

LARSON VOTES TO MAKE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FUNDING A PRIORITY

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) today released the following statement on his vote against the conference report on the FY06 Homeland Security Appropriation bill (H.R. 2360), which passed the House Thursday night 347 to 70.

“Our federal budget is a reflection of our priorities. We can choose to fully fund our first responders, or continue to give away more tax cuts to those who don’t need them. We can choose to give away millions of dollars in subsidies to the oil industry while they rake in exorbitant profits, or we can provide the funding needed to keep low income families from freezing this winter because they can’t afford high energy costs. It is time to demonstrate clearly where our priorities are.

“Just over a month ago, Hurricane Katrina demonstrated with alarming clarity that our nation’s emergency response infrastructure is still not prepared to deal with a large scale disaster - natural or man made. This should have been a wake up call to the administration and this Congress. Yet, the conference report before us today cuts funds for state and local preparedness programs, pre-disaster mitigation, disaster relief and the Coast Guard.

“State and local domestic preparedness grants are cut 19 percent from last year. Fire grants, which help fund critical equipment, training and personnel to respond to emergencies, are cut by eight percent. Pre-disaster mitigation programs are cut by \$50 million, and disaster relief programs are funded at \$70 million below the President’s request. FEMA, the agency responsible for coordinating disaster preparedness and response, is cut by almost 12 percent.

“At a time when terrorism, a flu pandemic, and the sheer power of nature remain real threats to our nation, cutting vital emergency preparedness programs simply defies common sense. It is inconceivable that after the response we saw to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress is about to cut funding to the very programs that FEMA and our communities need to prepare for and respond to disasters. I am left to wonder, what’s next?

“This conference report sets the wrong priorities for our nation.”

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