

LARSON FIGHTS TO SAVE FIRE GRANT PROGRAM CUT BY BUSH ADMINISTRATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2001

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today expressed his concern that the Bush Administration's budget proposal for fiscal year 2002 eliminates funding for the Firefighter Investment and Response Act (FIRE Act). The Bush Administration's budget blue print, released on Feb. 28, said that the program was "unneeded" and that such a grant "does 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), would begin issuing grants to the more than 32,000 fire departments across the country as early as 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 that could be awarded to chosen applicants is \$750,000 each, although departments can apply for grants in two separate categories, but cannot exceed that amount.

"I know that the municipal budget process forces fire departments to compete with other municipal departments and local interests for their share of limited budget funds," said Larson. "Yet the funds requested by fire departments are especially important as they cover, among other areas, the cost of continued training and the purchase of new equipment. The problem is being further exacerbated by the additional roles that firefighters are now being asked to perform in the community. Today, first response for most departments includes the need for additional training to face terrorist activities, and most local communities just do not have the resources to provide for this critical need. Fire departments truly deserve all the support and aid we are able to provide, because every dollar we invest in fire safety, is an investment in our neighborhoods, communities, and the well being of the families that live there. Cutting this program is both irresponsible and short sighted."

In response, Larson, along with 111 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 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.

Larson's late father, Raymond Larson, worked as a firefighter at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford for many years, and Larson is now a member of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus. 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.

When applications become available for this year, FEMA will make announcements through their website, and provide

departments with an extensive mailing on applying. Please 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.