The national crime trends provide a far more reliable and meaningful barometer, and murder was up nearly five percent; in human terms that translates to almost 800 more people killed in 2005 than the year before. Other violent crimes were up as well.

This kind of makes you reminisce about the “good old days,” just a few years ago when we were celebrating the great 1990s crime drop, as the nation as a whole witnessed a seven-year slide in violence. Of course, were it not for that huge crime drop, we probably wouldn’t see the current situation in such a negative light. To some extent, we are victims of past success.

The great 1990s crime decline was in part a result of fewer at-risk youth in the population plus more federal dollars to support children in a variety of initiatives. The crime drop was also aided by increased funding from Washington for local cops, as well as federal muscle in combating the flow of guns with the gun lobby losing its strangle-hold over the political agenda.

Well, times have certainly changed. Not only are there now more at-risk youngsters (we knew that would happen), but the resources for supporting them have been slashed by the new administration on Pennsylvania Avenue. President Bush also decimated the federal community policing program, and saddled up to the NRA as a political base. President Bush and key conservative members of Congress passed an amendment to block the release of ATF crime gun trace information, permitted the assault weapons ban to expire, and enacted a shield of immunity for the gun industry against civil litigation — who knew that that was what they meant when campaigning for tort reform?

If there is one feature that seems to define the current administration, it may be its doggedness. Even as support for the war in Iraq has sunk to incredibly low levels — in blue states as well as red ones, the President preaches that the nation must “show resolve,” “be vigilant,” and “stay the course” to defeat the “forces of terror,” borrowing a few of his favorite refrains.

Regrettably, President Bush has failed to show nearly as much resolve and commitment to our front-line of defense at home--local police protection, that is, to hometown security.

Somewhat disingenuously, President Bush during his re-election campaign stood proudly, shoulder-to-shoulder, with heroes of the NYPD in photo-ops and campaign ads, while at the same time depriving the local finest of the necessary federal funds to do the job: Keeping us safe from not just external terrorist threats but from common street crime as well.

In a classic case of money-vs.-mouth hypocrisy, President Bush says he supports the officers in blue uniforms who patrol the streets of New York and elsewhere just as much as those in green uniforms in Baghdad; but his funding priorities say otherwise.

The Bush budget proposal for fiscal 2007, like those of previous budget cycles, would further decimate federal programs on which local police agencies have depended to supplement limited local resources. The proposed cuts include an almost 80 percent cut of \$380 million to Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) for next year alone. The Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) program, which supports state and local governments in a broad range of crime prevention and control initiatives, received over \$400 million last year. This year JAG is slated for elimination

The President is clearly playing politics with policing, and jeopardizing us all in the process. Looking back over the last decade, it was the federal government's initiative to add 100,000 police officers through the COPS Office, that was key to much of the success in cutting crime through the 1990s.

Of course, COPS was one of Bill Clinton's pet programs, advocated during the 1992 campaign and delivered with Congress' aid. But President Bush, from the start of his term in 2001, targeted this Clinton program for downsizing, and regrettably he, too, has delivered on the promise.

This change in priorities is much more and far worse than the typical move in Washington politics to throw out a predecessor's agenda and replace it. This one has the tragic irony of occurring when the affected services provided by local law enforcement are as critical as ever.

Compounding the political hypocrisy is the fact that the federal government is asking local police agencies to do more, not less, in the face of a terrorist threat. If anything, the President Bush administration should be increasing local aid to law enforcement, not diminishing it.

How can the cops keep an eye on the hotspots of street crime and gang activity when there are government buildings, financial centers, and transportation hubs to patrol and protect? Still, many more Americans--mostly poor or working class folks--are murdered each year by local gunfire than were killed on 9/11 by al-Qaeda operatives. Of course, the distinction between homeland security and hometown security is that terrorism unevenly jeopardizes the wealthy and powerful, while street violence threatens the poor and powerless.

The other area of great concern involves cuts to various support programs for children, from mentoring to after-school programs. In fiscal year 2007, the proposed overall juvenile justice funding in the U.S. Department of Justice would be cut 43 percent, from \$309 million to \$176 million. For example, the \$50 million allocated for Juvenile Accountability Block Grants (JABG) in 2006 would be eliminated. JABG funds local efforts to prevent juvenile offenders from becoming career criminals. The \$10 million in funding for mentoring would also be eliminated.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) was already reduced from \$6.8 million in 2003 to \$700,000 in last year's budget. Before being cut to the bone, OJJDP was instrumental in supporting research on delinquency, offering technical assistance, and directly funding effective approaches to reduce juvenile crime.

Don't be surprised if the concomitant increase in the number of at-risk youth, especially black and Latino children with less than adequate supervision, combined with budget cuts for youth programs, translates into more increases in gang and gun violence. We're already seeing the early signs.

In closing, please understand that I am not suggesting that the recent rise in violence is reason to conclude, as did fabled Chicken Little, that the "sky is falling." Chicken Little, as you'll recall, became hysterical yet convinced Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Loosey, Turkey Lurkey, and her other frightened friends that their lives were in imminent danger. At the end of her journey, Chicken Little met up with Foxy Loxy, who knew better than to get carried

away. As far as this Foxy Loxy is concerned, we should remain calm in the wake of tragedy yet aggressively restore the funding levels for cops and kids.

The good news--or at least the encouraging word--is that the crime problem is not out of control, at least by contrast to the early 1990s when the nation's murder rate was almost twice what it is today. It is not surprising that a small bounce back would occur after the glory years of the late 1990s. But let this small upturn serve as a thunderous wake-up call down in the nation's capital that crime prevention, police funding, and gun control need to be a priority once again

I recognize that many citizens are tired of so-called "tax and spend" approaches to government. But I'm not sure what value a few hundred dollars more in the pocket when you're staring down the wrong end of a gun. The choice is ours, pay for the programs now or pray for the victims later.