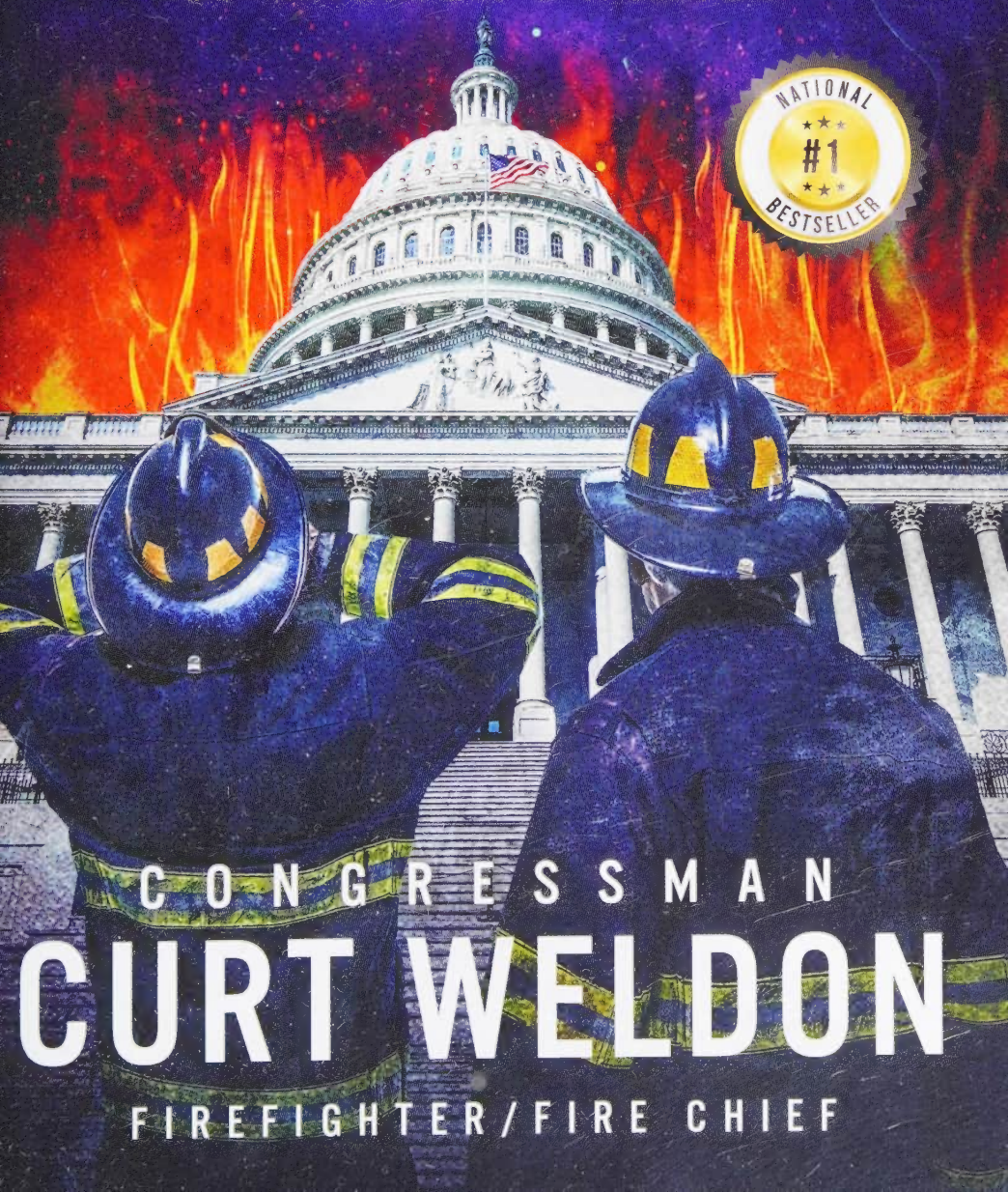


AWAKENING THE SLEEPING GIANT

THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT
OF AMERICA'S HEROES



CONGRESSMAN

CURT WELDON

FIREFIGHTER/FIRE CHIEF



Congressman Curt Weldon

represented Pennsylvania in Congress for nearly 20 years. A graduate of West Chester University, he also earned a degree in Fire Protection and served as a firefighter, fire chief, and first volunteer administrator of the Delaware County Fire Academy, and has testified in the Federal Courts and before Congress as an expert witness on fire issues.

Weldon served as Vice Chairman of both the Armed Services and Homeland Security Committees and has been on-site within days of many of the largest disasters in the United States and worldwide. He has received hundreds of awards, including the WorldSafe Public Service Award in 2014.

He and his family reside in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania.



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Praise of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, One World for Life, and Congressman Curt Weldon

“In a city that is too often characterized by how people disagree with each other, and by self-defining classifications of party, ideology, gender, race and ethnicity, Curt led the charge in creating something very different. The [Congressional Fire Services Caucus] was one of those rare organizations—maybe the only one I saw in my 24 years in the Congress—that was defined by a common purpose among people who most likely disagreed about many things. But they all agreed that support for America’s First Responders was non-negotiable.

It is sad that it took the September 11 tragedy to remind the popular culture that First Responders are selfless heroes day in and day out. But Curt Weldon—and the [Congressional Fire Services Caucus]—lived that belief—and walked the walk—day in and day out from the first day a handful of supporters met in a small room in a Congressional office building.”

— Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ)

“The success of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus is simple. It doesn’t exist to push partisan legislation, although members are free to introduce and support legislation as they see fit. Instead, the caucus simply exists to support fire fighters in each member’s district. That

was its genius. That was Curt's genius. As such, for more than 30 years, it has been one of the largest and most successful bipartisan caucuses in Congress. For three decades, the caucus has supported our national, state, and local firefighters and raised a tremendous amount of money for the families of both our professional and volunteer fire men and women. As someone who represented an area that experiences wild range fires as a way of life, I know our fire fighters greatly appreciate the caucus's support. And we greatly appreciate the work they do to keep our families safe."

— Congressman Elton Gallegly (R-CA)

"Curt's focus, drive and dogged determination pushed Congress and their stewards of the iconic United States Capitol Complex to improve and upgrade fire protection. This herculean effort began when he learned firsthand during the Longworth House Office Building fire in the Speaker's office just how out little had been done to secure the buildings and occupants from the ravages of fire.

His efforts included the formation of a Select Committee on Fire Safety that pushed Congressional leadership and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol to support my efforts to design and install contemporary fire safety features and systems in all of the buildings on Capitol Hill, starting with the United States Capitol and the Longworth House Office Building. And thus began a lasting respect for a fire chief that came to Congress and made them take notice of that

sleeping giant - the Fire Service.”

— Ken Lauziere (FPE) – Chief Fire Protection Engineer
– US Capitol Complex

“The vision and leadership of Congressman Curt Weldon in creating the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and Institute was one of [the most], if not THE most, significant events in the history of the American Fire Service.”

— Tim Butters – Senior Executive
PHMSA/DOT, CHEMTREC, IAFC, FAA, VA
Dept of Emergency Mgmt, Fairfax Fire Chief

“Looking back on my career I can honestly say that the most important work I ever did was related to the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and Institute. I had the privilege of witnessing the most unselfish group of men and women in our nation finally receive the attention they deserve for the impossible work they do. I also learned a valuable life lesson that Curt talked about constantly (from his father) that your only limitations in life are self-imposed. Curt believed this ethic and lived it for the fire service.”

— John McNichol – President & CEO
– Pennsylvania Convention Center, First Director
– Congressional Fire Services Institute

“Following the guidance of Curt Weldon, Mason Lankford and I organized Texas firefighters and the ‘Texas Connection’ with our Congressional Delegation

to network with firefighters across the country. Our goal was to get every Fire Chief involved in support of a national fire service agenda.”

— Chief Willie Wisko – Galveston Fire Department

“[One World for Life] is a truly visionary concept that, as Curt Weldon notes, can have broader long-term and systemic benefits globally. Indeed, OWFL has a positive vision and reflects a refusal to accept international conflict as always and everywhere inevitable. A noble goal of OWFL is to make humanity safer and empower an international movement of peace and understanding that will bring peoples of conflicting nations together.”

— W. Bruce Weinrod – DOD Representative to Europe
and Advisor to NATO

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THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT
OF AMERICA'S HEROES

Congressman Curt Weldon

Firefighter / Fire Chief



THE
BOOK
COUNSELOR

Curt Weldon
2017

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THE
BOOK
COUNSELOR

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the men and women in our neighborhoods in every city, town and village across America, and around the world, who quietly and unselfishly protect us from the ravages of fire and disaster while keeping our communities, and our families, safe.

The book is also dedicated to Wayne Curtis Weldon, Jr. (July 24, 1981 – August 29, 2016)

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Dedication

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Introduction

Sometimes things are so obvious we just take them for granted. For 200 years in America, we took our firefighters and other first responders for granted. We knew they were there and always ready to respond to any emergency at any time. In every national poll, we rated them among the most respected people in our neighborhoods, our cities, and our country.

The tradition of these heroes is older than America itself, started by people like Ben Franklin and others. They organized in every village, town, and city in America. We paused briefly when one of these heroes died in a tragic fire or other disaster.

We knew our towns and villages had this group of dedicated volunteers who spent time at the local firehouse while still raising their families and working full-time jobs. As our country grew, we recognized this group of unselfish people not only protected our homes and businesses but also organized our patriotic parades, rescued the cat in a tree, pumped out the flooded cellar down the street, hosted the Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop meetings, rented out their halls for weddings, retirement parties, and other celebrations, and, quite often, the site where we voted on Election Day.

We gave them a dollar when they held their tag day once a year; we attended the carnival or fair they organized

and ran annually, and we made that annual contribution of \$25 or \$50 to their annual fund drives.

But we took these ‘domestic defenders’ for granted. Because firefighters and other first responders never asked for a pat on the back for a job well done and because these backbones of our communities never protested or marched in demand for support and because this ‘heart and soul of our nation’ always delivered in the most professional manner every time they were called upon, we took firefighters and other first responders for granted.

This is the story of the awakening of the sleeping giant, the empowerment of that unsung group of men and women who have protected America since before we founded our country.

The 1-million-strong American fire service represents everything that’s right with our nation. Firefighters and other first responders are the best example of what America is all about: unselfish and ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things for their communities and for America.

Having grown up in a blue-collar family of nine children whose father was a volunteer firefighter, like my six older brothers, I learned my lessons in life in the firehouse. From firefighter to fire chief to mayor to Congress, I could take my experiences and share them with my colleagues from across the United States.

And I helped ignite a movement that continues to this day. In dozens of speeches in every state in the Union, I told my brothers and sisters in the fire service, "Logic is the last criterion used to make decisions in Washington, DC." There are dozens of logical solutions to problems and priorities, all of which make sense.

However, in our system of government, you also need to unify, tell your story, and then demand action from all levels of government. The sleeping giant awakened in 1988 and began to empower itself. The results are amazing, but the work continues because we haven't accomplished all our objectives.

And now, it's time to ignite and empower first responders worldwide. Through our work, we will make humanity safer, but we will also empower an international movement of peace and understanding that will bring peoples of conflicting nations together.

This is the story of a new movement to collaborate in the prevention, prediction, and response to fire and disasters within the US and worldwide. Real people, genuine leaders - coming together for the common good of all humanity.

1

“The Speaker’s Office Burns”

As I sat in my office across the street from the US Capitol on May 5, 1988, watching the 6 o’clock DC news report that was showing real-time footage of a high-rise building fire in Los Angeles, my attention drifted from my preparation for a DC visit by elected officials from my district to the fire. As a former volunteer firefighter and fire chief, I thought about the fire and trauma the folks in that LA building were enduring, as well as firefighters just doing their jobs, risking their lives to save strangers.

And then, I remembered that familiar smell of smoke and fire I experienced from hundreds of fires I battled in my industrial hometown of Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. I sort of believed that somehow that TV set had some new dimension of smell to intensify the visual drama. “I’m working too many hours,” I thought to myself as a first-term congressman devoting 16 to 18 hours each day seven days a week because I wanted to make my mark with this unbelievable opportunity just two hours from my hometown. The burning smell got stronger until I knew something was actually on fire.

“John, is there something burning out there?” I yelled to my staffer John McNichol who was working in the outer office on the second floor of the Longworth House Office Building. Built in 1933, Longworth is one of three multi-story office buildings directly across Independence Avenue that are each home to approximately 1/3 of the entire membership of the US House of Representatives as well as various committee hearing rooms.

Members of Congress at the beginning of each new two-year session draw lots by seniority for offices in each of these buildings with seventh floor Longworth and fifth floor of neighboring Cannon the two floors most frequently left for new members to set up their DC offices. I lucked out in my first session draw for offices and somehow ended up on the second floor of Longworth two doors from Speaker Jim Wright’s Texas district office, which occupied the entire front corner suite of the building. The House Speaker and other senior leadership in the House get two offices, one in the Capitol Building itself and a second office that focuses on normal constituent services for citizens of their districts.

Being close to the Speaker’s district office really had no meaning, but local folks coming to meet me in DC sometimes believed that “Curt must already be impressing people because his office is almost next to Speaker Wright’s office.” As a first-term Republican

from Pennsylvania in a Congress overwhelmingly dominated by Democrats, the Speaker most likely had no idea who I was and wouldn't even recognize me. After all, there were 434 of us.

Finally, my firefighter senses took over as I moved from my inner office to the outer front office where John was still working. Thinking that I was crazy, John said, "You're working too much; you need to relax." Then, I opened the office door to the hallway, and I immediately saw smoke banking down several feet from the marble hallway ceiling getting thicker by the minute. Smoke always rises and travels horizontally banking down lower and lower as the fire intensifies.

"John," I shouted, "there's a fire in the building; looks like it's coming from one of the front offices. Call in the alarm and close the office windows so we don't create a draft that will suck the smoke into our office and complicate things." John called the emergency operator for the Capitol and gave the location as second floor front corner Longworth Building and closed the windows as I instructed.

Then, John ran into the hallway, following me as I moved up the hall to the corner office where the smoke was obviously coming from. House office buildings (and especially Longworth) have huge hallways with marble floors and open staircases connecting each of the floors creating seven-story open chimneys where smoke can rise uncontrolled, which is exactly what was happening.

Because members and staffers work late and sometimes stay all night, I slept on a blow-up bed on my office floor for 12 of the years I served in the Congress because my wife and I couldn't afford to keep a small DC apartment and send our kids to private schools back home.

Staffers, constituents, and members of Congress were running down the stairs and others were crying and asking where to go and is this for real? I vividly remember the panicked look on Maryland Congresswoman Helen Bentley's face as she raced with her tiny dog down one of the open stairways to get to an outside exit.

A Capitol police officer (and they're the best) was hustling down the hallway as I approached what I now realized was Speaker Jim Wright's Office yelling, "fire, get out" and "proceed to the nearest exit" while he checked individual offices to make certain everyone was evacuating the building. I remember saying to the officer, "Are there no detectors [smoke] in the building? And "did you pull the manual fire alarm?"

He responded, "There are no detectors or any alarms in the building."

As I approached the closed front door of the Speaker's suite with John and a volunteer firefighter Erik Gaull (who also happened to be a Democratic staffer) while more Capitol police officers focused on evacuating the building, I remember thinking that this office building wouldn't pass any building or fire code in any city in

the United States. Having completed the NFPA Life Safety Code 101 course as a young firefighter, I was fully aware that high-occupancy/high-risk buildings must have sprinklers, alarm systems, and enclosed stair towers.

But, as we felt the Speaker's door and realized the fire must be in the back of the suite away from the door, things got worse. We kicked open the door and immediately got down low where the air was still breathable and started to crawl inside the Speaker's suite checking for staffers who may have still been there and perhaps unconscious. As we moved in, I asked John to grab some portable fire extinguishers from the hose cabinets in each hallway.

It seemed like hours but was really seconds when John returned with five extinguishers and passed them to us to use on the raging fire that we now saw involved the entire corner office of the Speaker's suite, a room we would later learn was the kitchen. As we pulled the pins and directed the extinguishers feverishly at the fire, only two worked; the other three were not charged. So, I yelled again to John to go back and pull out the 1½-inch preconnected hose in the hose station and bring it to me and then stand by for my order to open the valve so I could spray water from the nozzle directly onto the fire.

Frustration and anger set in as John yelled, "Curt, there's no hose in any of the hose stations. What should I do?" Realizing that our efforts to contain and extinguish the

fire were hopeless, we headed down the hall after we closed the Speaker's door to contain the fire in that suite alone. By this time, smoke was billowing down the second-floor hallways in each direction choking anyone who tried to run to safety. Elevators that should have been automatically recalled to the ground floor stopped on the fire floor exposing inhabitants to intense heat and smoke, causing more confusion and panic.

What seemed to be hours since I first smelled smoke was only minutes until I walked down the stairs and left the Longworth Building, my suit and white shirt stained with dirty water, sweat, and the pungent smell of smoke. As I exited, I heard the sirens of the engines and ladder companies taking positions on the streets around Longworth stopping at hydrants to connect for water supply while first-in firefighters entered the building donned in air packs with their preconnected hoses from their pumpers.

It was then I first saw the white chief's helmet on a firefighter who introduced himself to me as Ray Alfred, the DC fire chief. "You've got a working fire in the corner office suite on the second floor," I shouted to the chief having no time for small talk. "You'll have to lay lines or carry your hose and connect to the hose station outlets because they're all empty!" I shouted to the chief as he raced into the building to assess and then return to the street. "I'm sure you've pre-planned

this building and know what additional exposures you have that may cause additional problems for your firefighters,” I said to the chief.

Now realizing I was a member of Congress, the chief responded, “Sir, we were never permitted to pre-plan any of these buildings, but we’ll assess the situation quickly, and our professionals will do their job.” And that’s exactly what the DC firefighters did, with amazing efficiency since the fire by this time had fully engulfed the entire suite of the Speaker of the House. Like every volunteer firefighter I had encountered in small towns and those paid by larger cities like Upper Darby, Philadelphia, and Chester (in my district), the work ethic was the same. Each man and woman had a job to do, and they did it with dispatch, constantly focusing on the well-being and safety of those staffers and members who were now in panic mode.

As the Speaker’s office burned, the national news media raced to the Capitol and the Longworth Building. Realizing that I was a member of Congress, despite my rumpled and soot-covered shirt and suit, reporters started to shove microphones in my face asking me for comment. “These buildings are firetraps,” I blurted out on national TV “they wouldn’t pass any fire or building code in any city in the United States.” “They’re unsafe for members of Congress and the thousands of ordinary citizens who visit their representatives every day of the year,” I continued.

Weldon Battles *REAL* Congressional Fire



ON SCENE

May 15, 1988

National networks and other news media carried the fire in Speaker Wright's office in addition to this one in the International Association of Fire Chiefs publication.

The DC Fire Department did what it has always done even in the worst circumstances of understaffing and underfunding: They evacuated the entire building and extinguished the fire, which by the end of the fire had caused hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to Speaker Jim Wright's office. I went to my room and later that night received a call on my cell phone; it was the chief of staff to the Speaker.



The fire in the Speaker's Office resulted in more than \$200,000 damage, according to US Capitol fire protection fire engineer Ken Lauziere.

The Speaker's chief of staff thanked me for my efforts and told me how grateful the Speaker was for what I had done. And then he made a statement and asked me a question. "Congressman Weldon, this story is going to receive major national attention tomorrow; you'll be asked dozens of questions. You're not going to blame Speaker Wright for the fire, are you?" he said.

"Of course, not," I replied, "fires happen every day, but the Longworth Building is unsafe and needs to be updated and brought into compliance with national codes." He agreed and suggested we talk the next day.

My cell phone rang about 7 a.m. the next morning, and my chief of staff told me that media outlets were already calling and emailing requesting interviews about the fire. "What do you suggest?" I asked, still



Damage to the Speaker's suite of offices started in the kitchen area but was widespread and destroyed furniture and internal belongings. Because of the structure of the building, floors, walls, and ceilings suffered no permanent damage.

tired from the previous day's activities. "We'll set up a podium in front of the office, and you can handle all the media at once. Let's plan for an early morning press conference." I agreed and quickly got ready and headed for the office.

My staff had already started researching legislative options prior to my arrival in the office and found an obscure provision in the House rules that provided for any member to offer a “Privileged Resolution” on the House floor if the resolution dealt with the health, safety, and welfare of the members themselves.

“This is exactly what we need to deal with the fire,” I said, “let’s prepare a resolution I can discuss with Speaker Wright’s chief of staff to get his support.” The plan was to announce the resolution at the press conference and have it ready for immediate submission as the House convened that morning for business.

