

# WebMemo



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## Homeland Security: Five New Year's Resolutions for Congress

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The task of homeland security is to help keep America safe, free, and prosperous. Congress plays an important role in achieving these goals. By any measure, 2007 was not the best year for homeland security in Congress. Its landmark legislation for the year, the “Improving America’s Security by Implementing Unfinished Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007,” did anything but what its title promised, adding numerous unnecessary mandates that were never mentioned by the Commission. At the same time, Congress left unfixed homeland security faults that have lingered for years. Congress can do better in the new year by sticking to five New Year’s resolutions that fix the errors it introduced in 2007 and address long-time oversights.

**1. Consolidate congressional oversight of the Department of Homeland Security.** Congress has failed to consolidate jurisdiction of the department under one committee in each chamber as recommended by the 9/11 Commission. DHS officials report to a plethora of committees that offer conflicting and competing guidance. Committees continue to tinker with the department, moving offices and adding missions; committees other than the homeland security committees still retain jurisdiction over major parts of the department, including the Coast Guard. Consolidating jurisdiction in a single committee in each chamber will resolve these and other coordination problems.

**2. Stop turning homeland security grants into “pork-barrel” funding.** The 9/11 Commission warned about this problem, and 2007’s 9/11 Com-

mission Act made things worse. Though the bill reduces the minimum in homeland security grants that must go to each state from 0.75 to 0.375 percent of the total, it applies that minimum to other grant programs as well, which had never been done before. This change is an enormous step backwards, fencing off even more money for each state (regardless of its need) than before. Based on authorized funding levels, the change will give each state a minimum of \$6,750,000, which is \$200,000 more than the smallest states received in 2007. Congress should eliminate all minimums and insist that all funds be allocated based on national priorities. Congress should also eliminate grants which contribute little to national homeland security, such as Assistance to Firefighter Grants.

**3. Establish an Undersecretary for Homeland Security.** Since DHS was created, many have come to recognize that the agency needs a high-level, high-powered office to develop policies that bind the more than 22 federal entities consolidated within the department, to coordinate with other federal agencies, and to manage international affairs for the department. Congress has yet to authorize an undersecretary for the department to supervise these activities.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/wm1763.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/wm1763.cfm)

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**4. Repeal the requirement for 100-percent scanning of all shipping containers bound for the United States.** Congress mandated 100-percent scanning in the 9/11 Commission Act, despite the fact that the 9/11 Commission rejected this proposal. No congressional mandate is more intrusive, expensive, and unnecessary. Inspecting every container that is shipped to the U.S. makes no sense. Doing so would cost billions of dollars and drown authorities in useless information. Moreover, it is not clear why every container would require inspection. The “nuke-in-a-box” scenarios deployed to justify such drastic measures are highly implausible. Scanning and sealing every container will not make Americans much safer but will increase the cost of just about everything that American consumers buy. Already, the United States evaluates every container coming into the country and inspects the suspicious ones. It is not a perfect system—it can be improved—but it is a reasonable precaution and deterrent. One-hundred percent inspection is not.

**5. Finish immigration and border security reform.** Congress must let DHS move forward with border security and internal enforcement initiatives. This includes changing the law to allow the sharing of Social Security “no-match” data with DHS so that the department can track down employers who regularly hire large numbers of unlawfully present workers. In addition, Congress should move forward on visa reform and improve visa services so that employers can legitimately get the workers they need to grow the economy.

Congress has much to do to improve on its below-par performance on homeland security in 2007. These five priorities are good places to start.

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