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# Remove Security Barriers

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**P**RESIDENT BUSH'S re-election and the change of leadership at the Department of Homeland Security give us another chance to get homeland security right.

Created after 9/11, DHS was a swift conglomeration of 22 existing federal entities. More than 180,000 employees across the country suddenly found themselves going to work under a new boss, Tom Ridge. But it's now clear that the essential work of this department to keep America's homeland secure will be impossible if Congress does not get its house in order.

The Heritage Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Business Executives for National Security recently formed two task forces: one of academics, researchers and experts from the private sector and congressional staff to study DHS, the other of former senators, current members of Congress and former business executives to study congressional oversight of homeland security and recommend ways to improve it.

They produced more than 40 proposals. The one on which so many other improvements hinge calls for lawmakers to improve oversight of DHS by radically reducing the congressional committee structure and establishing permanent oversight committees in both chambers with jurisdiction over all homeland security activities in DHS.

Congressional oversight of homeland security has been a nightmare. The agency reported to 79 committees and subcommittees. DHS has never really become a department, but is more of a holding company of agencies all reporting to the same congressional overlords they answered to before the department was created. This fragmentation preserves the rivalries and cultural barriers that the creation of the department was intended to eliminate, and it prevents DHS from acting as a single, well-coordinated team.

This reporting structure not only prevents real oversight, it breeds caprice. It creates the conditions for midlevel subordinates to end-run the DHS leadership and appeal directly to committees with which they have long-standing relationships. All of the same fault lines that plagued the government before reorganization are still in place.

The current committee structure remains intact because it gives power and prerogative to the chairmen and members of those panels. Congressional committees seldom relinquish power, nor do politicians. But they must

if there is to be any hope of improving our nation's security. A streamlined oversight process, eliminating massive jurisdictional overlap, not only would help Congress and DHS do their jobs, it also would ensure smarter, better security at home.

Lawmakers must also fix the way they spend money on homeland defense, because spending alone will never guarantee security. Money has to be spent where it's most useful, and that's not happening today.

Current funding formulas are based more on politics and ensuring that all jurisdictions are equal than on sound security and managing risk. As an example, California, with many likely targets and 12 percent of the nation's population, received about \$5 per capita; Wyoming has been allocated closer to \$38 per person. We need to rationalize government spending, start setting priorities and recognize that not all threats are equal, nor are all targets likely.

Congress should also focus its spending to help state and local governments combine their counterterrorism, preparedness and response efforts into a national system and expand their capacity to work together to exchange and exploit information. The federal government can also help by preparing for an act of catastrophic terrorism - one so terrible and destructive that it would exceed the ability of any state or local government to respond effectively.

Finally, lawmakers should work to consolidate agencies that deal with border and transportation security and reorganize the DHS agencies that handle the critical areas of preparedness, response and intelligence. Now, eight agencies have some responsibility for border, immigration and transportation security. That's confusing for all involved. Streamlining the organization is the best way to make sure nothing slips through the cracks.

All of these reforms - and others listed in the reports - are required to ensure the United States is as safe as possible. Mr. Bush can help by illuminating the oversight travesty. But Congress must fix these problems. That's the only way to make sure DHS avoids becoming just another government agency that cannot be reformed, and starts to accomplish its vital mission of securing our nation's homeland.

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