House Legislative Counsel, as they always do, quickly prepared the proper language for my legislation H. Res. 440, “Providing for a Select Committee of the House to investigate fire safety in the Capitol and House Office Buildings.” I called the Speaker’s chief of staff and explained my intent to bring legislation dealing with the safety and well-being of members of Congress at the start of business.

The legislation would empower the Speaker and minority leader to each appoint two members of the House to a special task force that would make recommendations to the House leadership and the architect of the Capitol (who controls all buildings on Capitol Hill) regarding life safety in all the buildings Congress occupied. The Speaker’s chief of staff indicated that Speaker Wright

would support the legislation and would thank me publicly for my personal efforts to check on the safety of his staff members as well as my efforts to control the fire in his Longworth office.

At 10 a.m. on May 10, 1988, Speaker of the House Jim Wright, as he did every day, gaveled the House to order and recognized me so I could offer a privileged resolution regarding the safety and well-being of the members of the House. After brief discussion from members on both sides of the aisle, my resolution passed unanimously, and my first piece of legislation passed the House.

It was during this process that I first learned that Fire Protection Engineer Ken Lauziere in the architect of the Capitol's office had pushed for years to have all the Capitol buildings (and the Capitol itself) brought into code compliance with alarm systems, smoke detectors, automatic recall of elevators, and other provisions of NFPA Life Safety Code 101. I won my first battle in the Congress and over the following months and years, every building on Capitol Hill was brought into code compliance, and the DC Fire Department gained access and cooperation in pre-planning and inspecting every building on "the Hill." Chief Ray Alfred and Fire Protection Engineer Ken Lauziere would become good friends and remain so to this day.

Word within the Congress spread quickly and Democrat friends jokingly told me I must have started the fire for publicity while Republican friends kidded me that

I should have “let it burn.” The irony was that a year earlier I conceived the idea to create a Congressional Caucus that would focus on issues of importance to firefighters and other first responders nationwide. I remember well my staffers (and other members) laughing at me for wanting to organize a fire caucus. Don’t get me wrong; members fully respected first responders in their districts but could not quite understand why a Congressional Fire Caucus was necessary.

As a lifelong firefighter and fire chief, it became apparent as soon as I arrived in Washington that first responders were taken for granted across the country. In my first term in Congress (the last two years of Ronald Reagan’s second term), bureaucrats were proposing to eliminate the only federal funding for first responders, the National Fire Academy and US Fire Administration. New regulations were proposed that would make it more difficult for volunteers to continue to protect their communities, and no support existed in any form for career firefighters

As a fiscal conservative, I knew what would happen if we stopped all support for firefighters, especially volunteers. Small towns and cities across America would have to hire full-time firefighters to replace those who had proudly and effectively protected their hometowns since Ben Franklin started the first volunteer fire department in America—in Philadelphia. Eliminating volunteers would bankrupt every level of government and tear at the very fabric of what makes our nation so great.

Since the creation of that first volunteer fire department by Ben Franklin, thousands of Americans have chosen to organize and protect not only their own homes and businesses but also their entire communities. Older than America itself, the fire service had become the heart and soul of America's towns and cities, not only fighting fires but responding to every disaster faced by local communities, including floods, earthquakes, accidents, and much more.

But even more, these same local fire departments had become centers for community service, organizing patriotic parades and celebrations, rescuing cats in trees, pumping out cellars flooded by rain and flood waters, organizing search parties for lost children, and every other imaginable disaster local communities face.

More than that, these same nonprofit organizations began hosting Scout meetings in their halls, wedding receptions, social events, and even polling places for local elections. In every town and village, whether controlled by Democrats or Republicans, local first responder organizations quickly became the backbone of our growing nation.

Asking for nothing, these bands of volunteer first responders raised their own funds from tag days, chicken dinners, bingo nights, and every other conceivable way to raise necessary funds to purchase the fire trucks, the turn-out gear, the insurance, the multitude of special equipment and then still have to take

time away from their own families and jobs to train and retrain, manage the finances, and do the mundane things like wash the trucks, clean, and maintain the stations, and educate families and children about the need to understand fire and life safety in the home. In one study, fire service leaders in Pennsylvania estimated it would require profits from 733,333 chicken dinners to purchase just one aerial platform truck.

What hit me most, in my first few days after I became a member of Congress in 1987, was the lack of support for these American heroes, while, at the same time, the federal government was spending almost \$4 billion per year on programs for local law enforcement, including programs to hire more police, pay half the cost of bullet-proof vests, and fund special programs to assist local law enforcement.

I've always strongly supported our local police. In fact, my reason for running for public office in the first place was to assist my local police department in Marcus Hook as they battled day-to-day with the Pagans motorcycle gang back in the late 1970's. The Pagans established their national headquarters in my hometown and were allegedly running drugs for the Philadelphia mob, all while controlling our town and harassing our local police. In fact, as a new mayor I applied for, and received, a federal grant to hire two new full-time officers to fight the Pagans in my town in collaboration with three neighboring towns.

I remember attending a memorial service for a local police officer killed in the line of duty; it was an extremely sad and emotional event that attracted thousands of law enforcement officers nationwide who poured into our county. But then I remembered local firefighter and family friend Bill Gallagher who died while fighting a structure fire in my hometown, Herb Pinkowicz who died because of injuries while responding to a fire in my second hometown Aston, and firefighter Don Felker of nearby Collingdale who collapsed and died while serving EMS duty as a volunteer leaving behind a family of 10 children. More than 60 dead first responders in my county alone paid the ultimate price just as those law enforcement officers had.

But the double standard hit me smack in the face. Was the life of a dedicated first responder worth less than that of a law enforcement officer? The obvious answer being no; the logical question emerged about why the federal government was spending \$4 billion a year on local law enforcement and only \$40 million for our nation's firefighters and other first responders, especially considering that each year more than 120 firefighters (paid and volunteer) die in the line of duty. There are no local volunteer law enforcement officers; yet I knew our country had 1 million volunteer first responders and approximately 250,000 paid first responders.

The answer was in large part due to the law enforcement associations and organizations that established a full-time presence in Washington, DC, coupled with the

large federal network of law enforcement agencies (FBI, DEA, DOJ, etc.). Except for the IAFF (International Association of Firefighters) and the IAFC (International Association of Fire Chiefs), there wasn't a strong and permanent presence of visibility, awareness, and lobbying efforts on behalf of the nation's first responders.

At the time, there was a network of seven associations that met periodically and included the IAFF, IAFC, NVFC (National Volunteer Fire Council), NASFM (National Association of State Fire Marshals), ISFSI (International Society of Fire Service Instructors), NFPA (National Fire Protection Association), and (IAAI) International Association of Arson Investigators. As for any federal network of first responder advocates, nothing really existed except for the USFA (United States Fire Administration), an agency suffering from severe lack of funding and identity.

The path to success was clear to me; I had to convince the seven major national associations that first responders needed a single common entity within the Congress itself that would focus attention on firefighters and first responders, raise the visibility of first responders and act as a clearinghouse for every firefighter and EMS person in the US, whether they're paid, part-paid, or volunteer, as well as all their support organizations.

My job was to prod, empower, and awaken America's "sleeping giant", the men and women of the nations' first responder network by organizing members of Congress

who would commit to becoming personally involved in a new caucus solely designed to understand and support these unsung American heroes. There was some resistance, reluctance, and skepticism at first among a few of the existing organizations about this new entity. But how could anyone in the national first responder network object to creating an organization that would bring more focus within the Congress itself on the plight of what I began to call America's "domestic defenders."

The Congressional Fire and EMS Caucus was born. The battle to politically awaken and empower America's first responders had begun!

2

“The Whole Town Is on Fire”

Serving in Congress is an amazing experience, especially so if you're born the youngest of nine children (seven boys/two girls) in a blue-collar family in a small heavily industrial town on the Delaware River in the extreme southeastern corner of Pennsylvania. Marcus Hook is only one square mile in size, and three-quarters of the town is heavy industry—two large oil refineries; two chemical manufacturing plants; a mammoth abandoned rayon, textile, and cellophane plant where my father worked for 34 years; and a major port for shipping and receiving petroleum products. Running right smack through the middle of town is the primary northeast rail corridor for all Amtrak passenger and Conrail freight traffic. In the flight path of the Philadelphia International Airport, about ten miles north, Marcus Hook is also the home to the largest underground petrochemical storage site in America, five natural, man-modified storage caverns 300 feet below the surface built in the 1960s for storage of liquefied gases.

Growing up in Marcus Hook was unique in many ways. Home of one of the many flophouses of Blackbeard and



One of five man-made granite caverns 300 feet below the surface of Marcus Hook carved in the 1960's (still in use) for storage of extremely flammable liquefied gases. Because a fire department is volunteer, it doesn't mean they don't confront some of the most dangerous hazards known to man.

the site of one of the oldest churches in Pennsylvania, the town was largely ethnic European families who moved to the "Hook" to work in one of the refineries, ship out from one of the two refineries, or work in one of the manufacturing plants like my family. My father got a job in the British-based American Viscose Corporation plant that originally produced rayon and textiles and eventually manufactured cellophane when taken over by FMC Corporation. American Viscose constructed a small cluster of 500 British-style row homes that became known as the Village for purchase by workers in the plant. Our four-bedroom rowhome housed 11, including my parents. I guess you could say we were poor, but we never measured our wealth by the

size of our house, the year of our car (when we had one) or our backyard (which backed up to the main north-east rail corridor consisting of five parallel rail lines).

Growing up in the “Hook” was good. We never locked our doors, neighbors would often correct us if we were doing something wrong, and we had two loving parents who never had the opportunity to complete schooling beyond the eighth grade. Yet, to this day, my father was the wisest man I ever met, and my mother was the devoutly religious role model who marched all nine of us to church every Sunday about a mile from our home in the neighboring town. All nine of us learned simple truths: never take hand-outs from the government, get involved in a positive way in the community, and always do your best in whatever job or position assigned to you. Dad worked full-time at the American Viscose (FMC) plant and provided for the 11 of us. When the plant went on shutdown or a strike, others would apply for government assistance, not Dad, he would take another part-time job to make ends meet. And, when necessary, Mom would work at the local hospital in the coffee shop.

All seven boys in the family, to one degree or another, got involved in the local volunteer fire company (Viscose), following in Dad’s footsteps. As you can guess, many of the workers from the plant and who lived in the model village started Viscose Fire Company. One of two volunteer fire companies in our small community, Viscose was a ladder company specializing in

the firefighting evolutions necessary to enter buildings or structures above the ground floor. The first ladder truck at Viscose was a 1938 Hahn. The Hahn carried a full assortment of ground ladders ranging from 10 feet to 50 feet and skilled firefighters, who trained in their spare time to become proficient, operated them. Our other truck was always a pumper (or engine); my first recollection being a 1952 American LaFrance 500 gpm truck that was my father's pride. Dad never sought to work his way up to become fire chief, his special and unique skills were in maintaining and servicing the trucks. As far back as I can remember, Dad was chief engineer, responsible for the operation of both trucks and all the related equipment (generators, portable pumps, exhaust fans, forcible entry pneumatic tools).



The Weldon family at the rededication of the 1963 75 foot Mack aerial ladder truck in honor of my father Viscose Fire Department Chief Engineer Steve Weldon, Sr. When the truck retired from service, the Weldon campaign committee purchased and used it in parades and celebrations.

It was working with my Dad's involvement in the fire service that I learned all the basic mechanical lessons of life from vehicle maintenance to electrical wiring (series and parallel) to metal fabrication to battery maintenance to preventive maintenance, but the most important lesson was dependability. Dad knew that the failure of one of the trucks or a piece of machinery during an emergency could result in an injury or even death to a firefighter or civilian, so he worked tirelessly at his volunteer position.

The other trait that we learned at a young age was responsibility to do our absolute best at whatever position assigned to us. As I think back on my life, until age 11 or 12, I spent much of my time with my mother attending church activities. From that age forward, I shifted my focus to Dad and literally grew up in the firehouse. At every opportunity, I would plead with my father to take me with him when he would spend three or four hours a night in the firehouse two blocks from our home. If not working on the trucks or the equipment, Dad would just hang out and meet with other firefighters who would randomly stop in the firehouse just to chat or have a beer. Back then, most firehouses had beer machines where you could buy a bottle of Schmidt's or Budweiser for 25 cents.

The firehouse business was serious, and every member took his responsibility to the extreme. If you had more than one beer, you couldn't respond to an alarm, which was the ultimate disgrace. The firehouse was

like a club, a place for members (primarily men when I was young) to sit and discuss fires, fishing, vehicle repair, family, or work. Two areas of discussion were informally off the table, politics and religion, although from time to time, those topics found their way into the conversation.

On my 18th birthday, I proudly joined the fire company although I had been a permanent fixture in the firehouse for six or seven years by then. As a new member, I had to take classes at the local fire schools, which were held in local schools, other fire stations, or the Pennsylvania State Fire School in Lewistown. I sucked up every opportunity I could between my part-time job at the Acme Market and my preparation to go to college after high school (I was the first in my family to have the opportunity to go right from high school to college). My other brothers and sisters either went into the service (my brothers served in the Air Force, Navy, Army, and Coast Guard) or got a full-time job and took classes on the side.

Being a member of a local volunteer fire company was like being part of a huge close-knit family, kind of like a secret society, although anyone could join (race and religion didn't matter). And the more I got involved, the more I understood that these people were the heart and souls of their communities. Attending training classes, parades, athletic competition (softball, bowling, or whatever), I witnessed thousands of ordinary people who had the same common goal and civic responsibil-

ity interacting for the common good of neighbors, and strangers, in the most dangerous situations imaginable, many of whom they would never otherwise meet.

The more involved I got as an actual firefighter, the more I encountered other firefighters in neighboring towns who had the same ideals, interests, and a shared sense of community responsibility and pride. It was during this process of growth within the fire service that I came to the conclusion that these people formed the backbone of their communities and our nation.

Because of the huge industry in our town, we never knew what risk we would face. Dozens of times, the siren on the firehouse roof would blare (later, we had personal pagers), and we would drop whatever we were doing, whomever we were meeting, or in the middle of our sleep and run to the firehouse to answer the phone for the address from our 24/7 dispatcher who was based in our sister firehouse (Marcus Hook) about 10 blocks away. Arriving at the firehouse, we would jump onto one of the two trucks and look for our gear. We stored our gear neatly on the topsides of each truck as opposed to hanging in the firehouse. We didn't have enough room for storage in the firehouse, and it allowed us to save a few precious minutes as we got dressed while responding to the alarm. This practice was also very dangerous because you would have four to six men putting on boots, coats, and helmets on top of the moving trucks as they gained speed.

I have to admit, like every firefighter, police officer, or soldier, there's an adrenaline rush as you prepare for the unknown. Most calls would be routine, trash, automobile, grass, or false alarm. But you never knew when the big one would be waiting for you to arrive. Whether they were paid, part-paid, or volunteer, firefighters faced the same risks, except for big city exposures like multi-story high-rise buildings or underground transportation systems. Although, I can recall times the call board would read Sun Oil Refinery 10 Plant, or Sinclair/BP Refinery storage tank, or B&A chemical plant acid mix, or Congoleum Flooring production line, Allied Chemical overturned rail car carrying some exotic chemical or some other extremely hazardous and complex uncontrolled situation. But, like our colleagues in the neighboring towns, counties, or states, we always responded and did our best.

Of course, we routinely handled house fires, store fires, garage fires, hazmat incidents, school fires, and other incidents and were always proud of our work. Sometimes we would save people, sometimes we couldn't arrive to the scene quickly enough, and we would deal with death—adults who drank too much alcohol and burned in their own beds, ignited by a dropped cigarette, children who were trapped in an upstairs bedroom and who suffocated from smoke inhalation (smoke causes most fire-related deaths, not burning), or in the unthinkable situation where a fellow firefighter dies at the fire scene or because of fire-re-

lated complications. In my small town, we had three volunteers who died while fighting a fire in the Sunoco Refinery and one firefighter who died as a result of a heart attack while venting the roof of a beer distributor.

There's no other group of volunteers in America where members actually die each year while providing their service. In the US, the number of firefighter deaths each year exceeds 100. Each year, at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland, there's a moving service to honor these brave paid and volunteer domestic defenders who risk everything to save others. Thousands attend this annual service, including the President of the United States. I had the honor to serve as keynote speaker at one these solemn occasions and meet with the families of those who perished while protecting their communities.

As a volunteer firefighter, you also have a full-time occupation and usually a family. In my small town of less than 5,000 people, like every other town in America, when the alert sounds, you drop everything, and you run to the station to offer your services, not knowing what's in store. In January 1975, I was teaching in a public school full-time, my wife Mary was an RN at the local medical center, and we had purchased a small triplex in Lower Chichester Township, which was the neighboring town to Marcus Hook. Lower Chichester (sometimes known as Linwood) was up the hill from my hometown, which was obviously at sea level because the town sat alongside the Delaware River.

From the banks of the public park situated between the two huge oil refineries of Sun Oil Company and BP Oil Company, you could look across the one-mile wide river and see the banks of New Jersey and a chemical processing plant in Paulsboro. The refineries were large masses of steel piping, valves, and processing units that in some cases were three or four stories high. Massive oil tankers (some 700 or 800 feet long) would haul crude from South America or the Middle East, across the Atlantic Ocean into the Delaware Bay and then proceed up the Delaware River to the port of Marcus Hook where they would unload their crude oil into refinery storage tanks that lined the waterfront and extended into the refineries themselves. The companies would then process crude oil through the refineries to produce gasoline, jet fuel, heating oil, or sludge that's useful for other purposes. Living in a town where more than one-half of the land area was a maze of pipes, sounds, and odors was not always a pleasant experience. I remember well my mother doing the daily clothes wash necessary to support nine children and two adults and hanging the clothes out back in our small postage-stamp-size yard. If she happened to leave the clothes out at night, the next morning black soot would cover the garments because the refineries 'blew their stacks' at night in a regular operations process, and the winds would sometimes blow the soot over our homes and all over our vehicles.

My earliest concerns for the environment evolved from my experiences growing up in Marcus Hook. From the

soot to the smell of mercaptan to the rumbling sounds of the refinery flare stacks, life in the Hook was anything but tranquil. Over the years, residents learned to live with the smells and sounds, but as a firefighter, you never knew when a major problem would develop. During my first ten years as an active firefighter, we'd respond to three to four calls in the refineries each year. Usually a call into one of the refineries meant that a situation was out of control and was just too much for the company fire brigade to handle. When a call came in for one of the refineries, you knew the situation was unstable and very dangerous.

But the night of January 31, 1975, would be the worst case imaginable. At the time, I was a teacher in the William Penn School District, Mary was an RN at Crozer Chester Medical Center, and we were living in Linwood in a small one-bedroom apartment that was part of the triplex we had purchased as our first home. Our eldest child Karen was less than one year old and slept in the same room as my wife and me. It was late at night and I was preparing report cards for the students in my class of 34 at the Walnut Street School. I was sitting at my desk on our small back porch filling out the cards and half dozing when a series of violent explosions rocked our apartment almost like a bomb had exploded outside. I ran to the back door, opened it, and remember gasping as I saw what appeared to be one of the refineries down the hill on fire. From my vantage point of at least a mile away, the fire was

huge, belching flames, some hundreds of feet into the cold night air.

Within a few seconds, the fire sirens started wailing, and my beeper set off the tone alert followed by the announcement of a fire at the BP Refinery. As the explosions continued to rip the night and shake the house, I ran upstairs, awakened my wife, and told her to take the baby to her mother's home in Wilmington, Delaware, which was approximately 20 minutes away. As Mary got up and the baby starting crying, I told her to remain at her mother's until I called. Like every other firefighter in America, my instincts were to safeguard my family but head immediately to the scene of the disaster.

But Mary was the wife of a firefighter, and often the unsung heroes of the American fire services are the spouses. Often enough, spouses don't fight the fires, but they support firefighters completely. So, after I responded to the call, Mary packed up the baby and headed to our sister fire company in Marcus Hook where she (and dozens of other spouses) started to immediately set up a food kitchen and temporary bedding and then began to transport coffee and food to the fire scene and prepare bedding for rest periods the firefighters would have to take.

In Marcus Hook, in one of the smallest towns in the state of Pennsylvania, was a massive disaster the volunteers would face, volunteers who rolled out of bed

or left their homes to pursue a situation totally out of control and threatening an entire community.

As I raced in my car down the hill and over the railroad bridge to Marcus Hook, the belching flames rose hundreds of feet in the air lighting up the frigid late January night sky. As in every emergency, adrenaline rushed through my brain as I turned the corner at the main intersection in town and headed for the fire station. Upon arriving, other men who had run to the fire station from their homes were putting on their coats, boots, and helmets in what seemed like only seconds. As the first lieutenant (assistant fire chief) of Viscose Fire Company, I climbed up the side of our 75-foot Mack ladder truck just as the truck was pulling out of the station. As the truck gained speed and raced down our main street in town, I shouted to the other firefighters “get all your gear on because this fire is massive.” Because the other firefighters had run to the firehouse and because of the four- and five-story factory office buildings that were adjacent to the firehouse, they had not yet seen the flames rising hundreds of feet into the air as I had seen as I drove down from Linwood and crossed the bridge into Marcus Hook.

