



Homeland Security In Iowa: Utilize the Individual

By Laura P. Keith

According to the 2005 Iowa Code, homeland security “means the detection, prevention, preemption, deterrence of, and protection from attacks targeted at state territory, population, and infrastructure.”¹

“Homeland security” may be a hot topic but it is not a new notion. Much of the last century found Americans on the prowl, their sense of invincibility shaken with the onset of Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor. World War II’s ending brought peace, but revealed a new enemy. The threat emanating from communist Russia was sown deep into the American public and complicated U.S. foreign policy. The terrorist attacks across the Eastern Seaboard on September 11, 2001, changed the lives of Americans, but facing challenges in protecting our homeland is nothing new. Though life goes on as usual for most, perspectives and priorities for all have shifted once again.

The new challenge to protecting our homeland is dealing with the reality of foreign terrorism. Sadly, “foreign” does not refer to battles in distant lands, but to our cities, our backyards, and our farms. And battle does not necessarily mean conventional warfare, but the sleek plans of a precious few. So should Americans rush home and hire private security to protect them in the case of an emergency? Or pass laws that restrict us from living the lives we desire in the name of safety? How much anti-terror legislation must we pass in order to feel safe?

The founding of America is based on liberty, and tyrannically restricting that liberty is not a reality Americans will accept. This does not stem only from a practical point of view (talk about an over-extended budget), but from a principle view: If liberty in our country dies, so does the country. In other words, passing more and more legislation — even with good intention — will not solve the terrorist threat. Iowa’s efforts in protecting the homeland have revealed that personal liberty can be protected without many restricting laws.

The solution to protecting America has many layers and caveats, just like our democracy and system of federalism. At its core is the individual. How are we educating ourselves about possible terrorist threats? The next level is our community. What is our role in the community to prevent and respond to those threats? The state and national government lie on the surface, outside of our individual and community responsibilities. Just as important as foreign policy, the national government allocates funding to the states for distribution to local communities for homeland security purposes.

The criteria for FY 2005 homeland security funding from the national government to the states was based on a mixture of population density and risk sites. New York receives millions more than a more rural state such as Iowa, but because of Iowa’s small population, the per-capita amount spent on each state is quite similar. Changes in how the risk factor is set may occur for FY 2006.² The real battle is not arguing about how much funding a state receives, but how that funding is allocated.³

Detection, prevention, preemption, deterrence, protection. From the weeks and months directly following the 2001 terrorist attack, Iowa has been a leader in the Midwest for passing smart legislation to

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deal with a possible terror attack here at home, starting in early 2002 with measures to prevent bio-terrorism.⁴ The Legislature worked to create a section in the Iowa Code that is devoted to the setup and management of public defense, known as “emergency management and security,” in addition to bodies such as the National Guard.⁵ Much of the document deals with procedures and policies in the event of any emergency, including terrorism. It also creates “local emergency management commissions,” which coordinate emergency situations on a county level.⁶ Set up and enacted in 1983, with changes in 1992 and finally in 2003⁷, each county today has a commission made up of members from each community in the county, including members representing the Sheriff, Mayor, and Board of Supervisors. The commissions work in cooperation with the county boards of supervisors, city councils, and school districts to collaborate with law enforcement, emergency systems, and health systems.

Even before commissions were formally introduced, many rural communities pulled together to provide security services ranging from fire departments and emergency information systems to police forces. Our public servants already seek out the best ways to receive grants and funding for basic services and the equipment and technology to make those programs effective. Some areas may use the funding from the national government that is delegated to the state to raise their systems up to par.⁸ Others are able to focus on “vulnerable areas unique to rural areas,” such as energy sources, agriculture, and water supply.⁹

Communities in Iowa are already meeting and forming plans for reacting to terrorist threats. Detection, preemption, deterrence, and protection criteria for homeland security have been met or addressed. Once communities reach this threshold, they can focus on one criteria that goes beyond response: prevention of terrorism. Citizens of Iowa might not need the sophisticated level of protection that is necessary for the Statue of Liberty or an important harbor, but threats to our agriculture system and its technology are very real. How can we assist in educating business and agri-business owners to take steps to locate and even prevent possible attacks?

Iowa can affect, but not ultimately control, how much funding the national government delegates to our state. How the funding is used, and the extent to which it is used, is our responsibility. How aggressive is your community in acquiring homeland security funding? Is it being used effectively? The priorities for the individual in this war on terror may not be tracking enemy movements, planting victory gardens, or looking for the next Alger Hiss, but instead should be educating the many facets of the community for ways to prevent attacks from happening.

ENDNOTES:

¹ 2005 Iowa Code, Chapter 29 Section C.2.

² Molly Ramsdell, “Securing Homeland Security Funds,” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, Vol. 31, No. 4, April 2005, pp. 32-33.

³ “Homeland Security: Who Gets What and How,” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, Vol. 30, No. 12, December 2004, p. 5.

⁴ Executive Order No. 23, 10/12/2002.

⁵ 2005 Iowa Code, Chapter 29. To view entire Code, visit the Iowa General Assembly homepage at <http://www.legis.state.ia.us>.

⁶ 2005 Iowa Code, Chapter 29, Section C.9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Paul Helmke, “On the Home Front: Paul Helmke talks homeland security,” *Government Technology: Justice and Public Safety*, April 2005, pp. 12-13, 22-23.

⁹ Associated Press, “Rural Areas Feel Unprepared for Terror Attacks,” *The Messenger*, March 22, 2005, 5A.

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