

Washington, D.C. - Representative David Price, who chairs the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Appropriations, wrote a letter today urging Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to take full advantage of the authority Congress recently provided her to prevent firefighter layoffs through federal grants. The letter comes after passage of Rep. Price's FY 2010 Homeland Security funding bill, which boosted funding for firefighter personnel grants to an historic \$420 million.

Rep. Price writes, "This nation is facing a crisis concerning job loss for firefighters. The International Association of Firefighters estimates since September 2008, nearly 6,000 firefighter jobs have been lost or will soon be lost due to local budget cuts. In addition, more than 6,000 lost to attrition. These figures are not only troubling because of their impact on the nation's economy; I am also concerned that such widespread downsizing among fire companies threatens public safety and local preparedness."

The grants are a part of the Staffing for Adequate Firefighter Emergency Response (SAFER) program, which is designed to ensure communities have enough firefighters for adequate emergency preparedness. Grant funds have traditionally been used to cover costs associated with hiring new firefighters. Because of the work of Congressman Price and others, however, grants for fiscal years 2009 and 2010 can also be used to rehire firefighters who have been laid off, and to retain firefighters whose positions are in danger of being eliminated because of stresses on state and local budgets. Congress made these changes to the law as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the fiscal year 2009 supplemental appropriations bill, which also temporarily allows the Secretary to eliminate requirements that localities match federal dollars with local money and eventually cover all costs for personnel hired using grant funds. Despite a recent announcement from DHS that there would be fewer strings attached to the 2009 grants, the Department has not made full use of these tools to minimize layoffs.

"I am concerned that the Department's implementation of waiver authority for the SAFER grant program has not been entirely consistent with Congressional intent and therefore is failing to adequately prevent firefighters from being laid off," Rep. Price writes. "As the Department finalizes its fiscal year 2010 guidance that fire companies will use when applying for SAFER grants, I urge you to carry out the intent of Congress to do everything possible to keep firefighters on the job."

Rep. Price's letter comes less than a week after the House passed the Jobs for Main Street Act,

which would include an additional \$500 million for firefighter staffing grants in 2010 and would now require—instead of simply authorizing—DHS to grant the aforementioned waivers. Since the Jobs bill will not be considered in the Senate until early next year, Congressman Price is urging the Secretary to make the necessary changes to the program on her own authority.

Rep. Price has chaired the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Appropriations since 2006. During his time as Chairman, meeting the needs of firefighters and first responders has been a special policy emphasis. Rep. Price believes they play a crucial role in preparing for any potential disaster, and meeting the routine public safety needs of our communities.

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