As our truck turned the corner in the main intersection in town, the flames and the smell of panic and death hit us right in our faces. We proceeded down the 10 blocks of town with sirens wailing and approached Delaware Avenue along the river when the situation quickly became apparent; the fire raged on, a massive

fire rising hundreds of feet into the air. As we turned left and sped toward the BP refinery plant gate, we could see men climbing out of the frigid river screaming for help, some with severe burns and others with missing clothing, all in shock. Because we operated two fire stations in the town, all four fire trucks now lined up as we raced toward the closed BP refinery gate. The two ambulances from our sister fire station stopped and started caring for and transporting what we now realized were Greek crew members from the Liberian-flagged tanker *Corinthos*, which the *Edgar M. Queeny* hit. We would later learn that 28 crew members aboard the *Corinthos* (including the captain and his family) had died in the initial explosions and one crew member of the *Edgar M. Queeny* died instantly.

Here in Marcus Hook, as is possible in any town across America where flammable and combustible liquids and chemicals move by ship, by truck, or by rail or where planes fly overhead, a disaster unfolded because a 660-foot-long chemical carrying tanker (capacity 289,000 barrels) loaded with lenthol, phenol, styrene, methanol, vinyl acetate, paraffin, and caustic acid had made a U-turn in the mile-wide Delaware River and had directly plowed into the side of the docked 754-foot long oil tanker *Corinthos* (capacity 427,000 barrels), which was in the process of off-loading approximately 400,000 barrels of Algerian crude to the BP Refinery, 17,000 barrels off-loaded several days earlier to a barge in the Delaware Bay as the

Corinthos made her way into the Delaware River.

Both BP and Sun Oil had strict rules about non-employees entering refinery property and firefighters were no exception, of course, that is, until refinery management realized they couldn't handle this particular incident. BP was stricter than Sun Oil and the guard who was sitting at the BP refinery gate that night (Tony Garzia) shouted out as our truck approached the gate, "I can't let you guys in without permission."

With chaos in the river, at the dockside, along the banks with frozen crew members, in homes near the river that had windows blasted out from the force of the initial explosions, people panicking in the streets and an inferno of belching flames directly in front of us rising 100 to 200 feet in the air, we collectively shouted back "Open the f—ing gate, or we'll drive right through it!" Tony understood, and being a local Hook resident himself, quickly opened the plant gate, and we drove in. The ladder company's job is to use ground ladders to access buildings or structures to engage in rescue or fight the fire. The hydraulic 75-foot aerial ladder is designed to gain access to higher locations or use a massive water nozzle to spray hundreds of gallons of water per minute onto an uncontrolled fire. As we searched the area along the waterfront for victims, we raised ground ladders to the roofs of warehouses and tanks directly adjacent to the dock where the Corinthos was now totally engulfed in fire and explosions from bow to stern.

The three pumpers from our two fire stations simultaneously were laying large hose lines hundreds of feet from hydrants down to the dock area to start supplying water to fight and suppress the fire. At this point, which was only minutes from our arrival, it was impossible to get on board the *Corinthos*, so firefighters (all volunteers) manned nozzles and slowly pushed out on the short pier toward the ship, both to suppress the fire but, more importantly, to look for more victims (whether crew members or refinery dock workers). The only comparison to this situation would be a major war zone, body parts along the dock (cleanup crews found one torso on the roof of a warehouse 500 feet from the *Corinthos*), rivets from the *Corinthos* flying like bullets from large guns, explosions deafening to the ears every few minutes, and heat and fire never experienced.

The job of the firefighters at the scene was to place themselves along the dock and pier areas between the refinery itself and the massive warehouses and storage tanks filled with crude and flammable liquids to protect the refinery from becoming fully involved and to protect the town from destruction. As is typical across our great nation, volunteers from our county and across the region answered the cries for help from our two local fire companies. Within two hours 59 fire companies (some part-paid but most volunteer) raced to Marcus Hook risking their lives to join in the effort to save the refinery and to save our town. And we did!

One might say this incident was unusual, and it was; in fact, it was the single largest disaster in the US in 1975. But every day in every town in every state, firefighters

FIRE CHIEF



Local, national, and international news media outlets carried the story of the largest disaster in the United States in 1975, the collision of the SS Edgar M Queeny (660 feet long) as it rammed into the docked S/T Corinthos (754 feet long) as 300,000 bbls of crude was being off-loaded in Marcus Hook.

and EMS workers prepare to and do respond. Without regard to their own safety, as well as the well-being of their own families, they respond!



Fire completely consumed the 754-foot-long Corinthos filled with 300,000 barrels of highly flammable light crude oil for three days, killing 29 crew members and causing more than \$100 million of property damage. The Corinthos eventually split in two and sank next to the dock. The initial fires and explosions threatened the entire refinery and community of Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. I was lead author of the 59-page technical publication and made 11 recommendations for improvement to maritime fire safety nationwide.

3

“We’ll Just Have to Take Over the Town”

In every community across America, first responders are among the most respected people. Whether they’re paid, part-paid, or totally volunteer firefighters, they serve as the responders to any incident that threatens the community. This close-knit group provides a cadre of citizens who get involved in every aspect of the community. Thirty-two thousand organizations, the majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations protect every square mile of space from the effects of disasters, large and small.

A volunteer fire department or rescue association quite often must raise its own funds, take care of the fire station upkeep, pay for fire trucks that range upwards of \$400,000 each, buy personal protection equipment for each firefighter that costs tens of thousands of dollars for each responder, and still take time away from their families to attend training classes and update sessions. No other volunteer group in America has such a burdensome responsibility.

Paid fire departments are often the last funding priority for cities because of the focus on law enforcement, sanitary services, schools, and other institutions that citizens use every day, not just when an emergency occurs. And most paid firefighters also have the additional responsibility of having certification as emergency service providers to respond to all health-related emergencies in the community.

After completing my undergraduate degree at West Chester University in 1969, I returned to my hometown because my parents were aging. As a first-year teacher in the Darby-Colwyn School District, I spent a lot of time with my dad involved at the firehouse. Because I was an educator, I also agreed to take on the added responsibility of serving as the first administrator of the Delaware County Fire Academy, again as a volunteer. As a professional educator, I felt drawn to the idea of training other firefighters and had completed necessary requirements to serve as a Pennsylvania state fire instructor. As is the case in every fire department, firefighters are quick to take on added responsibility, and I was no exception. The request for me to serve as training director for almost 80 paid and volunteer fire departments in our county was important because training is one of the most important requirements for firefighter safety and success.

However, it was only natural I should devote more time to my own fire company, so I ran for fire company president, which meant that my responsibility was to keep

the fire company administratively solvent. Preparing budgets, organizing fundraising events like tag days, pizza nights, smoke detector sales, coin cards, and bingo are many ways volunteers use to raise needed funds. I even brought in a carnival with amusement rides each year; our job was to set up the booths, prepare the site, man the ticket booths and games, and promote the event. If we were lucky, we might earn \$30,000 to \$50,000 for a week of hard work but more time away from our families.

That \$50,000 was only a down payment on a \$400,000 pumper or a \$600,000 ladder truck, so fundraising became more of a burden and took more time away from other responsibilities. Like other volunteer fire departments, we relied more and more on small donations the citizens made each year and a one-time donation from the local Marcus Hook Borough Council, which was the elected city governing body of eight council members and a mayor who were responsible for the safety and well-being of the residents of Marcus Hook.

During the 1970s, the annual allocation for our fire company was less than the total allocation for one full-time police officer or two full-time highway workers. And those workers weren't responsible for providing insurance for the police cars or the borough highway trucks and related equipment, and, of course, they received wages or salaries. And so, as president of one of the two local fire companies, I organized a meeting of

fire department officers, and we agreed to respectfully demand that the town elected leaders provide the funds necessary for the insurance to cover the trucks, the fire stations, and related equipment. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania already provided workers compensation insurance in the event of a firefighter injury or death. As a group, we attended the town monthly council meeting to plead our case. When we finished, the mayor thanked us for our service but told us there were inadequate funds for other priorities within the community so our budgets had to pay the insurance costs.

One thing our town leaders would learn, that leaders across America would eventually learn, is that the fire service was waking up to the lack of support for their unselfish acts and dedication. Risking our lives and giving our time was one thing but don't deny us the most basic support that can allow us to continue to do what we love and that's to serve as first responders.

There was no doubt that our town needed funds for routine services, but we did have a strong tax base because of all the heavy industry in the community. But the heavy industry also presented problems and challenges that we, as first responders, had to face every day. Our town needed extra funds for law enforcement because one of the largest motorcycle gangs in America (Pagans) had established their national headquarters in our small town and were allegedly running drugs for the Philadelphia Mob. The confluence of these two factors, coupled with a morale and image problem because

the Philadelphia media called Marcus Hook the “worst half hour drive from Philadelphia” and the “armpit of the East” because of the smells, led to local firefighters and town residents to ask me to run for mayor in 1977.

My wife and I had moved from Linwood to Marcus Hook and were expecting our third child. My wife was still working as an RN at CCMC, and we both were Red Cross volunteers picking up and delivering blood on an emergency basis for our seven local hospitals in our home county. I was also a board member of the local bicentennial committee. We had to decide. Should we move out of the town to get away from the pollution, crime, and negative image of the community or stay and take on the battles?

We chose the latter, but to achieve ultimate success, I had to change the entire town in one election. That meant I had to convince other locals to run for four council seats, school board, and tax collector, and I knew one group of locals whom everyone respected and would vote for—firefighters! We reached out and identified candidates in every ward and put together a slate, a firefighter’s slate.

And I did something never done before. I conceived and drafted a four-page platform of commitments delivered to every citizen pledging to “take on the crime and Pagans,” “take on heavy industry and pollution,” and “fully support our two volunteer fire companies.” I defeated the incumbent Republican by a 2-1 margin

while also appearing on the Democratic ballot, it was tough to lose that election. We swept every seat and took over the reins of the town. Marcus Hook had a new beginning.

But the job of fire chief and mayor was too much, especially considering I was a full-time teacher and my wife had given birth to our third child, another daughter, Kimberly. This became especially evident almost three years to the day after the Corinthos disaster. It was Saturday, January 28, and borough fire chief/newly elected school board member Bob Sides and I were meeting in the Town Hall around noon when the sirens started wailing and our alert pagers started beeping, sounding an alarm for a house fire on Green Street. Since the Town Hall sits at the corner of 10th and Green streets, we both ran out to the street and immediately smelled smoke. Looking up along the row houses of Green Street, we could see smoke pouring out of a two-story home in the center of the block. Racing up the street, Bob said we should kick down the front door and make certain no people were inside. As neighbors came out of their homes, we learned the family had gone shopping, but firefighters always check to make certain. As we approached the house, we radioed to the county dispatch that we had a “working fire” in a two-story home and ordered both fire companies to approach the front and rear of the house and lay supply lines from nearby hydrants to supply water.

As we kicked open the front door, we could hear sirens on the responding trucks as volunteers poured from their homes to join the effort to save this house. As soon as the door opened, heavy smoke billowed out and a little dog ran out.

Stooping low, we entered the house, could feel the rising temperature from the fire, and sought to locate the actual fire. Within minutes, we saw the heaviest smoke coming from the door to the basement. As we approached the door, all the time calling for any inhabitants and looking for any people inside on the ground floor and second floor, we decided to return to the outside where we could direct the arriving trucks and start managing the response.

As is always the case at every similar house fire in America, the trucks arrived in minutes, and our trained firefighters immediately began their standard evolutions. Connecting hose lines to hydrants and pumper inlets, donning breathing apparatus, raising ground ladders, and checking every room in the target house as well as neighboring houses, we efficiently did our jobs. We used 1½-inch attack hoses immediately and hand carried them inside the building from the front and back as firefighters moved to attack the fire itself. By this time, the fire had fully engulfed the basement and was licking up the steps to the basement. Besides the interior attack, firefighters placed hose lines in the outside cellar windows. Bob and I were proud of the crews and were calling in fire departments from neigh-

boring towns to assist the effort and to 'stand by' for us in our fire stations as part of a pre-planned effort to guarantee we had enough firefighters to properly handle any additional incidents.

As the basement fire was extinguished, something strange happened. Five doors away from the fire, neighbors screamed that a second home started to spew smoke from the basement. Our initial thought was that perhaps we were witnessing insurance fraud, but that never deters firefighters. We immediately ordered firefighters to attack the second fire, and as they did, a fire broke out in the basement of the middle house of the five. Suddenly, a routine row house fire had turned into a complex situation obviously scaring the watching homeowners and public as well as us firefighters. With back-up support volunteers arriving, we eventually declared all three fires under control.

Now, it was time to investigate the origin and cause. With three to four feet of water now in the basement of the original house, firefighters yelled into their handheld radios, "We've got bubbles coming up in the basement through the water. Are the gas lines shut off?" As a matter of protocol, firefighters use a special tool to shut down gas lines to a house on fire at curbside, so the idea of a methane leak wasn't probable but still a concern. As Borough Fire Chief Sides called the local gas utility to dispatch an inspector to the scene, I gave orders as mayor to the police chief to evacuate every home on Green Street until we could determine cause and origin.

Panic set in as homeowners and firefighters worried what would happen next. Besides the local gas company, I became concerned the cause might somehow tie into the Sun Oil Refinery, whose property line backed up to the alley across from the small backyards of the affected homes. I put an emergency call into the refinery and within minutes received a return call from a refinery representative. "No way, Mayor, could any of our activities cause these fires. Our operating units are nowhere near the fire scene. It must be methane from a leaking line under Green Street," the refinery representative said to me. "We'll be glad to help, but it's not our problem."

In every town in every city and village in America, firefighters have to make life or death decisions every time a fire occurs even those fires in single family homes that appear to be routine.

Within ten to fifteen minutes after Chief Sides called the local utility company, an inspector arrived with appropriate testing equipment. We briefed him on the situation and immediately entered the burned-out basement of the first house and began testing and sampling the bubbling vapors. Immediately, he analyzed the vapors and glanced at Bob and me with a worried look. "It's not methane, that's for sure," he said. "But it is a gas, and it is entering this basement from cracks in the concrete floor". "Can you tell us what type of gas it is?" I asked.

"Afraid not, Mayor" he stated. "But I think you should call in an expert tester who can verify the actual substance."

Now the frustration would become serious. I called the emergency number for the EPA, identified myself as mayor and local fire chief and explained the situation. After a short silence, the voice responded with this amazing declaration, "I'm sorry, but we don't work on weekends. Call back on Monday, and we'll get someone to come to the scene to assist you," the respondent said.

"I've got 75 families evacuated from their homes, I've got three homes that have burned basements and citizens who are asking questions I cannot answer," I shouted in the phone as my temper rose. "Well, it sounds like a groundwater issue so you should call the 24-hour emergency Coast Guard number. It has jurisdiction in situations like this," he said, and I hung up for fear I'd completely lose my temper.

Our local police got the Coast Guard on the phone from our local base in Gloucester, New Jersey, across the river from Marcus Hook. "We're on our way," the Coast Guard rep assured me, and finally I felt some relief. The young Coast Guard officers arrived within an hour, but they brought with them open topped glass jars to collect samples, which was sad and not funny.

During this time, I had the town secretary calling to locate a friend who worked for Weston Labs, a regional environmental company. Finally getting my friend on the phone, I explained the situation and told him I needed an expert (with proper on-site testing equipment) ASAP. "I'm the mayor, and I guarantee you'll be paid." By this time, it was about 4 p.m.

Within two minutes, he called back and said, "We're on our way; we'll be there within the hour." Now, more time to wait as we isolated the entire street and barricaded that part of town. It was about 40 minutes from my call with Weston Labs that a technical inspector/analyst arrived. I briefed him, and he went right to work. Within 15 minutes, he emerged and gave me the results; the leaking bubbles in the basements that burned was butane. "Butane is somehow being forced through the cracks in the concrete basement floors," he said as he looked toward the Sun Oil Refinery, "Have you talked to them yet?"

As we walked back to the borough hall, the police radioed to tell me the Sun Oil plant manager was on the phone and wanted to talk to me. "I'll be in my office in 10 minutes with an analyst from Weston Labs," I said over the radio. "I'll take the call in my office."

Finally, with Weston Labs having already identified the gas, the plant manager said "Mayor," we looked at our operations near Green Street, and we believe we over-

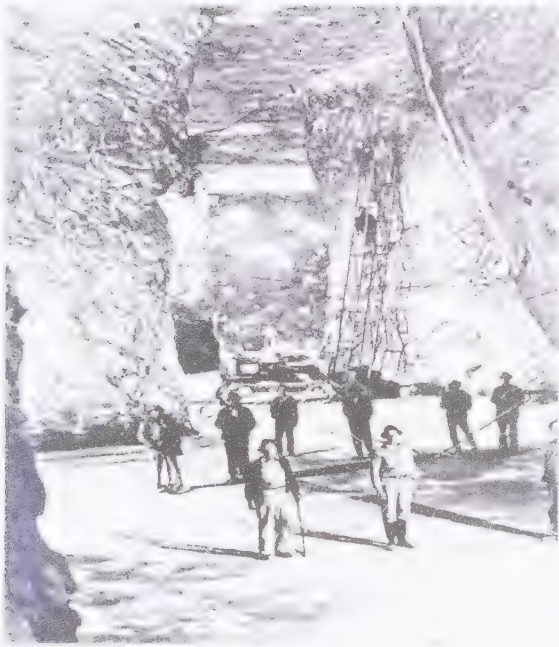
filled one of the underground caverns where we store butane and pumped the product through the rock and into the homes of your residents on Green Street.” My mouth dropped as I asked, “How could you do that?”

The response was, “We just don’t know yet.”

In the 1960s, Sun Oil Company mined five massive underground storage caverns 300 feet below the surface of the refinery for storing butane and propane, which are additives to gasoline to achieve quicker starts for car owners in the winter. The engineering and technology for underground storage of such products was actually sound as long as the pressure of the gas underground doesn’t exceed the pressure of the groundwater dripping into the caverns that natural gravity causes.

What we would later learn was that Sun Oil had installed no safety measures on the caverns and that the only check, a simple mechanical gauge, failed, and product continued pumping into the cavern well beyond its capacity. Ultimately, overcoming the natural seal of the water table, the butane forced itself into the fissures of the rock and sought out the warmest location, the basements of the Green Street homes.

Across America every day, in every big city and small town or village, first responders confront the unknown. And yet they still respond and risk their lives and well-being to protect their communities and their neighbors.



Underground storage caverns are a safe method to store liquefied gas because the natural water table seal keeps the product inside the cavern walls. That is, assuming the cavern doesn't overfill and overcome the natural water table seal and push the product through the cracks and crevices in the cavern walls forcing gas to seek out warm exit points at ground level. That is exactly what Sunoco admitted to in 1978. Regulations are necessary for design and operation of underground storage sites.

4

“Our Son Deserves a Proper Burial”

First responders don't just fight fires and save lives at risk. Firefighters and emergency medical services providers respond to every type of uncontrolled situation such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, explosions, vehicle accidents, hazmat disasters, and the like, but they also pump out the flooded cellar, rescue the cat in the tree, organize the search party for the lost child and also respond to disasters never imagined.

In March 1997, I received a call from my friend and Pennsylvania State Representative Bob Flick. He was upset and choked up as he said, “Curt, I need your help.” “Sure Bob, what's up,” I said, not certain what had happened.

“One of my closest friends, Steve Swymer, called me and was extremely upset,” Bob said. “I think you've met Steve; he's a principal here in Chester County and is the father of six children, five girls and one son,” Bob said. “They're a fantastic family, and our families have been close friends for years.”

Through a ton of emotion, Bob told me the story. The Swymer's eldest child and only son, 19-year-old Nathan,

was in college and staying in a cabin on one of the Finger Lakes in New York, Owasko Lake, with several friends. In late February Nathan disappeared, leaving his roommates with no information. Nathan was a good son and excellent student, and he never caused any problems in any way. "Nathan had every reason to live and succeed in life," Bob sobbed to me as he explained the situation as best he could. Nathan's father Steve explained to Bob that around February 22, the weather had warmed up considerably and Nathan had evidently got into a seven-foot rowboat and started paddling to the center of the lake. Within several days after Nathan's roommates reported him missing, the rowboat was found and neighbors admitted they saw the small boat on the lake with only one person in it. No one saw the boat capsize, and there was no sign of Nathan.

