



Voices from the Field:

*FBI Agent Accounts of the
Real Consequences of Budget Cuts*



September 2013



What is *Voices from the Field*?

Voices from the Field contains field reports from FBI Special Agents. The stories illustrate how recent budget cuts affect our work and the risks associated with any additional budget cuts or furloughs. FBI Agents Association (FBIAA) members provided these reports on a voluntary and confidential basis.

FBIAA is releasing *Voices from the Field* to ensure that Congress, the Administration, and the public are aware of the strain already placed on federal law enforcement budgets, and the risks that further cuts could pose to the safety of our nation. Agents are, and will continue, to respond in sufficient strength to any major incident, be it a kidnapping, cyber intrusion, or terrorist attack.

Voices from the Field explores two main themes: First, how the current budget cuts are already affecting FBI operations and secondly how impending furloughs could further affect FBI operations.

“The impact of sequestration puts us further behind enemies and criminals that pose threats to national security and public safety.”

- FBI Special Agent

What is in *Voices from the Field*?



- ***Background on the FBI's Budget Crisis***

- ***Budget Cuts: Undermining the FBI's Critical Mission***

How are current budget cuts affecting FBI operations?

- Undermining Counter-Terrorism Investigations
- Exposing Vulnerable Populations to Greater Risk
- Halting Counter-Intelligence Cases
- Closing White Collar Cases
- Limiting Mortgage/Financial Fraud Cases
- Constraining Use of Official Vehicles
- Losing Informants
- Impeding Surveillance
- Harming Local Cooperation
- Reducing Field Time
- Increasing Retirements

- ***Furloughs: "Savings" at What Cost?***

How could impending furloughs further affect FBI operations?

- Impaired Counter-Terrorism Efforts
- Decreased Number of New Investigations
- Slowed Emergency Response
- Diminished Counter-Proliferation Work
- Curtailed Surveillance Operations
- Increased Investigative Obstacles
- Reduced Number of Agents

Background on the FBI's Budget Crisis





Background on the FBI's Budget Crisis

As FBI Special Agents, we dedicate our lives to protecting our country from criminals and terrorists who threaten our safety, economy and way of life. We are honored to serve and protect the public.

Former FBI Director Robert Mueller described the Fiscal Year 2013 cuts as equivalent in size to closing the Bureau's offices in Chicago, Miami and Baltimore. Congress is currently debating funding for the federal government and the additional budget cuts required by sequestration. Because the FBI budget includes both defense and non-defense expenditures, sequestration cuts may be more devastating to the Bureau and Agents than any other federal agency. When the new Fiscal Year 2014 starts on October 1, 2013, the FBI will be forced to cut approximately \$800 million from its budget. According to media reports, FBI officials suggested recently that they might shut down FBI headquarters and offices across the country for 10 days in 2014 to save money. In addition, this cut may require furloughing Agents from 13 to 17 days. On these days, FBI Agents will be prohibited from working and will receive no pay.

“I was very surprised to learn how severe the required cut is and the potential impact on this organization. Frankly, as a taxpayer and as an American I was surprised, and it didn't make any sense to me that the FBI director would be asked not just to cut 3,000 positions but, given what's on our plate, to send our folks home for a couple weeks without pay.”

- FBI Director James Comey, September 19, 2013



Background on the FBI's Budget Crisis

Our commitment to our work is unwavering, and we will continue to make personal, professional, and familial sacrifices in order to fulfill our duties. However, the resources available to support the work of FBI Agents have been stretched to the breaking point. Severe funding limitations are already affecting current investigations and in some cases preventing us from opening new investigations. Budget cuts have compromised our basic transportation needs (such as a prohibition against using official FBI vehicles because there is no funding for gas). Frozen pay levels, a hiring freeze, and no training funds for Agents assigned to new duties have made it increasingly difficult for Agents to do our jobs.

