

Last month, a tragic fire fueled by fierce winds battered downtown Solomon's Island largely destroying two of the island's landmarks, the Lighthouse Inn and Bowen's Inn.

It took two hours for 68 firefighters and a pair of tugboats with hoses to extinguish the flames.

This recent tragedy offers us vivid reminders of the sacrifices our public safety officers make on our behalf every day. 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.

On Tuesday, I called on the House Appropriations Committee to increase funding for both the Assistance to Firefighters and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Grant Programs.

## **We Must Support America's Firefighters and Local Depts.**

April 08, 2006

---

In a letter signed by 135 of my colleagues, I expressed my deep disappointment that the Bush Administration has continued to slash funding for local fire departments. We ask far too many of our firefighters to risk their lives in our defense every day, too often with insufficient staffing, inadequate training and obsolete equipment, and we have an obligation to provide them the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible.

President Bush's budget proposes 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, the President's budget proposes to fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program at only one third the level appropriated in 2004 and 2005.

In every single budget he has submitted to Congress, the President has either drastically reduced, or eliminated altogether, funding for the Fire Grant Program. This year, once again, the President has proposed slashing the funds available to help fire departments purchase equipment and provide adequate training for their members from \$545 million to just \$293 million.

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

If necessary, I will offer an amendment on the floor of the House of Representatives to increase funding for these programs. In each of the past two years, I have worked with Reps. Curt Weldon (R-PA) and Martin Sabo (D-MN) to introduce and secure passage of bipartisan amendments to increase funding for these vital programs.

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.