

GAO Investigation Underscores Questions & Concerns About UASI Grant Program

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Findings offer guidance to refine critical, risk-based homeland security grant

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Washington, DC – Representative Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) joined with Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, Homeland Security Chairman Bennie Thomas (MS-02), and Representatives Mike Thompson (CA-1), Bob Filner (CA-51) and Susan Davis (CA-53) to release a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report [[click here to view a pdf of the report](#)] concluding that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) made unsupported judgments regarding the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grant program that affected the outcome of the awards.

According to the GAO, "DHS had a limited understanding of the effects of the judgments made in estimating risk that influenced eligibility and allocation outcomes in fiscal year 2006.”

"The findings from GAO's investigation substantiate the numerous questions and concerns raised about the grant over the past year – the overlooked critical infrastructure, the arbitrary eligibility decisions, and the effect of reduced homeland security resources. This report recognizes the holes in the UASI grant program, but in doing so, it also lays out the path to improving and strengthening this program,” stated Rep. Matsui. “Additionally, from the initial information GAO collected regarding the 2007 process, it seems that DHS has learned something from this investigation, but on this front, only time will tell. I truly hope this is the case, because as the only risk-based homeland security grant, the UASI grant is a key component of ensuring we are wisely allocating our limited homeland security resources.”

The report also found that DHS’s decision to arbitrarily assign values during the risk-assignment without conducting a sensitivity analysis to be a significant flaw in the UASI grant determination process. The report confirms that DHS had made many random decisions during their UASI determination that skewed the outcomes of the risk-scenarios and grant awards. Key findings include:

- The decision on the number of cities eligible is random;
- That the changes from FY06 to FY07 demonstrate DHS's recognition and

acknowledgement of problems with the program
- DHS failed to use standard guidelines (or sensitivity analysis) to make judgments.

"GAO's study confirms our suspicions — DHS's methodology for determining eligibility for and allocating UASI grants was arbitrary, ineffective, and just plain wrong," Senator Boxer said. "How can we secure our homeland against terrorists when our government can't even determine what cities are most threatened? I am thankful that GAO conducted this study and that Sacramento and San Diego are eligible for these crucial grants once again."

"As we advocate for more homeland security dollars to be allocated based on risk, we must ensure that the Department's process is a solid one. The result of strong Congressional oversight and feedback from state and local officials, has greatly improved the process for allocating the Urban Area Security Initiative grants," Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, said. "However, as this GAO report points out, there is still more to be done to best account for all of the factors associated with risk, threat and consequences when giving out future grants."

"The Sacramento region's first responders are a critical component of our disaster preparedness efforts, and they deserve an equitable amount of federal funding to meet our community's needs," said Rep. Mike Thompson, whose congressional district includes West Sacramento. "The Department of Homeland Security's criteria for an area's risk level should be made available so Congress can assess whether our cities' needs are being met. I believe the Sacramento region's population size and flood risk warrant an added level of protection from terrorist threats, and my colleagues and I will continue to push for appropriate funding."

The Members requested the investigation after they had made repeated attempts to get additional information from DHS about the revised eligibility guidelines they announced in January of 2006. For the first time in 2006, Sacramento and San Diego were not identified as high-risk areas, although they have received UASI funding in the past and in 2007 were again identified as eligible high-risk areas.

Earlier this year Rep. Matsui introduced the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Improvement Act of 2007 to address the arbitrary decisions made by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in connection with this grant. It is based upon preliminary findings of the GAO report, which were confirmed in today's final report. Ultimately, this legislation will bring much-needed consistency to the UASI grant program and allow the first responders in our

communities to better protect our citizens. Reps. Mike Thompson and Filner are among the 11 cosponsors of the House version, H.R. 296 and Senator Boxer introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

Matsui concluded, "Our local law enforcement and first responders continue to do an incredible job understanding the threats facing our country and are working hard to prevent and prepare for an attack. And while these heroes are doing their jobs, the federal government needs to do its job. Part of that is providing leadership by setting standards and the other is to provide resources. My concern is that the federal government has been shirking its responsibility, and so I have introduced legislation to make sure that Sacramento and all at-risk urban areas have the opportunity to receive the funds they need."

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