

LARSON AND COLLEAGUES SUCCESSFUL IN

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LARSON AND COLLEAGUES SUCCESSFUL IN FIGHT TO SAVE FIRE GRANT PROGRAM Under Pressure, Bush Administration Restores FIRE Act It Had Called "Unneeded"

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today expressed his satisfaction that the Bush Administration, under pressure from Members of Congress and local firefighters, has decided to restore funding for the Firefighter Investment and Response Act (FIRE Act) grant program, which it had previously cut from the Fiscal Year 2002 budget. The Bush Administration's budget blue print, released on February 28, said that the program was "unneeded" and that such a grant did "not represent an appropriate responsibility of the federal government." Larson was a co-sponsor of the FIRE Act and supported its passage in the House during the 106th Congress. The \$100 million grant program, administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), will begin issuing grants to the more than 32,000 fire departments across the country this spring.

This year, the program is divided into six separate categories: training, wellness and fitness programs, vehicles, fire fighting equipment, personal protective equipment, and fire prevention programs. The maximum amount awarded to each chosen applicant is \$750,000, and although departments can apply for grants in two separate categories, the funding they receive cannot exceed this amount.

"I am extremely pleased that the president has come to understand the benefits that the FIRE Act will bring to local fire departments across the country, and changed his position on this important program," said Larson. "Too often, fire departments are forced to compete with other municipal budget priorities, even as the range of services they are asked to provide grows wider. It is of the utmost importance that firefighters have access to every resource available in order to meet their critical responsibilities, including training and equipment. Every dollar that a department receives is another dollar that goes to improving the safety of lives and property in the communities they serve."

In response to the cut, Larson, along with 111 of his colleagues in the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, signed a letter to the president asking him to reconsider the decision to cut funding for the program.

The letter stated: "The need for the funding is critical. Just outfitting one firefighter with turnout gear and breathing apparatus can approach \$4,500 to say nothing of the training involved to bring either a paid or volunteer firefighter on-line. Each year, approximately 100 firefighters lose their lives in the line of duty. This program is aimed at drastically reducing this number and we hope that you consider including \$300 million for the fire grant program in your fiscal year 2002 budget request."

Departments that serve fewer than 50,000 people would have to provide a ten percent match in non-federal funds and departments that serve communities larger than 50,000 would provide a thirty percent match.

The first bill that Larson introduced in Congress was H.R. 1870, the Volunteer Firefighters Relief Act, which would have allowed a tax deduction for contributions made to a volunteer firefighter savings account.

Larson also stated that a complete set of application forms will become available shortly, and that FEMA will make announcements through their website, www.usfa.fema.gov, including the date on which the application will be published. In addition, departments will also receive an extensive mailing on applying. Departments should monitor the FEMA website for the date when the grant application will be published.

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For more information, please visit the FEMA website at www.usfa.fema.gov.