

“Helping State and Local Law Enforcement During an Economic Downturn”
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Thursday, January 8, 2009
Questions for the record from
U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold
Answers from John R. Schmidt

For John Schmidt:

Your written testimony touches on how safe communities are necessary in order to facilitate business. You also discuss how this money can be a more direct stimulus to the economy.

1. What are the various ways that this money would help get our economy back on track?
2. How would increased federal funding for state and local law enforcement directly stimulate the economy in the form of job creation and/or preservation?

ANSWER:

Federal funding to hire police officers to fill vacancies or eliminate layoffs creates jobs in the most direct sense—and it does it immediately and probably in more communities nationwide than can be reached by any other single program. Every dollar goes directly into jobs that would otherwise not exist. Further, the officers live in the communities they serve and they spend those salaries there. So there is a multiplier effect as the dollars are passed on to local retailers, developers, sellers of all kinds of goods and services.

The other critical economic effect is on the confidence and character of the communities where renewed economic activity must take place. Cities or towns with increasing crime rates, or even with concerns that crime rates will rise, do not experience economic revival and growth. In many places in this country memories of crime and violence at levels that made economic revival impossible are still very strong. A regression from the progress toward public safety, and public confidence in that safety, will severely and immediately undermine prospects for renewed economic activity. A significant decline in the size of police forces—which will happen in the absence of immediate federal funding—will produce that result.

During the hear you spoke about measures that you and others took in the 90's, such as talking to city mayors to see what their capacity for hiring was and getting police officers into the training pipeline to make sure that once you had the federal money in hand you could immediately put those dollars to use.

3. If additional funding is ultimately included in the stimulus package, what actions do you think Congress and the Administration should take to ensure that the money is quickly put to use in local communities?

ANSWER:

It will be critical for the Justice Department to make the funding process as fast and simple as possible. As I indicated in my testimony, in 1994 we asked major cities to tell us immediately, even before the President had signed the 1994 Act, how many officers they were prepared to hire and begin training and they did so; we then gave them an initial assured allocation of funding so the hiring process could begin immediately. I believe communities across the country will respond similarly to the passage of legislation authorizing funding today. We have the added advantage now of universal familiarity with the COPS funding mechanism.

The House Bill has eliminated the requirement of a 20% local match and the cap of 80% of the cost of an officer's salaries—for the reasons explained in my testimony, those steps are critical if funding is going to be effective in the current environment where local communities have no additional funds of their own to contribute. That change also simplifies the funding process since there is no need to make determinations as to compliance with those requirements. The result is that the process can be as simple as finding out from communities what level of officers they are prepared to hire and then allocating the available funding among those communities.

It may make sense to begin by allocating funds to fill vacancies or re-hire previously laid off officers with a formula based on the size of the police force; then if additional funding is still available, make further allocations to those requesting funds for hiring beyond that level. Trying to make more refined judgments of who is most in "need" of the funding is not likely to be productive and will slow down the process. Any community that has unfilled vacancies or has laid off officers clearly needs the money; and any community that is prepared to go beyond that and hire additional officers in the current environment is unquestionably responding to a real need.