New York state police and search teams immediately went into action and searched the lake and shore side for any clues that would indicate what happened. Several days passed and search crews, including an underwater camera company and the NYPD harbor unit, could find no trace of Nathan. Steve Swymer called his friend Bob as an act of desperation saying, "Bob, we have resigned ourselves to the fact that something happened to Nathan. Despite being a good swimmer and an excellent person, Nathan is missing and no one can find him or his body," Steve said. "Nathan's car is still next to the cabin, and Nathan was on the lake just before a massive storm erupted." These storms are typical for the Finger Lakes

and can appear quickly and violently. Owasko Lake is about one mile wide and 11 miles long and reaches depths of almost 200 feet.

“Bob” Steve said, “can you help us bring Nathan home? New York folks have formally ended the search. We can’t leave our son out there not knowing where he is.” The Swymers accepted that Nathan probably drowned and was somewhere in Owasko Lake. “Is there anything that you can do, Bob, please help us?” Steve cried to Bob.

Bob told Steve he’d do everything in his power to assist. Bob knew of my work as a firefighter and was also aware I was chairman of the Military Research Committee overseeing about \$40 billion in new programs and technologies for our military. Bob said to Steve, “Let me call our friend Congressman Curt Weldon and see if he has any ideas. I assure you, Steve,” Bob said, “I’ll do everything possible to help you.”

Three traits I learned at a young age from my father and his firefighter buddies: Firefighters always offer to assist others in need; firefighters are innovators who have an innate ability to find solutions to problems and challenges; and firefighters never give up until they achieve the ultimate objective.

After listening to Bob, I got on the phone with Steve and assured him that Bob and I would do everything possible on behalf of his family and his son. As the father of five, I couldn’t imagine what I would do if one

of our children were missing with no trace. Because our children were similar in age to Nathan, it was even more emotional.

My first action was to talk to local emergency responders in Owasko Lake and nearby Auburn, a small town north of the lake with a population of 27,000. Fire officers familiar with the incident told me they did everything possible to search the lake and locate the body but were unsuccessful. Because of the size and depth of the lake, they felt the body might never be recovered. I asked if we brought up a new technology and a diving team, would the fire department assist? The answer was an immediate and predictable – “Absolutely yes”.

As chairman of the Oversight Committee for Military Research and vice president of an international oceans consortium, I knew technologies that were under development that our Coast Guard and Navy could use to search ocean and maritime bottoms to look for debris, airplane parts from crashes, or any other items that might be identified without risking the lives of divers. I talked to my committee staffer Bill Andahazy and asked for an update on ‘side-scan sonar’, a specific technology our military eagerly awaited. Once the briefing was complete, Bill and I both thought we had a chance to find Nathan’s body, assuming he had drowned in Owasko Lake. I asked Bill to talk to the Navy and the manufacturing company for side-scan technology and determine whether they’d allow us to use a unit on Lake Owasko.

Within two months, we received confirmation regarding the availability of a demo side-scan sonar unit as well as an operational team that fully understood the technology. The company would provide the unit gratis, but we'd have to pay all related costs, including having a deep diving team and a decompression chamber on-site. The local Owasko Lake Fire Department agreed to assist the effort with boats and volunteers. Planning and coordination of schedules would take several weeks, and weather had to be ideal. I called my friend Rob Powelson who, at the time, was president of the local Chester County Chamber of Commerce where the Swymer's lived, and Rob pledged and raised \$10,000 for necessary expenses.

Because the side-scan sonar unit was available in late August, we developed a plan and again coordinated with the volunteer fire company at the lake. Bob Flick and I both headed up to Auburn where we'd stay and coordinate all activities. Expert divers Brett Phaneuf and Butch Hendricks both agreed to meet us at the lake. We spent the first day visiting the lake, looking at the cabin where Nathan had stayed and plotting Nathan's probable path as he crossed the lake in the seven-foot rowboat to the exact site where they found the rowboat on the opposite side. Because it was impossible to explore the entire 11-mile-long lake and because we had only five days to use the equipment, we had to carefully plan our use of the side-scan sonar for maximum success.

Local volunteer firefighters knew every inch of the lake and warned us that because of the lake's depth in some points (up to 200'), efforts to locate the body on the bottom would be in total darkness. Brett and Butch understood currents and prevailing winds and shared stories and theories with the firefighters. By Wednesday, the plotting for our crisscross pattern of an area approximately 1 mile wide and 1 mile long would allow the operator of the side-scan sonar unit to carefully watch the lake bottom from a boat the Owasco volunteer fire company loaned. As is always the case, the volunteers from the fire company were with us every step of the way.



Volunteer firefighters from four fire departments near Owasco Lake immediately responded to our call for assistance in locating the body of 19-year-old student Nathan Swymer who had disappeared and who was thought to have drowned.

On Thursday, the scanning began in a deliberate process as we all watched from the small boats the volunteers

operated. On that first day of scanning, three objects were identified almost 200 feet below the lake surface. Although identifications were made, there was no certainty that any one of the items was, in fact, a body. But, in each case a marker buoy was placed over the identified spots with one spot appearing more interesting than the others. Having our targets identified and the decompression chamber now on the shore of the lake, everything was ready for our final opportunity to find Nathan on Friday.

It was tough to sleep that Thursday night, and Bob had called the Swymers to update them on our efforts but not raise their expectations. As I ate breakfast on Friday morning, I thought of the local volunteers who had taken one full week out of their lives and schedules in August to help search for a 19-year-old from a town hundreds of miles away and for whom they had already spent days and weeks searching without success.

The special deep diving team put on their pressurized suits and boarded one of the three boats we were using that day, all operated by the local volunteer firefighters. There was a heightened level of anticipation and emotion as we boarded the boats and began the short trip to the most likely site. As we arrived at the designated buoy, the diver prepared to enter the water and dive down holding the rope through the cold darkness. The procedure for the divers was to reach bottom and walk in circles from the anchor location in five-foot circles, feeling along the bottom for any objects. After

one circle, the divers expanded the tether to a 10-foot circle again along the bottom.



Deep diving experts supplemented the work of the firefighters as well as the special side-scan sonar unit that I arranged. Young Nathan's body was 150 feet below the surface at the bottom of the lake still clad in his Penn State jacket.

And then it happened, over the radio we heard the shout "I've got a hit" from the diver "and it's a body." Chills went up our spines and emotions rose to epic levels as we realized we may have found the boy, but we could have no firm identity until the crew lifted the body out of the water. Could it possibly be that we located 19-year-old Nathan Swymer at the bottom of Lake Owasko six months after he drowned?

The divers rose to the surface to get a body bag. It seemed like an eternity as the divers worked feverishly on the lake bottom to place the body in the bag and carefully raise it to the surface. At 12:10 p.m., Friday, August 29,

the divers unzipped the bag, and there was 19-year-old Nathan Swymer, still wearing his jeans and Penn State jacket. Emotions ran wild as Bob Flick called his lifelong friend and emotionally cried "We've found Nathan and will bring him home to you and the family."

Local legislators provide help in recovering body of area teen

By DAVE ELDRETH
Staff Writer

UWCHLAN -- In the 4½ months since 19-year-old Nathan Swymer drowned in an upstate New York lake, the family of the former Downingtown High School student has been unable to rest.

Swymer was in the first semester of a work-study program at Penn State University. He was last seen paddling in a rowboat by himself on Otisco Lake 40 miles west of Syracuse.

Authorities have been unable to locate Swymer's body and now believe it to be at the bottom of the 160-foot lake.

Swymer's father Stephen said because they have not recovered their son, the family has been unable to have any kind of closure.

"I guess what we are struggling with is knowing that Nathan is at the bottom of that lake day in and day out," Swymer said. "We all know that his soul is in heaven. Frankly it's a continuing nightmare. It's very hard for any kind of closure at this point to know that his body is still there. We deal with that everyday."

Through the help of some lo-

"I guess what we are struggling with is knowing that Nathan is at the bottom of that lake day in and day out. Frankly it's a continuing nightmare."

Stephen Swymer, Nathan's father

cal legislators the Swymers believe they are getting closer to finding their son.

"Through this kind of frustration you get pretty desperate. The (New York) state police are working very hard and trying to do what they can but they have limited resources," Swymer said.

In March, Stephen Swymer called state Rep. Robert Flick, R-167th of East Whiteland, to see if he could provide any help in the search for Nathan's body. Swymer, the principal of General Wayne Middle School, had known Flick through the state representatives' association with his school.

Flick got U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon, R-7th of Aston, involved in the quest to return Swymer's body to his family.

"When I called Bob (Flick)

he said he would do something. He called Curt Weldon and got him involved. After initial efforts failed Curt didn't give up. It's almost as if they have put us as a priority over everything else that they have to do. It's really unbelievable. I can't even vote for them if I wanted to because I don't live in their district," Swymer said.

Flick said after hearing of Nathan's death he immediately wanted to help the Swymer family.

"All of my children went through General Wayne Middle School and I admire and respect (Swymer) for his work with children," Flick said. "He is a tough taskmaster. The kids go to that school as boys and girls and come out as men and women. I consider him to

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Pennsylvania State Representative Bob Flick and I played a small role in bringing young Nathan Swymer's body home for proper burial. Locating Nathan was a massive challenge, involved new technology, and could not have succeeded without the volunteer firefighters who gave their time to assist a family from a neighboring state.

Nathan's parents traveled to Lake Owasko that same Friday and identified their eldest child and only son and escorted Nathan home so they could properly lay him to rest and find some kind of closure. A personal letter from the Swymers with an appropriate verse remains one of my most valued possessions.

The Swymer family sent framed dry flowers and a personal note to me inscribed with Psalm 18:15-26.

"The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O'Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters."

It's impossible to estimate how many people our domestic defenders have rescued, how many lives they saved, how many families they protected across America. Older than America itself, first responders have answered the call in every catastrophic situation since Ben Franklin organized the first volunteer Union Volunteer Fire Company in Philadelphia in 1736 although there are also reports of the first engine company started in Boston in 1678.

Heartfelt stories like the Swymers, and thousands more very similar stories, make up the history of this group of which I am a proud member. But the one glaring omission of this heroic group of Americans is their absolute rejection of the need to receive "pats on the back" for their efforts. While law enforcement officers,

teachers, social workers and other community based servants have received funding, recognition and support, first responders had not seen fit to mobilize, to organize and to tell their full story at the national level. I likened the first responders in America to a 'Sleeping Giant' needing to realize that logic alone would never provide them with the proper support necessary to continue this proud American tradition and vital service.

As we organized the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and the Congressional Fire Services Institute, the 'Sleeping Giant' needed to be awakened – and that's exactly what we would do!

5

The Sleeping Giant Awakens

A Congressional caucus in Washington, DC is a group of members of the United States Congress that meets to pursue common legislative objectives. Formally, members form caucuses as Congressional member organizations through the United States House of Representatives and are governed under the rules of that chamber. Senate groups are more informal. In addition to the term caucus, they're sometimes called coalitions, study groups, task forces, or working groups.

When I first entered Congress in 1987, there were only a few dozen member organizations. Caucuses existed for national security, tourism, women, steel, law enforcement, and other focus areas of members. There was no focus group that pledged its support for America's first responders. Because a caucus is a member organization, no outsider can organize or lead such an effort; the leadership must come from one or more individual members who decide to join together to focus on and publicly support efforts and initiatives that are critically important to that specific group. Ideally, a caucus is bipartisan and not used for partisan political purposes.

Staffers and members initially greeted the idea of forming a Congressional caucus for firefighters and first responders with a great deal of skepticism. My job was two-fold: to convince my colleagues that support for firefighters and first responders was critically important to their constituents and could earn them political credits with the firefighters in their districts and to convince the national fire and first responder leadership groups and firefighters across America about the importance of a united effort to empower their ultimate benefit and success and attain what they needed to do to elevate the priorities of first responders to a national agenda and action.

Starting a new caucus required me to call upon my closest friends in the Congress, first starting with my own Pennsylvania delegation and members of my class (100th Congress) from both parties. I had to lay out the purpose and scope of activities of the caucus and develop an initial simple agenda for the first year of operation. One of the most important aspects of getting a member of the House or Senate to formally join the caucus required those members to assign one professional staff person to work with my staff and provide that close network of relationships as we identified and developed a consensus agenda of priorities. Organizing the caucus was easy because the fire service had been a critical part of my life so I had the credibility with my colleagues of speaking the 'language of the fire service' in terms that made members understand not only the

importance of these people but also the critical role first responders play in every community. Luckily, a few members had relatives or friends who were firefighters or had actually been a member of a local fire company themselves although that was less than a handful.

Two of my earliest supporters were Pittsburgh Democrat Doug Walgren and New York Republican Sherry Boehlert. Since Democrats controlled the House, Doug was chairman of the Oversight Committee for the US Fire Administration so he had obvious interest. Sherry was the ranking Republican member of the same committee so he happily agreed to join, as well. Doug and Sherry became the first two co-chairs of the Congressional Fire Caucus and allowed Oversight Committee staffer Carrye Brown to work closely with my staff. Carrye became a solid supporter for our success and eventually served as administrator for the US Fire Administration.

Because of my friendship with House Minority Leader Bob Michel, he immediately agreed to join the Fire Caucus and allowed us to use his name to recruit more members. But to really push what we were trying to accomplish, I needed to arrange a 'kick-off' event on the Hill for members to attend, and I needed to bring in the largest active national first responder groups and enlist their cooperation. Members of Congress do not have unlimited budgets and must account for every expenditure made. If you exceed your allotted budget, the overage comes out of your personal compensation. So, I had no available funds for the 'kick-off' event.

Because of a past association, Art Glatfelter, Chairman/CEO of Glatfelter Insurance Services, which included VFIS (Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Services), immediately came to mind to assist my efforts. Glatfelter was based in my home state in York, Pennsylvania. Art was a prominent Democrat and extremely successful businessman. I had known Art since the mid-1970s when I was administrator of the Delaware County Fire Academy. One of the courses that I conceived, organized, and taught at the Fire Academy was a course entitled 'Administrative Officers Seminar'. As the president of my own fire company, I understood the complexities of managing a fire company. All the courses we offered through the Fire Academy were hands-on courses in firefighting evolutions at multiple levels, operating pumpers and ladder trucks, arson investigation, and other various techniques required to deal with fires and disasters. However, no one offered a course for those firefighters to manage the financial needs and management of a volunteer fire company. In 1974 *Fire Chief* magazine featured the eight-week course, which included:

- Organization for Effective Administration
- Effective Public Relations
- Budgeting and Finances
- Legal Aspects of Fire Department Operations®
- Fund-Raising Strategies
- Insurance and Risk Management
- Fire Organizations in America

- Earning Respect and Support from Government and the Public

Hindsight tells me the last session in this course was the basic message I'd ultimately take across the country to stir up the 'Sleeping Giant'.

Instructors for each of the sessions in the course were specialists in their fields and offered their services pro bono for the seminar. My goal was to bring in the most knowledgeable people who were local and agreed to participate. Because insurance and risk management are such important parts of managing a volunteer fire company, I reached out to a man I heard speak at a fire conference—Art Glatfelter.

Without hesitation, Art agreed and would prepare a session outline, provide handout materials, and cover all the pertinent issues needed for the safe operation of a volunteer fire company. Art drove almost three hours each way to teach the three-hour session. From then on, Art and I developed a close friendship.

Oddly enough, three years later I'd take a professional position with the INA Insurance Company at the home office in Philadelphia, where I would initially serve as a technical instructor for almost 1,000 technical inspectors and specialists worldwide involved in fire protection, arson prevention and investigation, fleet (vehicle) safety, worker safety, product liability, marine and aviation safety, and overall risk management. Ultimately,

at the request of INA/Cigna CEO John Cox, I developed and delivered a national program entitled Risk Management for Public Entities in collaboration with the Risk Management Association through December 1986.

How interesting that the Glatfelter Group, at the time, was the single largest agent for INA, so again Art and I worked together. It was also at this time that I first met and worked with Dr. Bill Jenaway, who was a manager at INA/Cigna but also a local fire chief in nearby Upper Merion Township (King of Prussia). Bill would ultimately become my choice to assist in organizing the Congressional Fire Services Institute. It is oftentimes amazing how relationships can become beneficial as one proceeds through life.

The first official event of the Congressional Fire Caucus was on April 19, 1988, in the Cannon House Office Building. Art would pay the costs of snacks and beverages and agreed to design an appropriate symbol to give to every member of Congress who joined the Fire Caucus. As was typical of Art, he commissioned a sculptor to design and produce hundreds of pewter fire helmets to display in the office of every member to show that member's support for firefighters in their district and nationwide as well as that member's involvement in the Congressional Fire Caucus.

The story has been going around for years that one of the reasons we formed the Fire Caucus was because of the fire in Speaker Jim Wright's office. The fire in

Speaker Wright's Office was May 5, 1988, several weeks after our initial caucus event and months after we had planned and developed the caucus; planning began in 1987, my first year in the House.

To really empower the caucus's growth from the initial two dozen members who joined because they were either friends or classmates of mine, I had to undertake the second task, which was to organize and gain the support and involvement of the key firefighter/first responder groups.

And so, in the early spring of 1988, I reached out to seven groups that met periodically on their own. The seven key groups were:

- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- International Association of Fire Fighters
- National Volunteer Fire Council
- International Association of Fire Service Instructors
- National Association of State Fire Marshals
- National Fire Protection Association
- US Fire Administration

Some had their own DC representational offices in Washington, DC, and were leery of a new entity that might cloud their priorities. My plea was to develop a common agenda for the large national issues and convince the leaders of the seven associations to respectfully agree to disagree on issues that existed or would emerge pitting paid vs volunteer or firefighter vs chief



Leaders from the seven major fire groups in America met in support of the Congressional Fire Caucus. Pictured from left to right (front row) are Clyde Bragdon (USFA), Fred Nesbitt (IAFF), the author (R, PA), Gary Briese (IAFC). Back row – John McNichol (CFSI), Jack Gerard (NFPA), Robert “Skip” Smith (NASFM), Mary McCormick (ISFSI), Sara Yerkes (NFPA/Code Council), Tim Butters (IAFC), Carolyn Perrino (USFA/FEMA) and Ray Hawkins (NVFC/VFIS).

or industry vs firefighter. It took some time, but eventually everyone agreed. During this formative developmental stage USFA Director Clyde Bragdon and Ed McCormick were critical in this process, as were Gary Briese from the IAFC and Al Whitehead and Harold Schaitberger from the IAFF.

Administrator Clyde Bragdon of the US Fire Administration was extremely supportive because he knew the value of having an ‘internal’ support network in the Congress that would actively fight the bureaucracy that consistently tried to decrease and diminish support for the USFA and National Fire Academy. I had met



The IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters) played a crucial role in the early formation and long-term success of the Fire Caucus and Institute necessary for ultimate empowerment of all fire-fighters and first responders. In this photo, President Al Whitehead (left) joined with current IAFF President Harold Schaitberger (right) in presenting a special IAFF award to the author.

Ed McCormick when he invited me to speak at the Fire Department Instructors Conference in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1975 regarding the Corinthos incident, so Ed and I already had a working relationship. Ed's wife Mary, Gary Briese, Tim Butters (IAFC), Fred Nesbitt (IAFF) joined by leaders of the NVFC, NFPA, and NASFM joined John McNichol from my DC office to create the organization that would become the Congressional Fire Services Caucus.

With Art's help, and the appearance of all the leaders of the major national fire service groups coupled with

the attendance of Minority Leader Bob Michel (who said he had himself been a member of his local fire company before entering Congress), we were off and running. On that first night, we gave out three dozen helmets and took photographs of members that they could send back to the district media outlets with media releases we helped prepare.

The caucus required considerable time from my staffer John McNichol as well as other staffers from my Congressional office because our plans were aggressive to make the Fire Caucus the largest of the 98 caucuses that already existed in the Congress. Our intent was to completely intermesh members of Congress with their local fire service entities and stakeholder groups.

My plan to accomplish this new closeness included:

- Media events for members with fire service groups
- Sample op-eds for members for local newspapers
- Fire service/member interactions
- Sample floor speeches for members to give
- Information packets and updates for members
- Orientation events for DC and district staffers

In simple terms, our goal was to ‘get inside the heads’ of members to force recognition of every aspect of the American fire service as well as ongoing involvement with local and national fire service leaders. We were driven to make this a ‘win-win’ situation for everyone.

While networking colleagues in the House and Senate to join the caucus, I approached the Senate Chairman and ranking Democrat on the Oversight Committee for the US Fire Administration and National Fire Academy to request that they co-chair the caucus on the Senate side. They accepted, and John McCain and Al Gore became the first two Senate co-chairs of the Congressional Fire Caucus. Now that I had solidified the bipartisan leadership of the caucus, we went to work. Spreading the word across America to local and regional fire service leaders required that I travel as much as possible and speak about the new organization within the Congress that was promoting an agenda for firefighters inside the DC Beltway.

