**CRS Issue Statement on Homeland Security Appropriations**

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Jennifer E. Lake, Coordinator
Analyst in Domestic Security

Chad C. Haddal, Coordinator
Analyst in Immigration Policy

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The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, launched an intense and extended examination of the nation’s homeland security apparatus. One of the outcomes of this examination was the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS, the Department). DHS was designed to house under one roof the agencies responsible for major elements of the nation’s homeland security effort, including aviation security and the security of other modes of transportation, immigration control and enforcement, critical infrastructure protection, emergency preparedness and response, and science and technology research for homeland security. These missions continue to be of significant focus and interest to Congress. In recent sessions, Congress has grappled with a series of specific overarching issues that complicate the debates over the annual provision of appropriations for the Department.

One overarching issue confronting appropriators is determining the appropriate allocation of resources among the nation’s critical, competing homeland security mission areas. Appropriators are challenged with the difficult task of providing sufficient resources to achieve a base level of security in a volatile threat and risk environment. Appropriators must annually assess the relative importance of competing mission areas and make determinations regarding which missions will provide the most effective returns on investment. They must also evaluate how these missions fit into a broader national homeland security strategy—both between and within agencies.

One element of the debates surrounding the creation of DHS was concern over the non-homeland security (or non-terrorist-related) functions that were being incorporated into the Department. Examples of these functions include the disaster relief mission of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the maritime safety and stewardship responsibilities of the U.S. Coast Guard. Whereas the USCG retains major homeland security mission sets, after Katrina, some have questioned whether FEMA should still remain within the department. The proper allocation of resources between homeland and non-homeland security functions within the Department will continue to be a focus. FEMA’s position within the Executive Branch organization may also be an issue for Congress.

The current economic downturn will further challenge appropriators. Several DHS activities are at least partially funded through offsetting fee receipts. Many of these fees are derived from charges levied on the travel, trade, and immigration transactions that occur at the nation’s borders. When travel and trade decline, user-fee revenue declines, and thus less revenue is available to offset the Department’s appropriation. Congress faces the possibility of having to provide additional appropriations to the Department to cover the declining fee revenue. More fundamentally, questions can be raised about the degree to which inherently governmental security functions should be fee dependent. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), for example, is almost entirely fee funded.

The complexity of the structure of DHS, formed from several legacy and newly created agencies, further complicates the appropriators’ responsibility to oversee the execution of the department’s budget and evaluate its performance. This is especially difficult given the number of cross-component functions, such as intelligence, counternarcotics, and research and development activities. Funding and evaluation of these Department-wide functions will continue to be of significant concern to Congress.
Issue Team Members

Jennifer E. Lake, Coordinator
Analyst in Domestic Security
jlake@crs.loc.gov, 7-0620

Chad C. Haddal, Coordinator
Analyst in Immigration Policy
chaddal@crs.loc.gov, 7-3701

Bart Elias
Specialist in Aviation Policy
belias@crs.loc.gov, 7-7771

John Frittelli
Specialist in Transportation Policy
jfrittelli@crs.loc.gov, 7-7033

William A. Kandel
Analyst in Immigration Policy
wkandel@crs.loc.gov, 7-4703

Lennard G. Kruger
Specialist in Science and Technology Policy
lkruger@crs.loc.gov, 7-7070

Bruce R. Lindsay
Analyst in Emergency Management Policy
blindsay@crs.loc.gov, 7-3752

Sarah A. Lister
Specialist in Public Health and Epidemiology
slister@crs.loc.gov, 7-7320

Francis X. McCarthy
Analyst in Emergency Management Policy
fmccarthy@crs.loc.gov, 7-9533

Daniel Morgan
Specialist in Science and Technology Policy
dmorgan@crs.loc.gov, 7-5849

John D. Moteff
Specialist in Science and Technology Policy
j moteff@crs.loc.gov, 7-1435

Shawn Reese
Analyst in Emergency Management and Homeland Security Policy
sreese@crs.loc.gov, 7-0635

Barbara L. Schwemle
Analyst in American National Government
bschwemle@crs.loc.gov, 7-8655

Alison Siskin
Specialist in Immigration Policy
asiskin@crs.loc.gov, 7-0260