

HIGHWAYS: It's time for new road fund formula

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officials, congressmen and senators from donor states to demand justice.

All it takes is a coalition of lawmakers dedicated to fighting for their states' fair share of highway taxes. And to do just that, we are working to organize those lawmakers into the Donor State Working Group, and we'll carry that effort right into the halls of Congress.

The path of least resistance for reformers would appear to be a simple rewrite of the state-by-state spending formulas. But past efforts to do so have produced little more than superficial changes, leaving donor states no better off than before.

A cleaner, far more effective reform would be to cut out Washington regulators and bureaucracy altogether.

Simply let each state keep the federal fuel tax of 18.3 cents per gallon paid by motorists within state borders, as well as the diesel fuel tax paid by truckers. In turn, states would be held fully responsible for their own transportation programs.

The upshot: State transportation agencies would have funds and flexibility to keep things running smoothly within their jurisdictions.

D.C.-based central planning and financial management made sense back in 1956 when the sole task of the new program was to build the interstate highway system, coast to coast and border to border. But the nation completed that task in the mid-1980s. Since then, the highway program has become little more than a piggy bank for special interests, outrageous earmarks and wealthy states.

Unless Texas and other donor states band together, combining their clout to force change, motorists in the Lone Star State will continue to subsidize our wealthy friends to the northeast.

Flake represents the 6th District of Arizona, another donor state. Utt is the Herbert and Joyce Morgan Senior Research Fellow at The Heritage Foundation (heritage.org).

HEALTH: Don't blame the health officials

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hurricane to power outage — is built on the premise that society as we know it will, even in some distant command post or undisclosed location, continue to function.

We cannot really imagine an event or an illness that overwhelms our ability to maintain basic services or, as happened in 1918, sickness and death so prevalent that there is no one either well enough to provide help or willing to leave home for fear of contagion. Things can be worse than we imagined just as easily as they can be better than we feared.

It's a little discussed aspect of constitutional law that the president has authority to address disaster with every tool available to him, including deadly force. This is the dark-

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er side of public health. It's no accident that the previous administration's pandemic flu plan relied heavily on the army — and it didn't envision Army Rangers going house to house delivering chicken soup. The army was there to contain the sick by enforcing quarantines.

But just because the unimaginable can happen and leave us powerless doesn't mean we shouldn't plan for the things we can control.

One of the reasons Toronto wasn't brought to a halt by SARS, a highly lethal disease that came out of nowhere and spread quickly, was that unlike the U.S., Canada had a sophisticated and relatively well funded public health infrastructure that already employed thousands of people. When those exposed had to be quarantined, there was trained staff available to make sure that they stayed home and that food, including pet

food, was delivered to them so they were not forced to leave. Our public health agencies are so understaffed and underfunded as to make this kind of response a fantasy.