From the very beginning I mandated that everything we did in the Fire Caucus had to be totally bipartisan. Co-chairs had to be from both parties in the House and the Senate from which there was a chairman selected for each two-year session of Congress alternating between the House and the Senate and alternating between the two parties. The Fire Caucus was not for partisan exploitation of issues important to the nation's fire service.

These mandates ensured the success of the Fire Caucus and would set an example for the nation's first responders of how to achieve ultimate political success. Now, 29 years after its formation the Fire Caucus arguably remains the largest and most successful bipartisan member organization in Washington.

Now the nationwide battle to awaken this 'Sleeping Giant' group of American heroes had to be taken across America. I would have to travel to every state, speak at every convention and regional meeting, and do interview after interview to alert my fellow firefighters/first responders about the efforts needed from them at the local level to enable me to achieve success at the national level.

I was ready for the fight and the commitment, but I'd need lots of help. My fire service friends in Pennsylvania served as my initial facilitators and 'got the message' immediately. Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner Chet Henry answered the call and became a chief proponent of the Fire Caucus not only in our home state, but Chet also mobilized support among State Fire Marshals nationwide. One of the real heroes of the fire service, Lou Amabili of Delaware, joined Chet. Lou had been an original member of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control established by President Richard Nixon. Chet and Lou had credibility nationwide, and their support energized other national leaders.

In those early years, the most significant trade publications ran articles that announced the Fire Caucus and unanimously urged support, encouraging local fire service leaders to fully engage with their representatives in the House and the Senate. Legendary fire service editor/publisher Ernie Rojahn of the *Pennsylvania Fireman* took up the cause and documented every step of our

success with monthly articles and editorials. Ernie's reach was, and still is, far larger than just Pennsylvania. Fire service leaders in every state read his writings. Many other states have similar statewide or regional fire service publications, and they too joined the chorus of supporters.

In the end, it was critical to have individual leaders drive the concept of the Fire Caucus across America, especially fire service leaders already recognized in their state networks but who also had special relationships with individual members of Congress. One of those individual leaders who would help the most was a 'good ole boy' career firefighter from Fort Worth, Texas, Mason Lankford, who just happened to be a boyhood friend of House Speaker Jim Wright.

6

The Grand Strategy—Empowering America's Heroes

The National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, is part of a beautiful 107-acre campus that was originally the home of Saint Joseph's Academy, a Catholic school for girls from 1809 until 1973. The US government purchased it in 1979 for use as a national training center.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon assembled 20 blue ribbon experts on fire and life safety to study the amazingly large fire problem in the US as well as the American Fire Services and make recommendations for action by the federal government. Chaired by Penn State professor Richard Bland and including my friend Lou Amabili, the group was formally known as the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control (NCFPC) and issued the landmark report "America Burning" on May 4, 1973. One of the primary recommendations of the report was the establishment of the National Fire Academy as part of the proposed US Fire Administration. The academy would become the lead US entity on all matters involving fire training and arson investigation.

Located on the same Emmitsburg Campus is FEMA's Emergency Management Institute, the National Fire Data Center, the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial, and the National Fire Heritage Center. The National Fire Heritage Center, created in 2005, was tasked with the responsibility for archiving the rich history of the American fire service and fire prevention disciplines. In donating my 480 cases of original files and materials to the Weldon Archives Center at West Chester University, I stipulated that fire service archives would pass to the NFHC as part of their permanent collection. All files and a massive Weldon Oral History will add to the collection of the NFHC and be available nationwide to the fire service and the public. I currently serve pro bono as national spokesperson for the NFHC.

After announcing the creation of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, I received an invitation to speak to a group of national fire service leaders who assembled at the National Fire Academy for a multi-day program on the concerns of the American fire service.

Realizing that this opportunity was critical to enlist the support of grassroots leaders from across the country, I knew this was my opportunity to create a firestorm of support at the state and regional level. I had already received the endorsement of the key National Fire Service Groups in Washington. This speech could make or break the ultimate success of my idea to empower the 'Sleeping Giant' of America.

So, it was with great humility that I drove the two hours from the US Capitol to Emmitsburg to give a speech that would challenge these leaders from across America, most of whom I had never met. It's hard to understand, even harder to explain, that I was more nervous driving those two hours than prior to any political speech that I delivered as a mayor, county council chairman, or in my first term as a member of Congress.

Remember, I grew up as a firefighter, literally in the firehouse with my dad, and far more than politics, the fire service was at the core of my being. And now, as an elected member of the US Congress, I had an opportunity to empower volunteer and paid firefighters across America. Everything was riding on this one speech, and because I never wrote down my speeches in advance, this speech had to come from my heart! Little did I realize I'd repeat this speech hundreds of times across America in small-town firehouses, county fire and EMS banquets, state association conventions and national fire service gatherings some as large as 5,000 in one sitting.

My goal was to get inside the heads of those in attendance, not as a Congressman or politician, but as one of them, as a fellow firefighter. I started out, "I'm here as one of you who just happens to now be in a position to open the door to show you how we can politically empower our brothers and sisters across America, in every village, every town, every county, every parish, every city, in every location in this great nation".

“You wonder why the government never seems to respond to the needs of the fire service while pumping \$4 billion into local law enforcement. You wonder why there’s a national monument for law enforcement officers, national monuments for our military heroes but no national memorial for fallen firefighters. You wonder why the government is proposing to scale back the National Fire Academy and the US Fire Administration while increasing funds for the military, border security, and local law enforcement. You wonder why people take for granted that you hold chicken dinners and tag days to raise funds to purchase fire trucks, ambulances, and rescue vehicles. You wonder why elected officials don’t appear to care that you take time away from your families to maintain the trucks, clean the station, commit hours for training, all time away from your children and your families,” I continued.

“You need to understand that one of the last criteria used to make decisions in Washington and in every state capital in the nation is logic,” I said. “There are literally thousands of logical needs and initiatives that deserve funding, thousands of worthwhile investments in education, healthcare, foreign affairs, and environmental stewardship that are worthy of support, but funding for these initiatives and priorities is based upon the personal understanding of each elected official at every level of government about the needs and priorities and awareness of the affected groups and their impact on voters and constituents.”

There are five mandates necessary to empower our collective success in waking up the ‘Sleeping Giant’ to achieve ultimate political awareness and success in every elected body in our country, especially in the US Congress.

Awareness—The fire service does much more than respond to and fight fires 24/7. The fire service needed to tell the entire story to every elected official. Firefighters and first responders answer every type of disaster; floods, accidents, hazmats, lightning strikes, derailments, car fires, and brush fires are typical examples of incidents every fire department faces in America. But they also respond to home basements that are flooded and need to be pumped out, they organize search parties to search for lost children or disoriented elderly, rescue cats in trees, drownings, kids stuck in wells or caves, collapsed porches, industrial accidents, manufacturing incidents as well as school drills and simulations. They take the trucks to schools, churches, and daycare centers for education, help the US Marines organize Toys for Tots campaigns, raise funds for local charities and disaster-affected families, inspect every type of public building and make themselves available as needed in the community.

Some departments donate used equipment and trucks to less fortunate departments in the US and world-wide. And departments that run EMS respond to myriad other healthcare-related emergencies and trauma. But the fire service needed to tell the ‘rest of the story’ to every elected official and the public, as well. Besides all the above, the public uses the fire station and fire

hall for elections, wedding receptions, family gatherings, community meetings, scouting meetings, bingo parties, and sports events, and firefighters often are the organizers of community events, fairs, block parties, patriotic parades, and numerous other activities that give our communities the character of America.

Unity—One of the first observations I made regarding the fire service when I arrived in the Congress was the lack of unity among major fire service groups. I knew of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) largely because they gained recognition for the consensus codes that the members of their organization develop and make available to cities and towns across the nation, and in some cases, worldwide. Many often perceived NFPA as big business-controlled, but their consensus standards provide the backbone for consistent and latest state-of-the-art guidelines and regulations for protection of people and property and often cities and towns adopt them as part of their legal building codes and standards.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) represents paid and volunteer fire chiefs nationwide and in other parts of the world regarding issues and priorities local fire chiefs bring to their attention. The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) represents the paid career firefighters that serve across the United States, primarily in our larger cities but expanding to include paid firefighters in suburban communities. The National Volunteer Fire Council

(NVFC) represents the largest group of firefighters in the nation, those firefighters who serve their communities as volunteers. The International Association of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI) represents those firefighters who serve as training professionals and also managed the largest US Annual Fire Service Conference. The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) represents the nation's state fire marshals and focuses heavily on life safety and prevention of fires and disasters.

Each of these six national organizations represents the major fire service stakeholder groups in the US and were collectively known as the Big Seven when you include the US Fire Administration (USFA). USFA is the arm of the federal government charged with overseeing US government leadership and management of programs and policies that affect the fire service in every state.

The primary problem I witnessed as a new member of Congress was a lack of unity for a common agenda relating to firefighters and the fire service of America. My job and challenge was to convince the leaders of the Big Seven that strength would only come through unity and a common national agenda. What I had to convince the leaders of these seven groups about was that each of them should still promote the specific priorities of their constituents but, first, should agree to a common agenda that every fire service stakeholder group could embrace and support.

Proactive—Firefighters and first responders are dedicated and compassionate people who fully believe their personal and collective responsibility is to protect lives and property from the ravages of fires and disasters. It goes without saying that the fire service has always believed that support would come for their priorities and that their focus should be on operations, training, and preparation.

However, over the years that support never increased, and the federal government saw little role in empowering first responders. When I arrived on the Hill, federal law enforcement funding was approaching \$4 billion annually while the budget for firefighters was barely \$40 million, largely for the small staff of the US Fire Administration and operation of the National Fire Academy. The federal government was funding local law enforcement grants to hire and train more police, purchase state-of-the-art equipment and even fund 50 percent of the cost of bulletproof vests for local officers.

As a former mayor who led the fight with my local police department against one of the five largest motorcycle gangs in the US (that had established their national headquarters in my hometown), I supported funding for those law enforcement priorities, but I asked myself the question, is the life of firefighter worth less than a police officer? Each year, 100+ police officers tragically die doing their job, and we need to reduce that number as much as possible.

But each year in the US, 100+ firefighters also die doing their job, and many of those are volunteers. It didn't make sense that the federal government would allocate \$4+ billion each year in support of local police while allocating only \$40 million to support local firefighters. Additionally, volunteer firefighters are the absolute best value for taxpayers because they also, in most cases, raise the funds to purchase their equipment, operate the department and stations, and then do all the other public service initiatives that make them the backbone of their communities.

For all these reasons, my message to the Big Seven, as well as firefighters nationwide, was to become pro-active in communicating their message to elected officials at all levels and plan an agenda of requirements for local, state, and national leaders. Simply put, become pro-active instead of reactive about decisions, finalized budgets, and imposed cuts.

Work Within the System—Coupled with the pro-active effort so necessary at all levels of government, but especially at the federal level, was to learn to work within the system. Besides fighting fires and responding to disasters, it became necessary for firefighters to understand how politicians developed public budgets, proposed and adopted laws and regulations, how government agencies made internal decisions, and how firefighters could best obtain maximum input into those processes.

This also meant that firefighters needed their own ‘facilitators’ to bridge the gap between elected officials and the fire service at every level. In Washington, the best evidence of this was the creation of the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) that would serve as the internal arm of the fire service directly tied to members of Congress and their staffs. With an advisory board that first included the Big Seven, they had to undertake a gradual expansion to include every major first responder stakeholder group in the nation.

The small staff of CFSI would be the ‘internal’ arm networked into the office and staff of each member of Congress directly tied into the pulse of the nation’s first responders and their stakeholders groups. Today, the advisory board of this template for success of working within the system includes 40+ national associations and trade groups that represent every aspect of fire, EMS, and disaster response and recovery in the US. A list of the associations represented on the advisory board of CFSI is in the appendix.

Political but Not Partisan! —The final admonition to the fire service leaders assembled and the message I ultimately took to every fire service group and conference in each of the 50 states was that first responders needed to become political.

Now, one thing fire departments across the nation always frowned upon was talking politics in the fire-

house. Everything else was fair game for discussion and debate, but politics, that was always a no-no. And here I am advocating the need for political involvement and engagement at every level of government.

But in my first speech at the fire academy, and in every speech I ultimately made in all 50 states, I made a clear distinction between being political and being partisan. As citizens of this great nation, we have a mandate to get involved, vote, and participate in our democracy. That doesn't mean to paint elephants or donkeys on the back of the apparatus. Choosing to publicly align with one political party or the other within the fire service would be a tragic mistake. Ultimately, one party would take the fire service for granted, and the other party would simply ignore the fire service and its priorities. The fire service needed to be politically respected by both major political parties and all political leaders at every level of government.

So being political meant to register to vote every firefighter, family member, and friend; invite elected officials to visit fire stations and attend events; arrange staff orientation sessions for staffers of elected officials to more fully understand the workings of a fire department; periodically present awards to elected leaders who openly support the fire service; and invite candidates from both major parties and all political persuasions to meet with members, visit facilities, and outline their visions for support of a fire service agenda.

Using the five mandates at the local, regional, state, and national level would change the political dynamic for a fire service agenda. Logic has always been on the side of support for the fire service and first responders, but a lot of logical priorities get lost. The ongoing actions of each of the five mandates for success must back up and empower the logic of support. If the fire service politically 'awakened', realized its potential and engaged in a constructive political, yet nonpartisan, way at every level in America, the results would be enormous!

7

A “Longhorn” and the “First Staters” Lead the Charge

Having organized the Congressional Fire Services Caucus linking members of Congress, as well as the supporting nonprofit Congressional Fire Services Institute that would act as facilitator between members and their staffs directly with the major fire service stakeholder groups, I believed we completed the job with excitement and success. Developing and outlining a strategy that would empower firefighters and first responders nationwide was now complete, and we delivered the whole package at a national fire service leaders conference at the National Fire Academy, which greeted it with tremendous enthusiasm.

We held our premier kick-off event on the Hill on April 17, 1988, but now, I needed to ignite firefighters and first responders across America in every state, every region, and in every city and town. Accepting invitations to speak at every major fire service event across America now consumed much of my time. But the real power to ignite my efforts and vision had to come from firefighters themselves and that would not be easy.

“Congressman Weldon, sir, I liked your message,” he said in a friendly drawl that told me this guy must be from the South. “My name is Mason Lankford, and I’m a career firefighter from Fort Worth, Texas, and I want to help you” he said. In politics, you meet a lot of people who say they want to help you. I had never met Mason so I really didn’t know what he meant. So, we talked during the mingling that typically occurs after a meeting, and I could see the sincerity and commitment behind his words.

“I’m a lifelong Democrat, Congressman Weldon, but I agree with every word that you spoke,” Mason said. “We need to wake up and implement your strategy for success in Washington, Mr. Congressman, and I’ll do my part from my home in Fort Worth,” he said while he shook my hand with the power of his 6-foot 3-inch body.

“I want to work with your new CFSI executive director John McNichol as a volunteer. I’ll organize the states and develop a contact list for every state in the Union,” Mason went on. “I have friends across the country, and the one thing I can give to you is my heart and soul for this cause,” Mason said. “Oh, and by the way, Congressman. There’s one thing more I can and will do for you to help you succeed” Mason continued.

“And what might that be, Mason, you’ve already offered to put your heart and soul into this effort,” I responded.

“Well, you see, Congressman Weldon, I have a good friend I’ve known for a long time whom I have helped in many ways,” said Mason. By now, I’m wondering who this guy knows who could help, because he’s already offering to almost make CFSI his full-time priority. “I’m best friends with Jim Wright from Weatherford, Texas. Jim’s been my friend for over 30 years, and I’ve worked with him closely since his district elected him to Congress. I visit with Jim every time I come to the Capitol. Jim is a strong supporter of the Fort Worth Fire Department, and I’ll use his office to promote CFSI and your message,” Mason boomed out as others in the room started listening.

Now, here I am, a freshman member in a Congress overwhelmingly dominated by Democrats. House Speaker Jim Wright wouldn’t know me from any other new Republican in the House. And yet, here was one of the Speaker’s closest friends offering to join the empowerment train. I was so elated I could hardly speak.

“Mason, this is fantastic news. I want you to spearhead our national empowerment at the state level and help us motivate state and local fire service groups to pressure their members to join the Fire Caucus,” I said. Little did I realize what a Texas ‘Longhorn’ workhorse could do when motivated.

Mason was a typical firefighter/first responder. He was active in his community, had a great family, includ-

ing his wife and a son and a daughter who hoped to follow in their father's footsteps, and he had a love and passion for the fire service that I have seen in firefighters in every state in the nation. Mason also had strong ties to Motorola Corporation, American Airlines, and several other Texas-based corporations.

As an unpaid CFSI operative living in Fort Worth, Texas, Mason established and networked a massive national base of fire service leaders and led the effort to have those local leaders interact with their members of Congress and senators and demand that they demonstrate their support for the local fire service by joining the Congressional Fire Caucus and designating one staff person to join the caucus team and CFSI in Washington, DC.

Enlisting the support of Galveston Fire Chief Willie Wisko, Mason and Willie networked all of Texas as well as the entire nation. Mason is an example of how one ordinary person in America can use his influence to leverage massive support and action in an extraordinary way. Mason would use his connections with American Airlines to frequently travel to DC and across the nation speaking in support of the need to "awaken" the Sleeping Giant. Mason and Willie became great friends and led the national effort at the grassroots level while reinforcing Speaker Jim Wright's support in the Congress.

Mason also introduced me to Democrat Pete Geren, who at the time was a staffer for Senator Lloyd Bentsen.

Enticed by the National Republican Congressional Committee to campaign for the Republican nominee for the vacant seat of Speaker Jim Wright, I realized the best candidate for the open seat in Fort Worth was Pete, who, without my initial support, won the open seat and joined me in the House. Pete became one of my best friends in the Congress and served as one of the strongest supporters of the Fire Caucus and CFSI.

He joined me in leading the fight to reverse Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's decision to cancel the V-22 Osprey in 1989. The reinstatement of the V-22 Osprey was a landmark victory given that Cheney killed the program and House Armed Services Chairman (Aspin) and Ranking Republican (Dickinson) and Senate Armed Services Chairman (Nunn) and Ranking Republican (Thurman) supported his decision.

Using the template of the Fire Caucus and CFSI, Pete and I organized the nationwide support base for the Osprey, bringing together members of Congress from both political parties, active and retired Marine Corps leaders, major labor unions, including the UAW, Teamsters, IAM, along with the civil aviation industry. At the height of the debate, we even arranged, with the assistance of Transportation Committee Chair (Oberstar) and Ranking Republican (Shuster), for House Speaker Tom Foley to allow us to bring the prototype NASA XV-15 to the Capitol Plaza adjacent to the Capital building at 6 a.m. one Wednesday in the Spring of 1990 to fly the aircraft at noon back and forth

hovering 200 feet over the Capitol Plaza less than 200 feet from the Capitol dome.



- **HAS: Tapping The Hot Resale Market**
- **New Honeywell Radar: Primus With Punch**
- **Pilot Report: U.S. Army's OH-58D**

XV-15 prototype aircraft hovers over the Capitol parking lot as thousands watch to make the case for reinstating the V-22 Osprey tiltrotor that Sec Def Cheney had cancelled. Weldon, Transportation Committee Leaders Jim Oberstar (WI) and Bud Shuster (PA) successfully lobbied Speaker Foley for approval to fly adjacent to the Capitol. The V-22 Osprey Program was eventually reinstated and is in full production today for the US Marine Corps.

With Pete's support (along with Mason's), we defeated the original decision and fully restored the Osprey, which is now in full production. Besides our mutual friendship, Mason was extremely supportive of the Osprey because one of the two manufacturing companies (Bell Textron) was in Fort Worth.

While my 'Longhorn' friends Mason and Willie led the Texas and national grass-roots empowerment effort, I needed financial support to fund and maintain the CFSI operation. Designated staffers to members of the House and Senate make up the fire caucus, but CFSI needed funds to continue our efforts and meet other obligations.

Our initial dinners and financial support came from Art Glatfelter and his VFIS (Volunteer Fire Insurance Services) network along with corporations from my home district who bought tables at our early dinners, primarily as a favor to me. It was important to establish a solid funding mechanism for CFSI that would allow us to set up an office and hire a full-time professional staff. Convincing corporations to purchase tables at the first few national dinners only occurred because of personal corporate friendships, national fire and EMS associations, defense corporations, and state and local fire associations.

