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[Gene Healy: Get Rid of the DHS](#)

By [Joseph Lawler](#) on 9.27.11 @ 11:33AM

In the *Washington Examiner*, Gene Healy [suggests](#) that "if we're going to start downsizing the Cabinet, there's a lot to be said for starting with the most recent addition," the Department of Homeland Security.

The talismanic properties of the phrase "homeland security" enable politicians "to wrap pork in red, white and blue in a way not possible with defense spending," [David] Rittgers argues. "Not every town can host a military installation or build warships, but every town has a police force that can use counterterrorism funds." As a result of the "gold-rush pathology" encouraged by the grants -- to offer just one example -- the midsize town of Grand Forks, N.D., now "has more biochemical suits and gas masks than police officers to wear them."

The issue isn't simply waste. DHS largess often threatens civil liberties and privacy in ways that garden-variety pork does not.

Over the past decade, homeland security grants have been used in an apparent attempt to turn Main Street America into a London-style Panopticon, funding security cameras in sleepy hamlets nationwide. And, as investigative journalist Radley Balko notes, DHS handouts also further a burgeoning culture of police paramilitarization, funding armored personnel carriers for such "unlikely terrorist targets" as the towns of Adrian, Mich., and Germantown, Tenn.

All this has done very little to enhance public safety -- not that you'd learn that from the agency itself, which is especially resistant to using cost-benefit analysis. In 2006, a senior economist at DHS admitted, "We really don't know a whole lot about the overall costs and benefits of homeland security."

As Healy notes, the Republican-majority House recently cut funds for a new DHS headquarters, and have pledged to make other sizable cuts in the program, reflecting, perhaps, the influence of the Tea Party.