

Washington, D.C. - Fallen Firefighters Memorial

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of HR 1544. This bill significantly improves the Homeland Security application and funding process by restructuring it in a way that my home state of North Carolina predicts will shorten the time it takes funds to get from the federal to local levels by close to six months.

"This bill also significantly improves how we assess threat by taking the decision out of the hands of DHS and creating a Task Force made up of experts from the federal, state, local, and first responder community to develop a comprehensive means of assessing risk.

"And so I feel that this bill has a great deal of potential and could be a very important step in the right direction. But I warn my colleagues that we will fail in our efforts to protect the homeland if we do not take additional steps to avoid a trade-off between protecting ourselves against terrorists attacks and preparing for and responding to natural disasters.

"As we vote on this bill, we have a Presidential budget that would slash federal funding for our local police by close to 40% through massive cuts in Homeland Security and Justice grant programs.

"The Bush administration continues its trend of shifting money from natural and general disaster preparedness programs. For example, the Appropriations committee was recently forced to cut FIRE grants, one of the most successful federal grant programs in existence, by over \$100 million at a time when our nation is expecting more than ever from our understaffed and ill-equipped fire departments.

"And so while I applaud the committee for their work in crafting a strong bill, I want to make clear to my colleagues that voting for this bill is not enough. When it comes time to make some harder choices and budget and pay for these first responder programs we happily authorize, we will need the same bipartisan support for those on the front lines that we see today."

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