The leadership and members of the Delaware County [Pennsylvania] Firemen's Association provided early and strong support for CFSI and the national dinner, and without their support and that of friendly corporations

and associations, CFSI could not have succeeded. But the long-term survivability of the National Fire and EMS dinner and CFSI has only succeeded because of the men and women of the Delaware Fire Service.

Throughout my personal and public life, I've maintained strong ties to the state of Delaware. All through college and my first four years of teaching, I worked part-time at two local Acme Markets in Delaware. I met my wife while working at an Acme in Wilmington, Delaware, while she worked part-time in the drug-store near to the market. Between my wife's family (she's the middle of seven children) and my family (I'm the youngest of nine), most of our siblings live in Delaware and several served in the Delaware Fire Service as volunteers.

I would frequently remind Joe Biden, Mike Castle, and Tom Carper that my wife and I had more than 200 voting age relatives throughout Delaware. In a relatively small state, that's a lot of voters. As a firefighter and fire chief in Marcus Hook, I established friendships and worked closely with neighboring firefighters from Claymont, Brandywine Hundred, and Talleyville fire companies (all in Delaware).

With 64 paid and volunteer fire departments covering every square inch of Delaware's land mass and coastal communities, Delaware's fire services are a unique group of people who exemplify America. Fiercely community-oriented, Delaware has a rich tradition as the

first responders in the “First State.” But, the Delaware Fire Service is also extremely well-organized and loyal, and most importantly, they understood the ‘empowerment’ message that I had created and was delivering across the country.

As a local, I had great ties all over Delaware. Besides my wife Mary Gallagher’s family and my family, we both worked in Delaware early in our lives (me in the market/my wife in the drugstore and as a young RN). We annually vacationed at Delaware beaches (Lewes and Rehoboth) and our five children all attended and graduated from Delaware schools (Archmere Academy, also the Bidens’ school, and Salesianum, where my brother-in-law was dean of students and basketball coach). In effect, Delaware was our second home.

So, it was somewhat natural that the leaders of the Delaware Volunteer Firefighter Association (Steve Austin, State Association President Jim Monahan, national fire service leader Lou Amabili) and others took an early interest in the Fire Caucus and Institute. Little did I realize how important the “First Staters” would become in our national empowerment strategy to awaken the ‘Sleeping Giant’.

Our early national dinners gradually grew from crowds of several hundred to crowds approaching 2,000. Several of our national dinners have exceeded 2,000 although our average attendance hovers around 2,000, not bad for an organization now 29 years old and still the most

successful bipartisan organization in the Capitol.

Leaders come from across the US, many sponsored by national corporations (like VFIS), associations (like IAFF, NFPA), local and state first-responder associations, but no financial support group has emerged larger than the Delaware State Fire Service. Each year, at a reception held after the annual dinner, the leaders of the Delaware Fire Service present a check to CFSI leadership. And each year, the amount of financial support from the Delaware Fire Service grows. In 2016, the Delaware State Fire Service handed a check at the national dinner in support for CFSI again approaching \$200,000.

Because of the involvement of the Delaware State Fire Service, it was a no-brainer to receive solid support from Senators Biden and Carper and Congressman Castle. That support thrives as strong today through Senators Carper and Coons and Congressman John Carney. Because of the Delaware Fire Service and our personal friendship, it was easy to convince Senator Joe Biden to join the caucus and serve and co-chair during his tenure in the Senate. It was equally natural that Biden would speak at almost every national dinner.

Anyone who has attended one of the national dinners has heard Joe give his famous speech when he acknowledges the existence of three political parties in his home state of Delaware—Democrat, Republican, and the Fire Service. “And” Joe always emphatically states, “their

power is not necessarily in that order.” If you want to be elected to an office in Delaware, you must have the support of the men and women of the Delaware Fire Service” Joe has said dozens of times.

As an indication of Joe’s loyalty and support for the Delaware Fire Service, Joe arranged for every one of the fire departments in Delaware to have a representative join him and his family in the line of march in his section of the Presidential inaugural parade in January 2009.

Without the ongoing support and involvement of the men and women of the Delaware Fire Service, the Fire Caucus and CFSI could not have survived and flourished for 28 years as it has done.

Firefighters are all made from the same mold—dedicated, community-oriented, unselfish, hardworking—across America and worldwide. By telling their stories, unifying their resources, being active, and working the political process from within, empowerment success was inevitable.

During the past 29 years, the National Fire and EMS Dinner has become the Academy Awards for first responders nationwide. At each dinner, national leadership is recognized and success stories are highlighted. Hundreds of current and former members of Congress attend and speak at the dinners. President’s George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have attended and spoken at the dinner, as has former Vice Presidents

Dan Quayle, Al Gore and Dick Cheney and cabinet members Colin Powell, Janet Reno, Mike Chertoff, Tom Ridge, Jeh Johnson, as well as FEMA and USFA directors.



President George H.W. Bush gives the keynote address at the National Fire and EMS Dinner held each year in Washington, DC



President Bill Clinton addresses the Annual Dinner.

To demonstrate support for the American Fire Service, producer Ron Howard unveiled the Hollywood movie *Backdraft* at the national dinner along with Kurt Russell and Billy Baldwin, who both starred in the movie as Chicago firefighters.

As I sat next to Ron Howard at the head table at the dinner, he wore a baseball hat throughout the entire dinner. I learned why the next day as I escorted Ron to the White House to meet with President George H.W. Bush (hats are not worn in the Oval Office), so as we entered the Oval Office to meet the President, Ron took off his hat and exposed his totally bald head. Ron Howard was one of the nicest people and could not say enough about the personal importance to him of being able to produce a film about America's firefighters. Ron presented the original helmet from *Backdraft* to CFSI, and it remains in CFSI headquarters in Washington, DC.



Here Weldon (back row, right) and his wife Mary (back center) and children Karen, Kristin, Kim, Curt, and Andrew meet Ron Howard (far left) and Kurt Russell at the Annual Dinner as they unveiled the film "*Backdraft*"



*Charlton Heston appeared at the dinner in 1992 and spoke at the national dinner after starring in the TV movie *Rescue of Flight 232* focused on the real-life airplane crash and heroic response of first responders in Sioux City, Iowa. Kuwait Ambassador Sheikh Saud Al Sabah appeared and spoke at the national dinner in 1991 to thank US firefighters for extinguishing the oil well fires devastating Kuwait after Saddam Hussein's invasion.*

The annual national dinners grew and succeeded in showcasing the political power of the American Fire Service. Local leaders like the Texas 'Longhorns' and the Delaware 'First Staters' emboldened and empowered firefighters and first responders in all 50 states, but ultimate success is best when successfully influencing the elected leaders of America. Now, how would we accomplish that final mission?

8

Making Members of Congress Firefighters

People have accused me of doing some unusual things during my 20-year tenure in the Congress. As a teacher, I always believed the best way to accomplish an objective or tackle a tough problem was to use visual and tactile strategies to make a point or to convey a message.

Leading a group of bipartisan members to the steps of the Supreme Court with portable fire extinguishers in our hands to demonstrate our commitment to extinguish any flag burning by protestors in my first term, arranging for the XV-15 aircraft to hover over the Capitol Plaza at noon while Congress was in session in our battle to reinstate the V-22 Osprey for the Marine Corps, hosting Cher in the front row at an Armed Services Committee Hearing on helmet safety to reinforce the need for better head protection for our troops because of her personal donation of \$100,000 to a helmet safety foundation, demanding that the Pentagon drive a fully operational 36 foot long, 10,000 pound Scud missile and launcher from Redstone Arsenal

in Alabama to the Capitol and park it on the street in launch position between the Longworth and Rayburn House Office Buildings to demonstrate to Members that offensive missile threats are real and needed to be defeated by better defensive systems, having staff member/former CIA Threat Analyst Dr. Peter Pry build a nuclear suitcase bomb (depicted in the Spy Museum) and a suitcase chemical/biological weapon to use in speeches to demonstrate what these weapons might actually look like as well as how they would operate were just a couple of the antics that I used to win a debate or reinforce a position, and, for the most part, they all worked.

But now my challenge was to get ‘inside the heads’ of my colleagues by making the role and job of first responders real for members of Congress so they’d better understand the needs of firefighters and medical response personnel nationwide. Using our growing network of Fire Caucus members (and their designated staffers), we laid out a plan of activities and unique opportunities that would also provide great local press for members while binding their interest, loyalty, and support for firefighters and first responders.

With the enthusiastic support of my new friend and DC Fire Chief Ray Alfred in 1991, we planned our first “night out” for members of Congress and staffers to ride along with the busiest fire stations in the city. There’s no better way to understand the difficult task of America’s first responders than to join them on the front lines

of their daily work. Chief Alfred and the IAFF Union Leadership picked the busiest station in DC, and members excitedly joined me in casual clothes, not knowing what to expect or what threats they'd face. In those members' nights out, we sat in the station talking to firefighters about their jobs, families, and profession. When the alarm sounded, we rode in the front seats of a rescue truck, engine, or ladder truck to the scene of the emergency call.



DC Fire Chief Ray Alfred (second from left) briefing Weldon and members Jim Nussle (IA-2) (on left in cap) and Elton Gallegly (CA-23) (far right) on what to expect on their night out with one of the busiest stations in the DC Fire Department.

I remember Pete Geren of Texas sitting in the front seat of a DC engine as we responded at 1 a.m. to a shooting/drug deal that had gone sour. In most urban cities, firefighters must have certification as EMTs or paramedics and must respond to all emergency calls for assistance, not just fires and accidents. In many cities, firefighters arrive before or with police officers at incidents that may still be hostile and/or incendiary. As I stated frequently in my speeches, firefighters don't just respond to fires, they respond to every type of threat to the wealthiest family or the poorest, homeless vagrant. And the service is always the same for people the firefighters had never met.



Pete Geren (TX-12) (center), who would later become Secretary of the Army, packs hose after an alarm at the DC prison while other members pack the hose in the bed of the engine.

California Congressman Elton Gallegly totally dedicated himself to understanding firefighters. I remember well our response to a trash fire in the DC prison near RFK Stadium. As we entered the prison compound at 2 a.m., we didn't know what to expect. The battalion chief asked us to remain near the engine instead of entering the actual cell area where the fire had been set. We watched, we waited, and we listened as our firefighter brothers did their jobs efficiently while risking their own safety. We were able to pitch in as Elton and others hopped up on the hosebed of the engine and got our hands dirty as we assisted in repacking the three-inch hose that had been connected to a hydrant in the prison complex to supply water to firefighters inside at the source of the fire.

Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC) had a special interest in firefighters because her father was a decorated DC firefighter. Eleanor was quick to join our "nights out", not just to learn but also to enjoy the opportunity to experience first-hand what her father did throughout his career. But we didn't just focus on the paid firefighters in DC; we also took members and staffers to suburban volunteer and part-paid fire departments to experience their challenges.

On one night out, ABC network producer Hal Bruno took us to his volunteer fire station in Bethesda, Maryland. We spent the night in the volunteer fire station with Bruno and experienced the same challenges that volunteer firefighters in 30,000+ fire departments

in each of our 50 states experience every day. Bruno, like so many other Americans, had a full-time job as a national TV producer and political news analyst for ABC, but Hal was also a volunteer firefighter in the Cabin John Park Fire Department. Hal was a devoted supporter of American Fire Service and attended all our national dinners, eventually serving as MC until illness prevented him from attending.



Weldon (right) and Gallegly taking a break after packing hose on one of the DC engines after an alarm. Also assisting on this alarm were Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC) and Heana Ros-Lehtinen (FL). "Nights out" gave members a feeling for the job of a firefighter/first responder and provided members a realistic understanding of the men and women of the American fire service.

The “nights out” also gave young staffers a hands-on look at the job of responding to emergencies of all types, but we challenged staffers even more. Working with our friends at the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MIFRI) and the Delaware State Fire School in Dover, we arranged ‘fire weekends’ that provided opportunities for male and female staffers to experience real fires first-hand. Equipping staffers with bulky turn-out gear, including helmets, coats, boots, and gloves, Congressional staffers were led into training buildings where they had to extinguish real fires. Donning a breathing apparatus, feeling the intense heat of the fire, and crawling through smoke-filled hallways provided Hill staffers with the genuine experience of a typical firefighter.

These hands-on events were popular with staffers and provided social opportunities to interact and build camaraderie while creating understanding and bonds with actual firefighters. Staffers (and members) began to personally understand the mindset and the challenges faced every day by firefighters in every congressional district across America.

Through CFSI and with the cooperation of the House Sergeant-at-Arms, we arranged live fire portable fire extinguisher training sessions in the public park areas adjacent to the Congressional office buildings. In cooperation with EMS leaders, CFSI arranged training sessions on CPR and the use of defibrillators to empower staffers and members to be confident in the skills of

life-saving techniques. With the National Fire Sprinkler Association, we parked a portable fire trailer on the front steps of the Capitol and demonstrated the effectiveness of automatic sprinkler systems in saving lives and protecting property.

Our efforts were not limited to the Capitol and neighboring areas; I wanted members to fully experience the challenges, the bravery, the dedication, the commitment, and the humility of firefighters and first responders nationwide. And I wanted members to learn first-hand the needs of first responders as they dealt with every disaster known to mankind. And so, when a disaster hit in America, we were on our way. With California members Ron Packard (CA-48, 43), Tom Campbell (CA-15), Elton Gallegly, and others,



With Alaska Congressman Don Young, Weldon, Congressman Elton Gallegly (CA-24, 23) and former Congressman/Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan spent one week with first responders along the coast of Alaska hit hard by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.



Members of the California delegation Ron Packard, Sam Farr and Elton Gallegly (far right) and Roy Dyson (MD) join Weldon within hours after the Loma Prieta earthquake to witness and interact with first responders from throughout California.

including US Fire Administrator Clyde Bragdon and California State Fire Marshal Jim McMullen, we toured the areas most heavily impacted by the Loma Prieta earthquake. We walked the streets of California cities

devastated by the earthquake within 24 hours of the initial tremors.

With Alaska Congressman Don Young and Senators Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens, we spent nights in Tatitluk and Valdez meeting with first responders and receiving briefings on the challenges of clean drinking water and public safety after the largest oil spill in US history.

With Rob Andrews of New Jersey and leaders of the manufactured housing industry, we collected and flew in two UPS plane-loads of generators, bottled water, pharmaceuticals, cots, and medical equipment for use by first responders in Homestead and metro Dade County just days after Hurricane Andrew swept



Weldon and Rob Andrews (NJ-1) spent the weekend living in the Homestead tent city to work side-by-side with first responders providing food and emergency shelter in canvas tents.



Weldon and Andrews serve food in the chow line for families whose homes Hurricane Andrew destroyed. First responders rush to floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and any other natural disasters that wreak havoc on the people of America.

across Florida and devastated everything in its path. We arranged for three modular buildings to be delivered for immediate use as temporary fire and EMS stations. We stayed with the 10th Mountain Division in the Homestead tent city established on the high school football field and helped serve meals to homeless families who were staying in local shelters.

With Denny Rehberg of Montana, we flew into Billings to meet with local firefighters, and then I flew into Yellowstone National Park by helicopter during the height of one of the largest wildfires in park history. With Dana Rohrabacher (CA-46, 45) and Elton Gallegly (CA-24, 23), we flew into Simi Valley

to observe massive wildfires and to meet with forest firefighters specially trained in controlling and extinguishing conflagrations.

Within days after the Murrah building bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995, I arranged to hold a Congressional hearing at the Fire Department Instructors Conference in Indianapolis with Oklahoma City Fire Chief Gary Marrs testifying about the lack of resources available for him to use to assess a major urban bombing and communicate with federal, state, and local officials who were all operating on separate radio frequencies making it impossible to coordinate an integrated response.

Through CFSI, we communicated with New Orleans and Louisiana fire and EMS officials days in advance of the impending arrival of Hurricane Katrina's land-fall. Local state legislator (now Congressman) Steve Scalise (LA-1) served as one of our point persons as I made calls and raised \$700,000 for the New Orleans Fire Department and the volunteer fire departments in affected parishes adjacent to New Orleans. Because New Orleans fire officials lost all equipment and faced an immediate challenge of locating families (especially the elderly) trapped in their homes by seven- and eight-foot flood waters, we had unmanned aircraft with heat sensors flown in to search for people trapped and needing assistance.

Our efforts to immerse members in the response to disasters didn't end at our country's borders.



Weldon (far right) presents a check to Louisiana fire departments surrounding New Orleans for \$440,000 as a part of \$700,000 of private funds raised to help restore and rebuild fire departments devastated by Hurricane Katrina with Louisiana State Senator (now Congressman) Steve Scalise (third from right). Fire departments are often the first to jump in and raise funds or assist in helping victims and other departments who have suffered from disasters.

John Kasich (former Congressman, now Governor of Ohio), Pete Geren, Chris Cox (CA-40, 47), and I flew into Kuwait City one week after the invasion by Saddam Hussein to witness dozens of oil wells deliberately set ablaze while billows of black smoke made all of Kuwait dark in the middle of the day. Oil fire specialist Red Adair and American firefighters came to advise and assist the Kuwaitis in controlling and extinguishing the blazes. At our national dinner that year, Kuwait Ambassador Saud Al Sabah spoke about the bravery of US soldiers and firefighters

and thanked them at our dinner while presenting a \$10,000 personal donation to CFSI.

As my delegation of six members (Solomon Ortiz and Silvestre Reyes of Texas, Roscoe Bartlett of Maryland, Joe Wilson of South Carolina, and Eliot Engel of New York) prepared for our historic first trip into North Korea in 2003, a massive tsunami swept ashore in Indonesia and Malaysia killing hundreds of thousands. Working with international first-responder groups, we quickly generated 40 tons of medical supplies and equipment, cots and sleeping gear, and hundreds of toys for homeless children that we packed on our military plane and delivered on our stop in Banda Ache before heading north to Pyongyang.



Meeting with Indonesian officials, military leaders, emergency aid teams and ordinary families devastated by the Tsunami

During my 20-year tenure in the Congress, we arranged for more than 200 members of Congress to directly engage in the challenges facing firefighters and first

responders witnessing not only heroism and dedication of every magnitude but also creating direct personal links and appreciation for firefighters in local fire departments serving remote villages, towns, and farms and firefighters serving in our largest cities.



Members of Congress (from left) Roscoe Bartlett (MD-6), Solomon Ortiz (TX-27) and Eliot Engel (NY-16), the author, and Silvestre Reyes (TX-16) (not pictured) and Fred Upton (MI-6) (not pictured) delivering a planeload of supplies arranged by the members for the families and first responders in Banda Ache following the tsunami and receive updated briefings regarding US aid to first responders and victims of the tragedy

But the efforts of CFSI went far beyond getting members involved in hands-on situations. We created a National CFSI Awards program offering every member of Congress certificates to present to local responders for length of service, community service, leadership, and heroism and valor. Members then personally presented these certificates at fire station meetings and awards programs, building stronger bonds between the member and the local fire service.

CFSI arranged training and information programs for members to deliver in local fire stations and town halls

for the benefit of the local fire service. As needed, CFSI would help facilitate donation of used fire trucks and surplus equipment from wealthier departments to those less fortunate as well as items made available through the Federal Surplus Property Program. In my home county, I arranged for a 105-foot-long surplus Navy firefighting tugboat for less than \$3,000 to be acquired by our county fire service.

In the first 10 years of the existence of the Fire Caucus and CFSI, we clearly accomplished our original objective and created strong bonds between firefighters and first responders with their members of Congress and designated staff person. But the federal and state governments were still not making the magnitude of changes necessary to fully support America's domestic defenders. Equipment for first responders was not improving rapidly enough, a national system of inter-operational communication still did not exist, support for training and equipment was stagnant, and while funding for our military and law enforcement was spiraling upward, funding for our nation's 1 million first responders was, at best, stagnant but more realistically decreasing rapidly.

Now it was time to put our success to the ultimate test. Could the Sleeping Giant finally, after 200 years of being taken for granted, demand and receive proper levels of support and funding?

9

Storming the Capitol

As we approached the turn of the century, we accomplished much of the foundation I suggested that would fully empower the fire service of our nation. The Congressional Fire Services Caucus had become the largest bipartisan organization in the Congress; co-chairs included the likes of Congressman Steny Hoyer (MD-5), Senator Al Gore (TN), Senator John McCain (AZ), Senator Paul Sarbanes (MD), Senator Tom Carper (DE), Congressman Rob Andrews (NJ-1), Congressman Sherry Boehlert (NY-23, 25, 24), Senator Joe Biden (MD) and Senator Ted Stevens (AK). Dinners were attracting 2,000 leaders annually and expanded to include two days of meetings and update sessions as well as “days on the Hill” to interact on a regular basis with their members of Congress.

