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Inglis raises good questions about efficiency of anti-terrorism spending

Most members of Congress define pork-barrel spending as money spent in other members' districts, but U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis has always criticized federal waste, even when it could find its way into his constituency.

Now, he's questioning federal homeland security spending that allowed Greenville police to spend \$2 million to buy equipment including an armored personnel carrier, a bomb-response truck and other anti-terrorism equipment.

Inglis doesn't classify this as waste. It's easy to see how the equipment could be needed in a variety of situations. But he is right to question whether this is a proper and necessary expenditure of federal resources.

Greenville authorities say the federal homeland security grants have enabled them to buy equipment that the county budget could not have afforded.

But if we left each level of government to pay for itself, that county budget may have been able to include the equipment.

Part of the reason the federal budget is so large is that members of Congress and the president insist on including state and local spending in it. They include money for state schools and education programs. They include grants for state and local infrastructure programs. And they include grants to help cities like Greenville prepare for terrorism.

They do this so that they can boast about bringing federal money back to the district. They take the credit for helping cities and counties afford projects they could not otherwise afford.

But if the federal government stuck to legitimate federal programs and reduced its tax burden accordingly, there would be room for state and local governments to afford their own programs without Washington's backing.

And since federal money always comes with federal strings, they would be more independent and efficient in creating programs that suit the needs of the state and individual communities.

Inglis deserves credit for recognizing the untenable situation represented by the federal budget deficit

and the need to let local governments fund local programs while the federal government funds federal priorities. If only he could convince his colleagues.

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