

Homeland Security News Wire

Former DHS secretary: DHS has lost its way

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Former DHS secretary Tom Ridge recently said that, “[DHS has] kind of lost [its] way... The focus – the primary focus – has been substantially diminished.” Others echo Ridge’s concern, noting that the department, the budget of which has more than doubled since its inception, from \$29 billion in 2003 to \$61 billion next year, has been suffering from mission creep.

A recent [article](#) featured in the *Albuquerque Journal* by Michael Coleman explores what he considers the overly broad mission of the [Department of Homeland Security](#) (DHS), an agency which he describes as having suffered from “mission creep,” and how the organization may be losing its way. The premise of the article is a recent confession by former DHS secretary Tom Ridge that, “They’ve kind of lost their way... The focus – the primary focus – has been substantially diminished.”

Coleman writes that “The department’s budget has more than doubled since the agency’s inception in 2003, when it spent \$29 billion. This year, DHS is slated to spend \$61 billion.” Coleman mentions that today, “In addition to protecting America’s borders and airports, the department is interrogating people suspected of pirating movies at Ohio theaters, seizing counterfeit NBA merchandise in San Antonio and working pickpocket cases alongside police in Albuquerque.”

Additionally, a report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) last year found that “more than a decade after the Department of Homeland Security’s creation — and despite the specific language in the law that created it – the sprawling agency still didn’t have a clear definition for ‘homeland security,’ or a strategy for integrating the divergent missions that are supposed to achieve it.”

This ambiguity is what has led Ridge and others who are connected about the agency to question the broader direction it is taking. Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow in defense and homeland security at the Cato institute, echoes this frustration. “Perfect safety is an illusion; we could spend 10 times what we spend on Homeland Security and still not approach it. We’re spending big bucks chasing some pretty small dangers.”

In an editorial [piece](#) for *Homeland Security Watch*, writer Dan O’Connor supports Coleman’s argument, asking: “If Homeland Security is only terrorism prevention than why all the focus on so many other vectors?”