Fire service groups united to develop annual priority agendas for staffers and various committees as well as appropriate federal agencies. Members became personally engaged with CFSI to strengthen bonds between legislators and firefighters. Many members of Congress purchased antique fire trucks to use in parades and campaign events on a regular basis. Naturally, I had

three trucks, including two Mack pumpers and the original Mack 75-foot aerial ladder truck my father designed for use in my hometown fire department. Reps. Dan Burton of Indiana and Elton Gallegly of California proudly boasted of their own trucks and how they made them a part of their public identity.



President George H.W. Bush signs our Firefighter Bill of Rights legislation, which, for the first time, publicly acknowledged the importance and commitment necessary from all levels of government. Bush signed the legislation in the Springfield (PA) Fire Department station with hundreds of local, regional, and national leaders in attendance.

Without a doubt, we had put into place what we set out to accomplish. But, as we approached the new millennium, it was time to undertake the most difficult challenges. It was time to test our strength and ability to succeed.

One of the most important aspects of controlling any disaster is the ability to communicate. Yet, time and

again, emergency response departments across the nation couldn't talk to their neighboring departments or other agencies as disasters unfolded. Chief Marrs of Oklahoma City cited his inability to communicate with arriving agencies and departments as one of, if not, his biggest challenge when he arrived on the scene of the Murrah building bombing.

Congress enacted legislation mandating the addition of adequate frequency spectrums by forcing media networks to free up spectrums that would lay the foundation for a national inter-operable communication network for first responders. But the lobbying strength of the networks kept pushing the implementation dates back as firefighters and first responders continued to feel frustrated by their inability to communicate during disasters.

"We have to shake up the system," I told my staff. "We have to create a firestorm of support by making the lack of inter-operable communication real for members of Congress. During several of our CFSI sponsored activities with members, we noticed the DC Fire Department couldn't communicate with neighboring departments in suburban Maryland and Virginia counties, and yet, they often had to work together.

I recalled the success we had in our fight for the V-22 Osprey after members and staffers witnessed a tiltrotor plane hovering over the Capitol Plaza and flying back and forth during lunch one day when Congress was in

session. Members thought the aircraft was a V-22, but that wasn't possible. It was a smaller tiltrotor that, to any ordinary person, looked like the V-22 Osprey. The aircraft was really one of several XV-15s NASA built as prototypes for the larger V-22. But the excitement of seeing this revolutionary aircraft flying directly in front of the US Capitol building at noon sparked strong interest and support for this new aircraft and helped win the larger battle to overcome Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's decision to cancel the entire program, much to the chagrin of the US Marine Corps.

I knew what we had to do. We had to storm Capitol Hill and make the problem of the lack of inter-operable communication for first responders real for members of the US Congress.

Because of the strong relationship and friendship I had with the Sergeant-at-Arms staff and the Capitol police, partly because of my firefighting episode in Speaker Wright's office and the training programs that CFSI organized for members and staff in using portable fire extinguishers, defibrillators, and other life safety equipment, it was easy to get support for activities promoting the fire service.

On several occasions, we arranged for DC firefighters to bring fire apparatus onto the Capitol grounds for public demonstrations. We arranged for a fire sprinkler trailer to park on the Capitol grounds to promote the importance of automatic fire sprinklers, and we

provided much-needed support for professional staff (like Capitol fire protection engineer Ken Lauziere) to finally obtain necessary support for implementation of life safety recommendations in the Capitol and all Congressional office buildings.

And so, we hatched the idea to ‘storm the Capitol’ in 1998 to make the point that the inability of firefighters and responders to communicate, especially during emergency life-threatening incidents, was unacceptable, and Congress and the federal government needed to act. Through our CFSI network, we put the word out to the state contacts up and down the East Coast and Mid-Atlantic fire service organizations.

My request was for fire apparatus (pumpers, ladder trucks, rescue squads, ambulances) to drive to the RFK parking lot in the capital by 11:30 a.m. on a Wednesday when we knew the Congress was in session. Like wild-fire, the word spread that we needed as many vehicles as possible to surround the Capitol building to make the case for a national focus and solution for an inter-operable communications system for fire, rescue, and EMS organizations across America.

While the fire service network spread the word, CFSI staff reached out to the Sergeant-at-Arms, Capitol Hill police as well as the DC Fire and Police departments. We got approval to open the parking lot directly adjacent to the Capitol building for the DC Fire Department to park two ladder trucks with their aerials raised in

an arch above a flatbed trailer we arranged to act as a makeshift stage. The DC Fire Department draped a large American flag between the top of the two aerial ladders and we set up a sound system for a national press conference. The DC Fire Department and several neighboring suburban Virginia and Maryland fire departments parked ambulances and rescue vehicles adjacent to the stage to provide a public demonstration of their inability to communicate.



Preparations underway at the Capitol as 300+ fire apparatus from many states and DC assemble at RFK Stadium on a Wednesday morning when Congress is in session. At 11:30 a.m. Congressman Steny Hoyer and I drove to RFK Stadium and got into the front seats of trucks from our districts to lead a massive motorized parade down Capitol Street and onto Independence and Constitution avenues. At 12 noon, I gave the signal, and the now parked apparatus on both sides of the Capitol activated their air horns, sirens, and bells, creating a thunderous two-minute commotion that caused thousands of members, staffers, and the public to hurry to the parking lot under the raised aerial ladder trucks to join the Press Conference demanding a nationwide interoperable communication system.

Capitol Hill police and the DC Police Department approved the movement of our expected small group of fire apparatus leaving RFK Stadium two abreast to slowly drive down East Capitol Street eventually circling the Capitol and parking on Constitution and Independence avenues.

Without any advance notice to Minority Whip and Fire Caucus co-chairman Steny Hoyer, I grabbed Steny on the House floor at 11:30 a.m., and I said, “Come with me; it’s very important.”

“What are you up to, Weldon,” Steny said knowing my reputation for unusual demonstrations. “We’re going to make the case for inter-operable communication for our friends loud and clear today, and we need your leadership and support,” I said.

Steny Hoyer is one of the finest and most capable leaders in the Congress, and I’ve always been proud to call Steny my friend. He was one of the original co-chairs of the Fire Caucus and co-chaired two other caucuses I created, the US/Russia Parliamentary Caucus and the SMART (Strengthening the Mid-Atlantic Region through Technology for Tomorrow) Region Initiative encompassing the four states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. Steny has done so much for the American fire service that he’s recognized nationwide from members in both political parties. To this day, Steny Hoyer remains the co-chair and driving force in support

of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and fire-fighters nationwide.

As I expected, Steny agreed to join me as we walked out of the Capitol while I explained the mission ahead. I told Steny I arranged for one of the fire trucks from his home station to lead the 'parade' of fire apparatus from RFK Stadium to the Capitol. Adjacent to Steny's truck, I would drive Engine 46-1 from my home station in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania (where I had served as firefighter and chief). We would lead the group of fire apparatus side-by-side down East Capitol Street and then split off with my line heading down Independence Avenue and Steny's line heading down Constitution Avenue.

It was then that I told Steny I'd give a signal (through our multitude of radio frequencies) to every truck to park along each avenue and, at exactly noon, activate their air horns and sirens. "Weldon, you're one crazy bastard," Steny laughingly said as we approached the stadium.

As we approached the stadium, Steny asked me how many trucks I expected to show up. After all, it was a Wednesday and most of the fire departments in the neighboring states of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey were volunteers, which meant many firefighters were at work. I told Steny I hoped for 50 trucks because that would grab the attention we'd need for the press conference to follow the sirens and air horns at noon.

“Press conference?” Steny questioned.

“Yes,” I said, “it’s all set up.” “We have a flatbed trailer situated between two DC ladder trucks with Virginia and Maryland ambulance and rescue squads on each side. We tested the sound system, and you’re going to be the first member I ask to speak,” I said to my friend. “Weldon, you’re one crazy bastard” were the same words again out of Steny’s mouth.

As we approached the stadium, we began to see red and a multitude of other colored fire apparatus all parked in the largest parking lot with some trucks still arriving. The staff did a fantastic job organizing at RFK Stadium and at the Capitol and were waiting for Steny and me to arrive. Steny and I had the same reaction of amazement as the staff shouted out to us on our arrival at RFK that more than 300 fire apparatus had showed up with more still enroute on I-95. They told us vehicles had come from as far away as Ohio and New York with most coming from fire departments in Virginia, Maryland, New York, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Because the noon hour was fast approaching, Steny and I jumped up into the front seats of our respective local fire department vehicles. DC and Capitol police provided escort vehicles to lead the ‘parade’ to the United States Capitol building. As a firefighter, I had attended and marched in many parades in many states, even riding a horse as Grand Marshal of the Pennsylvania

State Fire Convention parade in Gettysburg with Pennsylvania State Fire Marshal and founding CFSI board member Chet Henry beside me.

But this 'parade' was something special. As I drove my old pumper from my hometown slowly down East Capitol Street, the same Mack pumper my father drove so many times as chief engineer of our local department and the truck I drove to dozens of fires and emergencies, my head was spinning with memories and thoughts. Like every other firefighter and first responder in America, the fire service is a part of my very being. From my early days growing up and begging to go the firehouse with my dad to my adolescent and teen years when I thought I knew everything about firefighting but was too young to join the department, it all flashed before me.

It's impossible to explain the feelings, the camaraderie, the drive, the dedication, and the pride that exists within and between firefighters. The Fire Service is one massive network of men and women with similar mindsets and no limitations; firefighters are poor and some are wealthy, some are from large families and some have no families, some have advanced college degrees and some, like my father, only completed eighth grade because he had to go to work to help support his siblings, firefighters worship in every religion while others keep their religious beliefs inside. Firefighters are the heart and soul of our nation and the backbone

of our communities. Firefighters are the best example of what this nation is all about.

As we reached the halfway point to the Capitol, I thought of my firefighter father who never visited the Capitol but raised nine kids while serving as a volunteer, I thought of Bill Connelly, an operator in the Sinclair Oil Refinery and volunteer fire chief in my hometown who pushed me at the age of 12 to take my interest in firefighting seriously and make a difference, and I thought of Bill Gallagher, Herb Pinkowitz, and Don Felker, all local volunteer firefighters from my town and county who died at young ages when responding to emergencies to save people and property in their hometowns and while managing work and families.

As I led my line of trucks down Independence Avenue, I felt a sense of pride that in America the youngest of nine children from a blue-collar industrial community could one day serve in the US Congress. Now, here I was in my hometown fire truck passing and parking alongside the US Capitol building while my friend and House Democratic leader from Maryland was leading his line down Constitution Avenue. It was a proud time for me. I only wish my father could have been there, as well.

As our lines of apparatus lined up along both sides of the Capitol between the Capitol building and the House

and Senate office buildings, I could see the DC aerial ladders raised and the large American flag hanging between less than 200 feet from the Capitol itself; it was a dramatic site. We parked the trucks and exactly at noon, as planned, I gave the signal. Imagine 300 fire apparatus all assembled at one location with air horns, screaming sirens, and bells signaling to all within ear-shot that an emergency was underway.

The wailing of the sirens, deep bellows of the air horns, and clamoring of the bells probably only lasted one or two minutes, but in Washington, DC, surrounding the building that symbolizes the most powerful nation in the world, the deafening sound was amazing. Hundreds of staffers, and members of Congress stopped in their tracks, hurried out of the three House office buildings and three Senate office buildings to see what was happening, scurrying to the Capitol parking lot after seeing the two large aerial ladders raised in a giant arch almost 100 feet in the air.

Now, politicians, including me, are all alike in one respect. Whether Democrat or Republican, or even Socialist like my friend and firefighter supporter Bernie Sanders, we can smell microphones and cameras a mile away. And so, by 12:15 dozens of members of Congress and staffers were moving quickly toward the Capitol and the make-shift press conference stage located directly under the two raised aerial ladders and the giant American flag.



Standing on a flatbed trailer directly in front of the Capitol with arched DC aerial ladders and US flag hanging over the makeshift stage, dozens of members jumped onto the flatbed stage and demanded that the government set up an inter-operable communication system for our nation's first responders

Of course, Steny and I welcomed all to join us on the stage and speak in favor of finally solving the problem of a lack of inter-operable communication for first responders. Having handed out brief talking points as members arrived on the podium, member after member spoke of their support for firefighters and pledged all their energy and resources to provide necessary funds and legislative remedies to enable firefighters to communicate at the scene of any emergency.

The “Storming of the Capitol” was obviously just a catalyst to provoke action and a solution, but as in other similar situations, it worked. Members, staffers, and Congressional committee leaders now knew it was unacceptable in America that first responders had such communication problems during emergen-

cies. But, like every other logical problem in the United States that needs a solution, the challenge was funding. Communication systems, like all firefighters' specialized tools, are expensive and require large amounts of funding. A dozen years after creating and building the caucus and institute, it was time to use the foundation we built and respectfully demand appropriations, not as large as the military or even law enforcement but additional funding, nevertheless.

10

“We Don’t Need the White House”

One of the things I learned as a local mayor, a county council member, and chairman for a county of 600,000 and as a member of the US Congress is that there are never enough funds to meet everyone’s priority. There are literally dozens, if not hundreds, of major priorities that legitimately deserve more funding at every level of government. But funds must come from taxes levied against all the people being served, and that part is never popular.

As a fiscal conservative, I fundamentally believe that government cannot solve every problem known to mankind. However, government must provide funding for the necessities that benefit us as a collective nation and protect us from disasters we can’t handle on our own. The American people cannot personally protect our nation against international threats, cannot personally provide funding for necessary research to control infectious diseases, and cannot maintain our vast national parks and wildlife refuges and numerous other priorities that benefit the whole of our society.

Longer than America has been a nation, volunteer and paid firefighters and first responders have protected our homes, our businesses, our schools, our towns and cities, and our nation from disasters, natural and manmade. Volunteer firefighters and emergency response personnel have saved the taxpayers of this nation billions of dollars and will continue to do so as long as government assists and supports the training and equipment costs at a minimum. Volunteers will proudly continue the tradition of unselfish volunteer service as long as America is a nation, but with more pressure placed upon young people and working parents, fewer and fewer new volunteers are joining the ranks of our departments. In many states fire companies are merging to save costs and meet ongoing staffing needs.



A typical volunteer fire department in America includes people of all genders, all races and ethnic backgrounds and always includes families as a part of all activities. Giving time, energy, and personal resources, America and nations of the world must support these brave local heroes. (East Lansdowne Fire Company, PA)

In 1999, we began the discussion within the Congress to develop and support legislation that would provide small grants for the first time on a competitive basis to local fire departments. Staffers from the offices of Steny Hoyer, Congressman Bill Pascrell (NJ-9), Congressman Rob Andrews (NJ-1), Governor Mike Castle (DE) and others joined with my staff and worked with CFSI Staff Director Bill Webb to draft a comprehensive funding bill that would begin to provide grants for equipment and technology that would directly benefit local fire departments across America. My good friend Bill Pascrell and I introduced this legislation that would, for the first time, directly support the men and women of the American fire service with grants. The legislation was carefully crafted with the major national fire service groups on the CFSI advisory board and contained provisions that prevented politics from playing any role in the allocation of funds.

Any recognized fire department or emergency services group out of the 32,000 nationwide could go on the internet and apply for a direct grant to pay a portion of the cost necessary to purchase costly equipment like turn-out gear, new technology, communication equipment, firefighter life-saving machines, or other items. The FIRE Act, as it became known, was finally a reality, legislation that would benefit all 1 million first responders. In a Republican controlled congress, I worked with primary sponsor Bill Pascrell because party did not matter.

We introduced the legislation in the House on March 17, 1999, with primary sponsors Bill Pascrell and me, along with 70 original co-sponsors from both parties. Because of the size and success of the Fire Caucus, co-sponsors in the House and support in Senate grew. Ultimately, 285 House members would co-sponsor the legislation as a testament to the support process we had established.

Hearings were scheduled in the House throughout 1999 and 2000 because House members were in the lead on this legislation. Because of legislative jurisdiction over the US Fire Administration, the Fire Act was initially referred to the House Science Committee as well as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Joint referrals made our job more challenging, but that would not stop us.

Because of the Clinton Administration's objections, we couldn't get the White House to guarantee support once we moved the bill out of committee and to the House floor as a free-standing bill, where we knew we'd have massive support. As the days of the Clinton Administration drew to a close in late 2000, we feared we might not have time to enact the legislation as a free-standing program, so we had to conceive an alternate strategy. On the Senate side, senators Chris Dodd (MA) and Mike DeWine (OH) gathered support for the House bill and planned to offer the Fire Act as an amendment to the 2001 Defense Authorization Bill.

The Defense Authorization Bill is the one piece of legislation passed in the House and Senate every year in support of our military and our troops. Although the process for approval is long and arduous because of the massive size of the bill, it always passes in each chamber and is then referred to a joint conference committee composed of members appointed by the Speaker and ranking minority member with the bulk of the conferees being senior members of the House and Senate Armed Service Committees. The final conference report developed between the House and Senate conferees always receives presidential approval.

As vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee, I was in a unique position to take the entire Fire Act (with minimal revisions) and offer it as an amendment to the House Defense Authorization Bill while members of the Senate were considering the same. My task, therefore, was to add my version of the Fire Act to the 2001 Defense Authorization Bill in the conference and encourage my colleagues in the Senate to do the same. Because of the strong bipartisan network, built by our years of hard work with House and Senate members who had joined the caucus, the foundation for success was in place.

The conference process is one of competing priorities contained in one of the House or Senate bills but not in both. Typically, all conferees must discuss hundreds of “conferenceable items” in a private session until there’s agreement on every outstanding item. I had individual

discussions with Senate Chair Carl Levin (MI) and ranking Republican John Warner (VA), both of whom were members of the Fire Caucus, and they gave the green light for the Senate to accept my amendment in the final bill.

Public Law 106-398 Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 included my Conference Amendment, Title XVII, Section 1701-1707 entitled “Assistance to Firefighters” which included:

Section 1701—Firefighter Assistance. The original act contained this section, which made authorizations for a program of assistance to benefit all paid and volunteer firefighters within the US.

Section 1702—Volunteer Fire Assistance Program. Also contained in the original Fire Act legislation, this section authorized assistance programs, specifically for volunteer fire departments within the US.

Section 1703—Burn Research. As a strong supporter of the Burn Foundation and my local burn center at Crozer Keystone Medical Center in suburban Philadelphia, I included a focus on burn research and funding.

Section 1704—Study and demonstration projects regarding cases of Hepatitis C among certain emergency response employees—developed in collaboration with the IAFF and Congressman Bob Brady (PA-1). I included this separate bill as a part of my revised amendment.

Section 1705—Report on Progress of Spectrum Sharing. I added this section to keep the pressure on the federal government to solve the inter-operable communication problem across America.

Section 1706—Sale or donation of excess defense property to assist firefighting agencies. We added this initiative to expedite the process of donating still-operable defense and military equipment to fire departments across America.

Section 1707—Identification of defense technologies suitable for use, or conversion for use, in providing fire and emergency medical services. This had been a subject of several of my sub-committee hearings that I chaired.

The final revised amendment I added to the Defense Authorization Bill contained much more than the original Fire Act but provided blanket authorization for all the above initiatives and making them the law of the land once President Clinton signed the 2001 Defense Authorization Bill into law on October 30, 2000.

We had accomplished our objective, and for the first time in America's history, there was legal authorization enacted on behalf of 1.2 million paid and volunteer firefighters in 32,000 fire departments in every state.

Public Law 106-398 also contained another strategically important amendment that I drafted and championed regarding the threat of electromagnetic pulse. My amend-

ment, which became Title XIV of the law, created the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack. This legislation mandated the creation of a formal commission, outlined procedures and powers and authorized Department of Defense funding for the commission's operation.

The EMP Commission board eventually was appointed and consisted of the top scientists and scholars with my former staffer Dr. Peter Pry named as executive director. The EMP Commission held hearings, completed extensive research, and produced several documents, which laid the foundation for the current national debate and discussion regarding America's EMP vulnerability.

However, our victory with the passage of the Fire Act and Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative was short-lived because an authorized program means nothing without appropriations to carry out the mandates and programs of the authorization. And the appropriations process is a whole different ballgame—different committees, different problems, and different competition for limited dollars.

The Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the FIRE Act, was legally authorized in the last quarter of 2000, the last days of the Clinton Administration. Now, we had to fight to get the first appropriation to fund the programs that were now authorized by law. Each year, the President of the United States puts forth

the annual budget message to the Congress, calling for funding levels in every aspect of federal spending. As a Republican, I anxiously waited to see what level of funding incoming President George W. Bush would request for funding the Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the FIRE Act.

The President must submit his budget message to the Congress each year by February 1, but that date sometimes slips, depending upon different administrations' internal preparations and schedules. The President highlights the priorities of the administration each year in the State of the Union Address delivered in January.