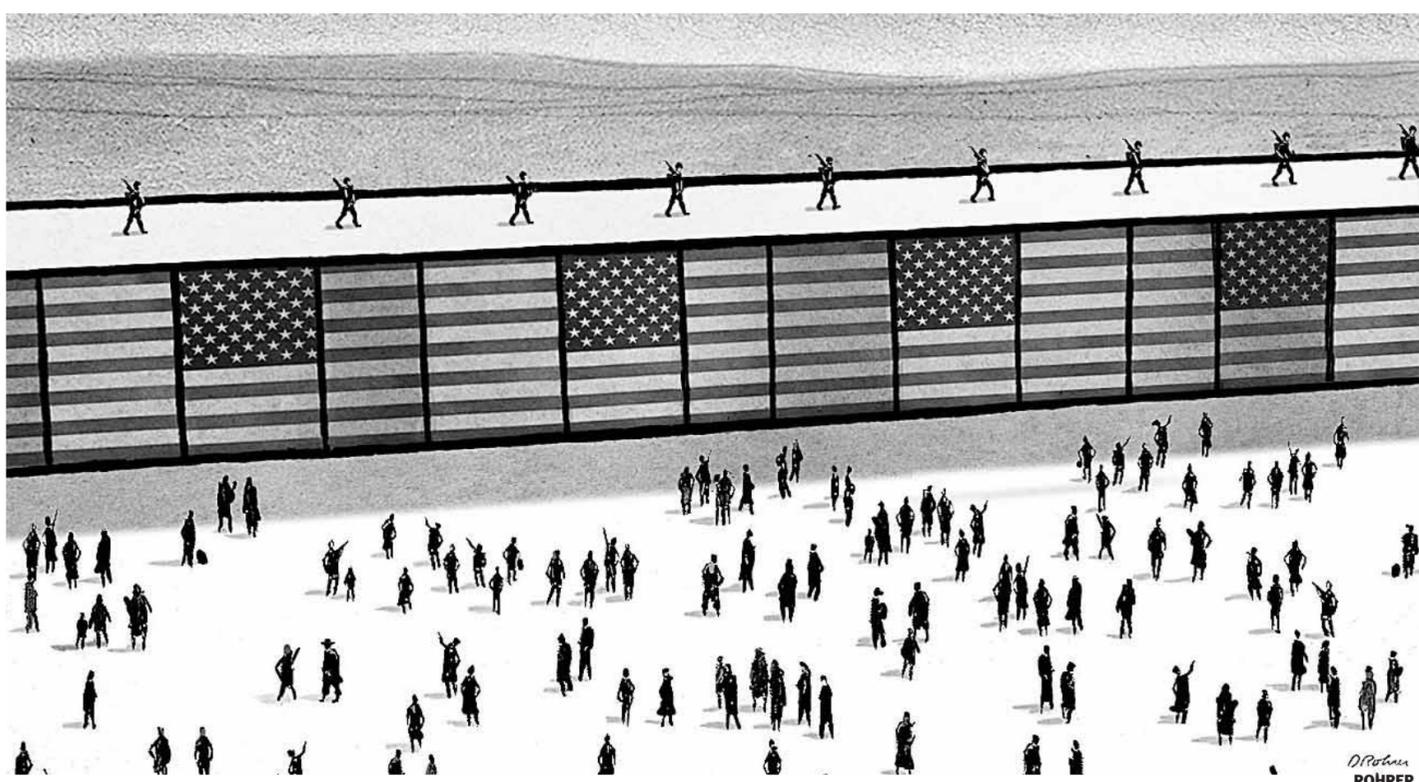
So what should be our take-home message? Well, the idea that we can really plan against doomsday is laughable. But the notion that we won't spend the money to plan for a lot of very bad things that are actually relatively likely to happen but might not because of disaster fatigue isn't funny.

There are plenty of threats that we do have the ability to address with adequate resources and H1N1 is a perfect example. Within days scientists were working on a vaccine and the CDC was distributing stocks of antiviral drugs all over the country. It's

a problem we can solve with money.

The threat of pandemic flu and other disease is as real today as it was in 1918 when ten times as many Americans died of influenza at home as on the battlefield in World War I. Consistent funding for planning and maintaining the public health infrastructure is what can prevent disaster. Lets not let what looks like a narrow escape turn out to be an excuse to stop spending money on public-health infrastructure. Planning isn't anything to laugh about.

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BORDER: Changes could lead to reforms

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America is a victim of its own success. Because we are interdicting and confiscating more drugs in the Caribbean and the Pacific, rival cartels now fight over new overland routes up from Central America through Mexico and into the United States. Mexico President Felipe Calderon's unprecedented actions against the drug cartels de-

serve our support. By working with him to dismantle transnational criminal organizations and strengthen governing institutions, we can multiply the effectiveness of our own security efforts.

With that in mind, the Bush administration backed the Merida Initiative to complement the broader efforts by Mexico and Central America in the battle against gangs

and organized crime. Today, we need to expand the tools used by law enforcement for Merida to be effective — tools such as scanners that identify contraband, better communication devices and expanded economic assistance programs for vulnerable youth who need alternatives to cartel activities.

We should also recognize that Mexico has its own im-

migration and contraband problems that often become our own. It needs a fence — both real and virtual — strategically positioned along its 600-mile-long border with Guatemala. Mexico should also beef up security at its ports of entry to help slow the entry of weapons that cartel members smuggle into that country. It is in our collective interests to work toward these goals.

Similarly, just as border security does not start on the United States side of the border, it does not end there either. Even during the current economic downturn, the magnet of American markets is too great to completely halt smuggling rings that operate at the border.

