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Bite the Bullet – We’ve Got Too Many Agencies With Armed Agents

Buck Sexton, Contributor for TheBlaze (<http://www.theblaze.com/author/buck-sexton/>) August 20, 2012 5:43 pm

It raised many eyebrows when we learned last week that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration received 46,000 rounds of ammunition. This revelation—which we are now told was a “clerical error” — came on the heels of the Social Security Administration procuring “174,000 rounds of “.357 Sig 125 grain bonded jacketed hollow point pistol ammunition.”

All of this leads to the question: Why do so many federal agencies need bullets?

While the government claims it needs the ammunition for training— that is exactly the problem. The expansion of the federal law enforcement and regulatory apparatus should be deeply troubling for anyone who believes in limited government and federalism. America has too many national authorities employing their own armed officers to police a vast and growing array of federal statutes. And in the process, these Feds trample on the police powers left to the states under the Constitution.

The growth of the federal law enforcement bureaucracy has jumped dramatically over the last 20 years. There are now 73 federal agencies that have armed officers, often called “special agents.” And all of these agencies now cordon off and enforce a federal fiefdom of the more than 4,500 criminal laws at the federal level and thousands of additional regulations that have sprung up in recent decades.

The result is a panoply of specialized, niche enforcement organizations that will be tasked to balance the rights of U.S. citizens with a need to justify their budgets. While the U.S. Congress has used the interstate commerce clause to pass sweeping legislation that has eviscerated state rights, the enforcement mechanisms have started to catch up with the rampant over-legislation.

As of 2011, there are at least 25,000 sworn (and armed) law enforcement officers working for federal agencies not traditionally associated with law enforcement, and 3,800 of them were specifically criminal investigators.

The list of agencies—many of which are recent creations—that have their own police forces is staggering. Even the Environmental Protection Agency has its own sworn officers, as does The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). While NOAA only has 63 officers today, the EPA started out with one armed officer in 1978 and as of last year it had 265. There is also the General Services Administration, the Department of Education, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development—and the list goes on.

This is not to say that these agencies do not pursue, in many cases, real violations and crimes. And the

protections intended by the laws themselves may be necessary. But the problem is that state and local law enforcement should be tasked to handle many of the issues that have been transformed into federal concerns.

There is a lot of overlapping and duplicative effort with these federal agencies. With approximately 800,000 local and state police officers in the United States, the burden of enforcing laws that cover wildlife, agriculture, or other localized issues should fall on those closest—and therefore most accountable—to the people they police.

As we head into the thick of the 2012 election, a majority of the American people claim to wanted a smaller federal government. Nowhere is the power and reach of the state more acutely felt than in law enforcement. But unless Americans begin to push back against this avalanche of federal police and regulators, the number of people receiving a paycheck to investigate and prosecute average citizens for opaque and even unknowable federal violations will grow dramatically.

Editor’s Note: Buck Sexton will lead a discussion about the proliferation of federal agencies with armed agents tonight at 6pm ET on Real News From The Blaze (http://web.gbtv.com/shows/index.jsp?content=real_news).