



Idaho city councilor objects to federal policing dollars

By [Dustin Hurst](#)

May 29, 2015

Coeur d'Alene City Councilor Steve Adams voted against more federal money for cops in his city, worrying the cash would come with federal strings.

"I don't like the potential of having to fund this in the fourth year with no plan," Adams told IdahoReporter.com Wednesday.

Adams served as the lone dissenter on a 2-1 vote to move forward on the grant application. If the U.S. Department of Justice approves the request, Coeur d'Alene would receive \$375,000 to pay three-quarters of three officers' salary and benefits for three years.

Coeur d'Alene would have to pick up the remaining quarter of costs for the first three years, plus the total cost of three officers for the fourth year. Grant rules require the city keep the officers on for a year after the federal funds run out.

The Coeur d'Alene Police Department plans to deploy officers in the East Sherman area of town, recently plagued by burglaries.

Adams' vote drew the ire of leftist blogger Dave Oliveria, who bashed the councilor in a Spokesman Review blog post Tuesday.

"And this is exactly why Councilman Steve Adams should become a one-term council member," [Oliveria wrote](#). "A vote against 3 new officers simply because he doesn't like the federal 'strings attached' is goofy."

Goofy or not, questions remain about the program's effectiveness. Money flows from the federal government to localities through the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Since President Clinton kicked off the program in 1994, localities have secured more than \$14 billion in federal dollars, used primarily to hire cops.

The program exists, [according to the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office](#), to proactively address conditions "that give rise to public safety issues," including "crime, social disorder and fear of crime."

Though American cities boast thousands more cops on the streets, GAO data suggest the billions invested have done very little to cut crime rates.

“While we find that COPS expenditures led to increases in sworn police officers above levels that would have been expected without these expenditures and through the increase in sworn officers led to declines in crime, we conclude that COPS grants were not the major cause of decline in crime from 1994 through 2001,” [the GAO reported in a 2006 COPS evaluation](#).

The agency reported the federal cash cut total crime by 5 percent and violent crime by 7 percent between 1993 and 2000.

Researchers said other, immeasurable factors led to the total 26 percent overall crime rate drop in the time span. Those same factors cut violent crime by 32 percent between 1993 and 2000.

The conservative Heritage Foundation suggests the grants “had little to no impact on crime rates.”

“For instance, the hiring grants did not have a statistically significant relationship with murder, rape, assault, burglary, larceny, or auto theft rates, although they were associated with negligible reductions in robberies, with a 1 percent increase in hiring grants associated with a 0.01 percent decrease in robbery rates,” [Heritage researchers wrote](#).

The Heritage Foundation joins Adams in worrying about the nationalization of local police forces.

“Grants that subsidize the routine activities of local law enforcement assign to the federal government functions that fall within the expertise, jurisdiction, and constitutional responsibilities of state and local governments,” Heritage’s David B. Muhlhausen and Erica Little wrote in 2007.

Adams blasted the two-faced nature of his detractors, who often [complain when state lawmakers in Boise restrict city or county powers](#). “They will then say these federal grants are wonderful,” Adams said. “They’re hypocritical in a lot of their bashing.”

The libertarian Cato Institute worries about the nationalization of police forces, too. After President Obama’s administration released a report on improving police-community relations, Cato analysts noted a line suggesting the COPS office use financial incentives to entice localities to meet yet-unknown federal policing benchmarks.

“As in most other policy areas, when it comes to police reform a decentralized approach is better than a centralized one,” Cato’s Matthew Feeney wrote March 3.

Feeney suggested federal officials write the benchmarks but forego the financial incentives to give localities the chance to properly evaluate proposals without dollar signs attached.

In Coeur d’Alene, the full City Council will take up the issue at its June 2 meeting.

Coeur d'Alene is hardly the only Idaho city taking the federal dollars. Boise, Twin Falls, Payette and Spirit Lake, among others, have taken federal cash in recent years.