Trying to save money by undermining the FBI's ability to protect the public is likely to be far more costly to our country in the long run. FBI employees represent less than two percent of the federal workforce, and FBI Agents are less than one percent. In addition to helping protect our country, our work has also resulted in the payment of over \$23 billion in recoveries and penalties to the federal government over the last three years. It makes no sense to place the entire country at greater risk and restrict the resources available to these dedicated public servants for a small amount of savings.

It's time for Congress and the White House to negotiate an agreement that protects national security and public safety, and eliminates devastating cuts to the Bureau that would hurt thousands of dedicated Agents and their families who faithfully and effectively serve the United States each and every day.

“Quantico is quiet. I have no new agent classes going through there. I can't afford it.”

*- FBI Director James Comey,
September 19, 2013*

Budget Cuts: Undermining the FBI's Critical Mission





How are current budget cuts affecting FBI operations?



Undermining Counter-Terrorism Investigations

“I ... work International and Domestic Counterterrorism. Budget restrictions have and will continue to limit the resources available to include personnel and equipment. ... Restrictions in surveillance technology means the necessary facilities used for terrorist communications won't be monitored.”



Exposing Vulnerable Populations to Greater Risk

“Here is how the sequester will affect my little slice of the Bureau. ... No gas means cases don't get worked – period. Nothing is close to anything on the reservation. Witnesses and victims don't have phones. We have to drive to them. They are too poor to drive to us. ... Fewer guys - fewer cases get worked. That is the cruel truth. Real people won't get justice. **The face of the sequester is a molested Navajo kid or a beaten Apache woman, neither of whom will see justice.** Our victims are the poorest, most vulnerable ... people in this country.”



Halting Counter-Intelligence Cases

“We have approximately 10 very important CI cases that we would open ... but we can’t open them because we don’t have the [Special Agents] to work the investigations and the other agents on the squad already have full case loads. These are national security cases that could lead to the loss of highly sensitive classified information if we don’t address them. ... It will only get worse with furloughs.”



Closing White Collar Cases

“I work white collar/fraud/public corruption. ... The impact of the sequestration is already being felt and will continue to hinder our productivity. **I am closing cases and not looking to open new ones. ... Current investigations and informant development have been hindered because of lack of funds.**”



Limiting Mortgage/Financial Fraud Cases

“The hiring freeze has prohibited our team from adding new agents to combat the significant surge in investment fraud and mortgage loan modification fraud. Resources are stretched and not able to completely address the financial losses experienced in our area of responsibility. With the loan modification fraud, many victims lose their home and life savings because of the scheme. ... **Several new targets have recently been identified**; just this past week, four known fraudsters were advertising in the classifieds for employees to expand their current fraudulent schemes, however, **with our lack of resources and now the additional cuts and furloughs, we are not able to address the progressing schemes.**”



Constraining Use of Official Vehicles

“In the beginning of March when the sequestration began, the ... division was told **we are now on a strict gas budget and were pretty much not allowed to use our [Bureau] cars. This severely affected work performance and disrupted investigations** as we did not have enough money to put gas in a work car to go do something as simple as an interview, let alone anything else of significance with regards to investigative matters.”



Losing Informants

“I ... investigate street gangs. Recently ... we have been facing funding shortages on the criminal side for the last couple of years. There are certain gangsters I can't go after with a Confidential Human Source (CHS) or any other way as 'drug buy' money is not sufficient. These subjects are at a certain point where the CHS can't buy small amounts of drugs. Most of our larger targets only sell in big amounts. With dwindling resources, we have had to let these subjects go as investigation against them would be futile. ... Being that most of my gang CHS's motivation are financially driven, I am running the risk of the CHS's turning back to a life of crime if I can't make payments for their services.”



Impeding Surveillance

“The existing hiring freeze and budget restrictions have forced my squad to conduct investigations in a less effective manner. Many interviews are now conducted telephonically; thus, limiting the agent’s interaction with the person being interviewed. This limited interaction also minimizes the intelligence that can be obtained throughout the interview. The limited communication has also minimized opportunities for Source development and information collection. Surveillances have also been cut short and completely eliminated because of financial restrictions or lack of agents to conduct the surveillance.”



