



AOC Wants To Kill the Department of Homeland Security. Libertarians Have a Plan For That.

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July 10, 2019

The horseshoe theory of politics might be true after all. Today, self-described "democratic socialist" Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) endorsed an idea long advocated by free-market libertarians: abolition of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

During a Tuesday taping of *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, Ocasio-Cortez told host David Remnick that DHS has been a definitive failure that should probably go the way of the dinosaurs.

"I feel like we are, at a very, it's a very qualified and supported position, at least in terms of evidence, and in terms of being able to make the argument that we never should've created DHS in the early 2000s," said Ocasio-Cortez.

When asked flatly if she would get rid of the department, Ocasio-Cortez said "I think so," while re-upping her slightly less radical proposal to get rid of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which is a department within DHS.

Should Ocasio-Cortez want to seriously pursue axing DHS, she'd find a ready ally in libertarian policy wonks, who've long called for breaking up the department and either spinning off or shuttering the numerous federal agencies in its portfolio.

Congress created DHS in 2002 by merging 22 disparate federal agencies responsible for everything from immigration enforcement to disaster relief. President George W. Bush promised at the time that the new department would "improve efficiency without growing government."

However, "the lean and efficient DHS that the president promised did not materialize," the Cato Institute's Chris Edwards wrote in a 2014 paper that argued for the abolition of DHS. Instead of the well-oiled machine we were promised, "DHS agencies are some of the most poorly managed in the federal government."

The largest of DHS's charges is the scandal-plagued Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which spent about a third of DHS's \$60 billion budget this fiscal year.

Often remembered for its impotent response to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA has also been on the receiving end of more recent, scathing reports and audits.

In December, *Politico* reported that staff shortages during the 2017 hurricane season saw the agency promote people beyond what their abilities or skills would merit, resulting in some 38 percent of FEMA staff being in a position for which they were not qualified.

A 2016 DHS Inspector General's audit of the agency's spending during fiscal years 2014 and 2015 concluded that "of the \$1.55 billion in disaster relief funds we audited, we found \$457 million in questionable costs, such as duplicate payments, unsupported costs, improper contract costs, and unauthorized expenditures."

In September of 2018, FEMA Director Brock Long was found to have spent \$151,000 of the taxpayers' money on unauthorized private travel.

It's not just FEMA. Undercover performance audits of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) found that TSA screeners miss anywhere from 70 to 95 percent of contraband moving through its checkpoints.

This general incompetence is exacerbated by individual episodes of TSA agents harassing and abusing the flying public. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the agency has some of the highest turnover rates and lowest levels of job satisfaction in the federal government.

Obviously, the thing driving Ocasio-Cortez and other progressives' animus toward DHS isn't TSA or FEMA, but the departments' immigration agencies, which include ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which runs Border Patrol.

These two agencies have been making headlines recently for the deplorable conditions in their migrant detention facilities. Ocasio-Cortez made a recent well-publicized visit to one such facility and was reportedly appalled by the conditions she found there.

A recent *ProPublica* investigation found that thousands of Border Patrol agents were members of secret Facebook groups where racist and sexist memes were frequently posted.

That's far from an exhaustive list of either agencies' scandals and misdeeds. Even when acting well within the letter of the law, their treatment of immigrants is enough to shock the conscience.

Really, the only DHS department that appears to be in not horrible standing is the Coast Guard.

The abysmal track record of DHS's various divisions—many of which have very different missions from each other—suggest that the department should be broken up altogether, Cato's Edwards wrote.

Functions like disaster relief should be delegated to the states, he suggests, while the TSA should be privatized altogether. Liberalized immigration policies that both progressives and libertarians could endorse would reduce the need for agencies like CBP and ICE. The later agency could probably be gotten rid of altogether.

It's questionable how much of this specific reform platform Ocasio-Cortez would support. That she openly acknowledges the abject failure of DHS puts her far closer to libertarians on this issue than most of her congressional colleagues.