

Opening Statement of Sen. Coburn

Sept. 6, 2014

Hearing, "Oversight of Federal Programs for Equipping State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies"

Good morning, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing, both this panel and the second. And thank you to the Chairman for convening this hearing.

As I look at my short time left remaining in Congress, and having traveled for two weeks in Oklahoma in August, I am brought constantly and frequently back to the position of our Founders. Not only to their vision, but to their wisdom.

Protect and Serve. Our founders saw no role for the federal government in state and local police forces. None. And yet what we have seen done, on the basis of what we saw on 9/11, seems to be an over-reaction: Progress toward what the federal government and law enforcement doing the same thing it's done in every other area when it comes to the General Welfare clause and the Commerce Clause. We're on dangerous ground, undermining the very principles that built the country.

It's hard to see a difference between the militarized and increasingly federalized police force we see in towns across America today, and the force that Madison had in mind when he said, "a standing military force with an overgrown executive will not long be a safe companion to liberty."

I have some real heartburn with not just the 1033 program and the UASI grants, but with some of the Justice Department Grants, and other homeland security grants, both how they're utilized, what they've been utilized for. And so I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. I have some significant questions. The 1033 program has been around a long time, not just in response to 9/11. But I think we need to have a good airing. We need to re-center where we are.

There is no role for the federal government in the local and state police forces in our country. And I hope we can winnow that out today to see where we've stepped across the line and actually created some problems that wouldn't have been there otherwise.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.