A significant part of our strategy must focus on interior enforcement targeting transnational gangs that traffic black-market goods. Transnational criminal organizations are opportunistic — the smuggling of people, drugs and contraband is part of their business model. We can undermine human smuggling operations by reducing the magnet of unlawful employment in the United States.

Close cooperation between federal, state and local governments in the United States is essential. A positive development is the "Secure Communities" program, a comprehensive plan that will allow quick identification and tracking of criminal aliens whether they are in America's federal, state or local jails.

We also must do a better job accounting for those who enter our country. Without a national database of U.S. citizens and non-citizens authorized to work in America, our current worker verification system relies on a patchwork of easily falsified identity and work-authorization documents.

Aggressively prosecuting employees and employers has not proven politically sustainable. It remains to be seen whether the Obama administration's recently announced approach of solely targeting employers will have a sig-

nificant effect. That leaves mandatory use of e-verify, an online electronic employment verification system, as crucial to any serious effort to enforce immigration-related employment laws and reduce the magnet of unlawful employment.

Only a very small percentage of all U.S. employers voluntarily use e-verify. While imperfect — e-verify cannot identify individuals who present stolen documents — it can instantly verify 96 percent of all persons checked. Most of the remaining 4 percent are either verified once they provide the government with updated biographic information, or they are illegally in our country or not authorized to work.

As an initial step, the administration should immediately mandate use of e-verify for all federal contractors.

Many of our suggestions are practical, noncontroversial and relatively easy to put in place. We should go about accomplishing them even as we consider solutions for what is a bigger and tougher challenge — creating an immigration system that serves our national interest.

A comprehensive approach to our collective security requires no less, and an honest and frank debate over it should start now.

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Tip line could counter the rule of 'silver or lead'

Fight cartels with anonymous calling system

By **JOAN NEUHAUS SCHAAN**

TRY to place yourself in this position: After years of hard work, you have become the owner of a small business, a member of city council, a judge, a clerk or a police lieutenant. One day, a man arrives at your office with an envelope. He has a proposition. When asked, you do what is asked of you, and you will receive thousands of dollars. If you refuse the offer and/or notify authorities, your children will disappear and face horrible consequences.

You have just come under the rule of "plata o plomo": silver or lead.

Regardless of a person's morals or intentions, the victim will ask himself or herself, "Is there really a choice?"

Where does a victim turn? Statistics published in Mexico indicate in excess of 60 percent of law enforcement is on the payroll of a drug cartel, and many in the U.S. borderlands worry about corruption in their own communities. When organized crime seems so pervasive, the victim does not want to turn to law enforcement for fear of triggering horrific consequences.

Perhaps the time has come for establishing an anonymous

tip line to a trusted organization at the federal or binational level, such as a federal or binational Crime Stoppers chapter. As the anonymous tip effort is put into place, the trusted organization must be beyond reproach and distant enough from the source of the corruption to not fall prey to corrupting influences itself.

The first and most important step in fighting the corruption, coercion and extortion by organized crime is a solid tip. Individuals know their own communities best, and they can detect activity early on. However, many of those with important tips are among the most vulnerable. While motivated to rid their communities of criminal organizations, they live in fear. If they have confidence that their information cannot be traced back to them, those same persons might be willing to do their part to fight back. To the extent their tips can be safely rewarded financially, so much the better.

Why can't these victims call the police department or a local anonymous tip line? First, a call to the local police department usually results in the caller's telephone number, name and other information being recorded. Divulging personal information can lead to retribution from the criminal organization. Second, information derived from local anonymous tip lines are forwarded to the local law enforcement agency. Even if the caller remains



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anonymous, if the local law enforcement agency is heavily infiltrated by organized crime, the information will not be acted upon.

Countering a criminal organization requires intelligence. Tips are the starting point. When a large number of tips are collected in a single location, patterns emerge.

Of course, procedures must be put in place to screen for bad information, misinformation, and infiltration, but these are the routine considerations of analytical operations.

The tide of organized

crime must be successfully confronted. None of us cares to imagine a neighbor where 85 percent or more of law enforcement, judges and politicians is on the payroll of organized crime.

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