Harming Local Cooperation

“The impact on local law enforcement is completely negative because we can’t support where we have traditionally. [Local law enforcement] depend[s] on us for support in larger cases and we depend on them for support and back-up because we are a small office. Once we walk away from working traditional criminal programs ... we will lose the support of local law enforcement.”



Reducing Field Time

“The **administrative burden that is now put on Agents ... that was previously handled by support personnel has caused Agents to spend an unprecedented amount of time at their desks versus being out on the street conducting interviews and recruiting [Confidential Human Sources].”**



Increasing Retirements

- “For the first time in my 10 year FBI career, I am strongly considering ending my FBI employment and going back to the private sector.”
- “I am actively seeking to retire and move on to my next career sooner than I want to because of the issues in Washington. I have four more years left before ... mandatory retirement. If I retire, that leaves two criminal agents in the [Resident Agency].”

Furloughs: “Savings” at What Cost?





How could impending furloughs further affect FBI operations?



Impaired Counter-Terrorism Efforts

“I am serving on an International Terrorism squad. ... Those who wish to harm the United States operate on a 7 day a week 24 hour a day cycle. ... Receipt of information about a potential threat could be delayed and timely and effective responses to crises could be hampered through the mandatory furloughs.”



Decreased Number of New Investigations

“I work Counterintelligence. ... Currently, we have a list of potential targets that we cannot open due to lack of investigative personnel. In addition to this unaddressed work, furloughs would force us to close active investigations.”



Slowed Emergency Response

“How can [Special Agents] be sequestered when they are responsible to respond to unplanned events? How will our SWAT [team leader] handle a SWAT response when half the team is furloughed each week? ... There is no way to plan this, as they give less than 24hrs notice. ... **You can't furlough personnel responsible to respond to unplanned events without significantly increasing costs and decreasing efficiency.**”



Diminished Counter-Proliferation Work

“One of the highest priorities of the Counterintelligence Program is to prevent the proliferation of U.S. technology by foreign governments. This **counter-proliferation effort not only protects National Security issues and concerns, but it also protects U.S. economic interests.** I specifically recruited a counterintelligence expert ... to fill this position. ... With the threat of furloughs, this agent was 'forced' to retire before his intended date of retirement (and take a job in the free market) in order to financially support his family. ... **Not only did I lose coverage of this massive territory (and the loss of an experienced agent), but due to sequestration, I will not be able to backfill this position.**”



Curtailed Surveillance Operations

“My main concern ... is the very real chance that something significant happens in one of my national security cases or that is of investigative importance to the national security program on the days I and my fellow Agents (and the supporting surveillance teams) are furloughed. For example, it is not uncommon for me to receive short notice that a subject is getting on a plane heading out of the country or has just purchased a plane ticket to return to the U.S. ... These short notice incidents require immediate action to undertake investigative methods ... which could not be undertaken if we were on furlough, thereby causing us to potentially miss significant national security threat issues.”



Increased Investigative Obstacles

“Inability for the public or sources to connect with their Agent will delay and potentially prevent the passage of ... evidence, information, leads or indicators requiring expeditious actions.”



Reduced Number of Agents

“If you hit agents too hard, you take the risk of losing agents that are marketable (i.e. cyber, white collar, etc) to corporate America. Not because they want to but because they are forced by their family's **financial needs**. As agents we will never be rich, we do our jobs largely without being thanked, yet we are always willing to give our lives to protect the U.S.”



About the FBI Agents Association

FBIAA is the only professional association dedicated to providing support and advocacy to active and former Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBIAA's membership includes more than 12,000 active and former Special Agents of the FBI. The pillars of FBIAA include internal advocacy, legal representation, legislative and financial support to Agents, offered through both the Memorial Scholarship and Member Assistance Funds.

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