

The 5th anniversary of the 9-11 attacks reminded us that our volunteer and career firefighters sacrifice a great deal to protect our communities and it is our duty to provide them with the equipment and training that they need to keep their departments running safely and efficiently. It is critical that our firefighters and first responders have the resources they need to better protect themselves and the communities they serve.

Unfortunately, fire departments often have difficulty purchasing proper equipment. A ladder truck for a local fire department can run upwards of \$750,000 and outfitting one firefighter with turnout gear and breathing apparatus can approach \$4,500. In addition, departments must fund training programs for paid and/or volunteer firefighters.

I led the effort in Congress to establish the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program to meet the basic equipment, training and firefighter safety requirements of America's fire service, in order to bring our fire departments to a baseline of readiness to respond to all hazards.

Since 2001, Maryland has received more than \$31 million in grant funding from the program. Fire departments that have received grants in the 5th Congressional District include La Plata, Hughesville, Mechanicsville, Solomons, Laurel, Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services Department and Arson Investigation Unit, Seventh District, Leonardtown, College Park, Cobb Island, Second District, Brandywine, Greenbelt, Benedict, Waldorf, Newburg, Prince Frederick, Potomac Heights, Bryans Road, Berwyn Heights, and Ridge.

Last week, the House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations conference report which increased funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs.

In May, the House adopted my amendment that increased the funding for these programs to \$651 million -- \$541 million for Fire Grants and \$110 million for SAFER.

The conference report fared even better—increasing the funding for these programs to \$662 million—\$547 million for Fire Grants and \$115 million for SAFER. That is \$368.5 million above the level requested by the President and \$122 million over the original House bill (before passage of my amendment).

A Victory for Firefighters

September 27, 2006

President Bush's budget proposed eliminating funding for the SAFER Grant Program, which helps departments hire new firefighters, recruit and retain volunteer firefighters, and provide relief to the thousands of local fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff. Furthermore, it proposed to fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program at only one third the level appropriated in Fiscal Year 2004 and 2005.

With nearly \$3 billion in applications submitted for the current program year, the continued reduction of funds to train and equip our nation's firefighters would have been bad public policy.

Firefighters risk their lives every day when protecting us, our homes, and our families. The very least we can do is provide them every resource available to ensure they go home safely to their families at the end of each day.

I am proud to have won this latest fight on behalf of some of our bravest first responders.