Incoming President Bush, in one of his first appointments, named Mitch Daniels (former governor of Indiana) as Director of the Office of Management and Budget in January 2001. Mitch had earned positive praise as Senator Dick Lugar's chief of staff (also from Indiana) and would make an excellent budget director. I was optimistic because I had worked with Mitch and Senator Lugar on Russia and other foreign policy initiatives, and besides, Mitch was born in Pennsylvania, one of the strongest fire service states in America, with more than 2,000 paid and volunteer fire departments.

So, you can imagine my frustration, disappointment and outrage when the 2001 budget zeroed-out the Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the FIRE Act. We had come so far, had overcome the objec-

tions of outgoing Democratic President Bill Clinton to our initiative and now had incoming Republican President George Bush include no appropriation request for the programs we had just created.

Disappointment across the country within the fire service came quickly and loudly with many firefighters believing I should have gotten at least a small amount of funding for our newly authorized programs because of my support for Bush. And I agreed that the Bush Administration had let us down, especially because we worked hard within the fire service to support Bush just as my Democratic colleagues had worked hard for Al Gore who had been a strong supporter of the fire service as one of the first Senate Fire Caucus co-chairs.

And so, once again, we had to make our point loud and clear because the bureaucracy of the Federal Budget Office thwarted the logic of supporting a relatively small amount of funds for the nation's domestic defenders. I had my staff call the Office of Budget Director Mitch Daniels to request a meeting with me as co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus along with a few of the other members of the caucus. We agreed on a date and time, and my work began.

One of my mandates from the beginning for the Fire Caucus was the bipartisan underpinning in everything we did. But this was a Republican problem because the new President was from our party. So, I prepared a memo to every Congressional Republican member

of the Fire Caucus, explained the budget problem, and asked members to join me for the meeting with Mitch.

My office on the 4th floor of the Rayburn Building, like most Congressional offices, would normally hold 10 to 12 people at most for a typical meeting. Thirty minutes before the meeting with Budget Director Daniels, members started arriving in my office to discuss the budget situation. Ten minutes before the scheduled meeting with Budget Director Daniels, 41 members of Congress jammed themselves in my inner office, the outer office, and in the hallway. Unbeknownst to us, Mitch had sent one of his staffers to my office in advance of the meeting and must have texted Mitch that he was being 'set up' by Weldon.

As Mitch walked down the hallway with his staffers on the fourth floor of the Rayburn House Office Building, he passed a fire hose cabinet, stopped, thought for a moment, opened the door to the hose cabinet, and pulled out a portable fire extinguisher. As Daniels pushed through the crowd of members in the hallway and outer office into my inner office, he carried the portable fire extinguisher with him.

Daniel's first words to me after my welcome were, "Mr. Chairman, I think that I'm going to need this." He held the fire extinguisher in front of his body, causing the entire roomful of members to break out in laughter. Each of us told the story of how the firefighter initiatives would benefit our districts, as well as the nation as a whole.

Bottom line, Daniels went back to his office, revised the budget document for 2001 and added a \$100,000,000 appropriation request for the Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Unusual challenges require unusual solutions.

Our success reminded me of our battle with Defense Secretary Dick Cheney later that same year. Cheney refused to spend funds for the V-22 Osprey Program that Congress had restored despite his cancellation of the program.

As with the President's budget request, Congress had to find a way to force Dick Cheney to relent, just as the budget office had relented about not funding the fire programs. So, I drafted and added an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill later that year that cut the Administrative Budget for the Office of the Secretary of the Navy by 10 percent each month until Secretary Cheney appropriated V-22 Osprey funds, as mandated by Congress.

Then-Navy Secretary Sean O'Keefe pleaded with me, "What are you doing?" fully understanding my strategy. "Sean, within 10 months you'd better start spending the money on the V-22, or you'll have to answer your own phones," I said. Within a few days, we reached an agreement, the funds started flowing, and the Navy Secretary kept his staff in place. And the V-22 Osprey moved forward into full production.

The year 2001 was a banner year for the American Fire Service. Our Landmark Legislation was enacted, initial funds were appropriated and the seven key elements of the Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the Assistance to Firefighter Grants Program, was in operation. \$100 million was appropriated and distributed on a competitive basis to hundreds of fire departments across the US. Since then, the Comprehensive Firefighters Initiative, including the Assistance to Firefighter Grants Program has totaled \$7.28 billion since 2001 providing grants to almost 30,000 fire departments across the country. The sister SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Program to assist communities who wish to hire firefighters has totaled \$3.19 billion.

Neither President Clinton nor President Bush initially wanted to fund or support these programs, but we proved that “we didn’t need the White House” to accomplish our objectives. We empowered ourselves!

The Sleeping Giant not only awakened but arose and demanded that government treat firefighters with dignity and respect, empowering themselves through a process that they created, a process that is now a template for other groups who feel ignored or taken for granted politically in America.

11

The Arrogance of Our Federal Bureaucracy

Volunteerism is one of the most important foundations of a free society. Volunteers serve because they have a deep commitment to community and other people. My parents instilled in each of their nine children a sense that we had to become involved in the community. Our mother was very involved in our local church, and our father loved being involved in the local fire department. All seven boys at one time or another joined the local fire company (Viscose), named after the American Viscose Corporation that established its US-based manufacturing plant in our hometown.

Long before the United States became a free nation, men and women organized in their towns and villages organizations that would battle fire and disasters. These “fire companies” often started in an individual’s garage or barn or a business enterprise. In fact, Ben Franklin often receives credit for founding one of America’s first fire departments in Philadelphia.

In some cases, insurance companies organized brigades that would respond to fight the fires in the buildings

they insured. They placed steel “Fire Marks” in a prominent position on the front of their insureds to identify the properties the brigades should protect. Over time, citizens organized their own individual fire companies that would protect all homes and properties, not just those with insurance.

As our nation grew, local leaders organized fire companies in almost every village and town. Initially, hose wagons (some pulled by men; others pulled by horses) took the hose to the fire’s location where they could pump water from a creek or pond through the hose to the fire. As towns grew, they installed underground water lines and strategically placed hydrants to allow fire companies to connect and get the water to pump through a motorized fire truck to the fire.

Over time, almost every town and village had at least one fire company. The people who manned these fire companies were volunteers. This network of volunteers often became the backbone of the community, not just in fighting fires and responding to disasters, but also organizing patriotic parades, pumping out flooded basements, organizing search parties to locate lost children, and providing a community center where people met, voted on election day, and often used the building as the town meeting hall.

The tradition of the American fire service is rich and storied and developed its own identity and personality common to every town large and small. Growing

to 32,000 organizations, these fire companies played a strategic role in the development of our American soul. At the height of the American fire service, more than 1.2 million men and women called themselves firefighters, emergency rescue workers, and collectively became the American first-responder network. As large cities emerged, and fire and rescue challenges became more complicated and time-consuming, firefighters and first responders started to draw wages and salaries. Today, volunteers still dominate the American landscape as first responders, but large cities all have paid departments.

Local, regional, state, and the federal government pay and fund almost all our public protection forces, such as police, military, civil defense, and hospitals, but many fire companies receive little in the way of financial support. And paid employees of various levels of government never fully realized that most fire companies and departments across America are NOT a part of the government but rather operate as individual nonprofit organizations.

And so, as funds from the various levels of government grew dramatically for the military, law enforcement, civil defense, and healthcare, funds for fire companies and departments largely came from local fundraising efforts. Chicken dinners, tag days, bingo, carnivals all became primary sources for operational expenses while volunteers provided the labor. In 1987, when I first entered Congress, the federal bureaucracy had “no clue” of the needs of first responders.

Bureaucrats under Ronald Reagan were trying to eliminate the National Fire Academy, impose unreasonable requirements on ordinary firefighters who had been serving their communities for years, and basically ignored the very people who had become America's "domestic defenders". The budget for our military (our international defenders) had grown to \$400 billion, healthcare expenditures were in the hundreds of billions, and even local law enforcement received \$4 billion annually in support of local police (which I strongly supported). But the federal funding in support of first responders nationwide was a paltry \$40 million per year.

As a firefighter, fire chief, and fire instructor (all volunteer), I was dismayed and frustrated. Certainly, our country and government needed to fully support the protection of every soldier, police officer, and civil worker, especially those hundreds of families who lost loved ones on the job. But was the life of a first responder less valuable, especially considering that most were volunteers? On average, in 1987, 120 police officers died in the line of duty, but in that same year (and every year), a similar number of firefighters died in the line of duty. Something had to change; the federal bureaucracy just didn't get it.

As a fiscal conservative, I'm not in favor of expanding federal appropriations. But imagine if the volunteers were to stop their services to our towns and cities. The costs for fully paid departments would bankrupt

America. So, the fiscally conservative position was to support and empower all first responders, provide new technology and training, and state-of-the-art protective equipment.

We needed to shake the bureaucracy by the neck and demand support and respect for firefighters, paramedics, rescue workers, and all first responders. And give our first responders the same technology we funded to protect our soldiers and police.

I took the call from leaders of the Louisiana Fire Service two days prior to Hurricane Katrina's predicted landfall. I had talked to my friend Congressman Gene Taylor of Mississippi who lives along the coast and discussed his concerns. He told me he was going to his home and community to be available when the dreaded storm came ashore.

Everyone hoped the levees would hold around New Orleans and the area could avert massive flooding, but that was not to be. As Katrina battered the coast and bore down on New Orleans, the levees burst, and water poured into downtown New Orleans and neighboring communities and parishes. We had also been in constant contact with state legislator (now congressman) Steve Scalise who updated my staff as things grew really bad. Our planning calls started immediately—seeking a private plane to haul supplies and a small team, including me, to Louisiana with whatever needed items we could secure.

Local contractor Gary Holloway made his private plane available as the storm came ashore. Within hours, we were on the phone with Scalise, the New Orleans Fire Department, neighboring local fire departments, the governor's office (Senator Mary Landrieu's brother Mitch was acting incident command officer), and members of our national firefighter network. Fire stations were under water, trucks, and rescue equipment couldn't move, power was out, and medical centers needed evacuation, but the biggest problem was thousands of homeowners who became trapped on their roofs or stuck in second-floor bedrooms and couldn't get outside to get someone's attention. Many of the trapped were senior citizens.

Because I had been briefed on the phone about the situation before taking off from DC with medical supplies, several fire service leaders, and former Miss America 1999 and friend Nicole Johnson, who's a Type 1 diabetic and, at the time, a diabetes advocate, we carried drugs and specialized equipment needed by diabetics. We also carried baby formula and antibiotics to give to emergency medical personnel.

But medical supplies and equipment was not the top priority in the first 24 hours; rescuing trapped people in residential homes and multi-family buildings was number 1. But the fire department had no way to know exactly who was trapped and exactly where they were located.

But we had a solution; the military was developing UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) for use on the battlefield. The oversight for all these new UAVs came under the jurisdiction of the committee I chaired at the time. I'd seen the UAVs in operation, so I knew their capabilities and limitations. I also knew that thermal imaging cameras could be strapped to the UAVs to look for people based on body heat. I immediately got on the phone and called Tony Mulligan, CEO/founder of Advanced Ceramics Manufacturing in Arizona and Tom Fenerty, CEO/founder of NAVMAR Applied Sciences Corporation. Both were leading technology companies that had developed operational UAVs and whose aircraft had thermal imaging capabilities.

The conversation was the same with both. "Can you get me a Silver Fox or a Manta down to New Orleans ASAP?" I asked. "You can't get into New Orleans, but I'm flying to Baton Rouge so the goal is get the 'birds' to Baton Rouge. Both men gave their support, and Mulligan had a Silver Fox driven across the country, which arrived before my plane landed at the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport.

Assembling and operating the UAVs was simple, so we alerted the fire chief, police chief, and Louisiana State Police that we had 'cutting-edge' tools that could fly over New Orleans at low altitude and pinpoint the exact location of trapped people either on roofs, second floor porches, and even through some thin-walled homes.

Since the New Orleans airport wasn't open and the military wasn't yet activated, the possibility of an air crash incident over New Orleans was extremely minimal. Besides, the UAVs could follow distinct flight paths over specific segments of the city where the need to locate trapped people was greatest. These UAVs had already undergone thousands of hours of flight testing, and our troops were using them overseas with great success. Imagine our amazement, frustration, and anger when the FAA got wind of our plan and ordered a ban on any UAVs being used over New Orleans.

Trapped people, senior citizens, babies, and young children in small single-family homes surrounded by 6 to 10 feet of scary gulf water, yet first responders were prohibited from using state-of-the-art technology to assist in locating and rescuing people using technology that our military had already tested and perfected.

To this day, we still don't have an approval process for use of UAVs by civilian first-responder agencies and departments. Some departments have used UAVs without FAA approval because of frustration associated with the federal bureaucracy.

Wild fires and conflagrations each year cause hundreds of deaths and cost taxpayers billions of dollars in our western and mountainous states. Specially trained and extremely brave wildfire first responders parachute into raging infernos and survive in the most hostile environments known to humanity. Yet we still don't have

an integrated automated system using existing military technology to alert these first responders at the very outset of an impending nightmare conflagration.

As chairman of the Military Research Oversight Committee, I learned about our detection methods used worldwide to instantly detect a rocket or missile launch caused by the heat given off by the rocket engine. In questioning our scientists and engineers, I learned that they “see” fires less than one acre in size. So why, I asked, don’t we have a national (and international) fire detection system that would allow us to stop and control wildfires and conflagrations before they occur. How stupid can we be?

Six brave firefighters in Worcester, MA, two in Philadelphia, and others nationwide, lost their lives when they became disoriented or incapacitated inside burning structures and could not be rescued. Again, our military had developed and perfected both vertical and horizontal GPS as well as remote monitoring of vital body functions. Why then, did we not have personal locator devices on every firefighter and first responder as they entered hostile environments? It took 10 years for the federal bureaucracy to simply reengineer existing technologies for use by firefighters and first responders.

As chairman of the Congressional hearing following the horrific Murrah building bombing in Oklahoma City, I asked Chief Gary Marrs what his toughest challenges were as he faced the devastation of the bomb-

ing as he arrived at the scene of the devastation. Chief Marrs explained that he panicked as he realized that children were in a second floor daycare, and rescue would be his initial focus.

Chief Marrs, just like Chief Ray Downey after the first World Trade Center bombing, did not have an inter-operable communication capability to talk to all responding emergency organizations so he could smoothly coordinate lifesaving with fire suppression and rescue. Chief Marrs, again like Chief Downey, did not possess a handheld emergency resource locator to assist in bringing in vital resources like structural engineers to assess potential collapse, air quality assessment experts to monitor air quality and toxins, or integrated agency protocols to support his vitally critical decisions in the first minutes and hours of the disaster.

Years later, that incident command technology enabler is still not perfected and in the hands of every chief officer in the nation. Yet, each of these technologies have been available to our military for years.

It's not just been the lack of understanding regarding our first responders. In my opinion, it's been arrogance and, in some cases, pure stupidity on the part of our federal bureaucracy.

I recall a National Conference on Volunteerism organized during the Clinton Administration and headed by my friend former Senator Harris Wofford. Initially, I felt excited by the prospect of a national conference

focused totally on volunteers until I learned the conference defined “volunteers” as social workers and community activists. Being a teacher by profession in poor areas, I recognized the importance of such volunteers, but how could bureaucrats be so naive, arrogant, or just plain stupid not to include our nation’s first responders. I remember well a speech I gave at the King of Prussia fire station alerting firefighters that we might need to surround the convention center where the conference was being held.

Thank goodness, my friend and former Hill staffer Carrye Brown was US Fire Administrator and responded immediately to my call for action, her conversation with Harris added the nation’s firefighters to the guest list and the agenda, but the oversight should never have occurred in the first place.

Because of these, and countless other, horror stories negatively affecting our first responders, I drafted and included language to our Defense Authorization legislation that mandated aggressive action in the Department of Defense to focus especially on ready-to-go technology. The process of dual-use for technology, training, and response to improve the capabilities of first responders continues to this day. The Awakening of the Sleeping Giant forced the awakening of the federal bureaucracy, but more work remained!

12

The Real 9/11 Hero

The first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 startled our nation. We had never witnessed that magnitude of an attack that caused that significant amount of damage on our soil, but it had the potential to be a lot more devastating. As founder and chairman of the Fire Caucus, I made it my business to be on the scene within hours or days after every disaster in the country. I also made it my business to be at international disasters as soon as possible. The purpose of my visits was to interact directly with first responders to better understand their challenges and frustrations in responding to and dealing with disasters.

And so, it was on February 26, 1993, that America suffered its first attack on the World Trade Center. Within minutes of the attack, my interactions with the New York State Fire Marshal's office started. I had a great relationship with the New York State Fire Marshal because of my ongoing association with the National Association of State Fire Marshals, one of the stakeholder groups I included as part of our national first-responder advisory panel.

My job was to assess federal agency response and what support I could provide to meet immediate life safety actions already underway, what back-up emergency response I could help muster to assist NYC in ongoing protection of the citizens, and longer term, what recommendations I could make to my colleagues in the Congress that would necessitate legislative action.

Within hours of the attack, I received an invitation from the New York City Fire Commissioner to visit the WTC and the bombed-out parking garage. Dropping everything, I headed to New York City on the next Amtrak train where one of the FDNY deputies met me. My first stop was FDNY headquarters where they briefed me on the bombing and ongoing response and cleanup.

Fire officials asked me to visit the WTC garage to see first-hand what happened as well as the response by federal, state, and local agencies. Assigned to accompany several FDNY officials, I went to the garage. I received a thorough briefing about the attack, saw the structural damage to the WTC, and heard the supposition of what could have occurred.

Damage to the WTC Garage was horrific; a monstrous cavern now existed exactly where parking levels were filled with automobiles and vehicles tossed and crushed like toys. My briefing focused on the attack itself, the devastation the attack caused that hampered rescue, and the importance for Washington, Congress, and the federal bureaucracy to understand firefighter and

first-responder needs. It was then that I met the man who would become the real hero of 9/11 at the same site where 8 years later he would lay down his life for others.



A huge cavern resulted from the 1st attack on the World Trade Center where Weldon first met FDNY Officer Ray Downey. Ray, a retired Marine, would become Weldon's advisor on national resources necessary for NYC and other cities to prepare for another terrorist attack.

Ray Downey was a typical firefighter and loved every minute of what he was doing. Like firefighters across America, Ray served his country as a US Marine, married his sweetheart, and was raising his family of five beautiful children. Ray's job was to brief me, and he expressed frustration with the federal government's lack of awareness of the needs for first responders like him. "They just don't get it, Congressman. You were one of us so, we need you to be our voice and shake up the bureaucracy. I'll give you my insights and recommen-

dations, but you need to make things happen,” Ray said.

That meeting began an eight-year friendship with Ray. Ray outlined in detail what cities like New York needed, what technologies he knew about from his days in the Marine Corps and promised to do his part as a voice for the men and women on the front lines of fires, disasters, and terrorism in America. I remember Ray, at one point, saying to me, “Congressman, this is going to happen again, and we’re not ready for another attack that may be larger and more devastating. These buildings are built to withstand every negative force, but I just don’t feel comfortable with our capabilities.”

From that point Ray and I communicated often, sometimes directly but often through my staff. Based upon my initial meeting with Ray, I immediately returned to DC and did a one-hour special order that night on my trip and findings, which for the most part Ray gave me, and outlined recommendations to my colleagues and the nation (via C-SPAN). Members can do special orders after regular house business has finished up to one hour in length on any topic of importance to that member. Finishing my special order around midnight, I bedded down for the night in my office. (For 12 years after I sold my small unit on the Hill to pay for our kids to attend private schools, I slept in my office on a blow-up bed. It wasn’t comfortable, but it worked. Each morning, I’d wake up early, head down to the House gym to shower and be back by 7 or 8 when

staffers started arriving.)

As I plugged in the blow-up bed, the phone rang. Usually, I wouldn't answer the phone because people would call at all hours with crazy requests. Sometimes, I'd pretend to be the cleaning person and tell the caller to call back. But this night, even though it was late, I felt good about my message and hoped that some firefighters may have tuned into C-SPAN. Sure enough, first one call, and then another from firefighters across America who watched (some in firehouses on duty) called to thank me. It felt good; my message/Ray's message was now an official part of the Congressional Record, and people heard the message live.

After six or seven calls, I was ready to call it a night but, for some reason, I answered the phone again. "Is this Congressman Weldon?" the voice asked.

"Who's calling?" I inquired.

"It's Governor Cuomo from New York, and I just watched your speech on C-SPAN. It was great," the voice said.

"Who is this?" I said. You see firefighters are always 'busting balls' so I was certain one of my friends from home or a firefighter friend was just calling to have some fun.

After a few exchanges, Governor Mario Cuomo convinced me he was, in fact, on the line. He explained to me he was working late in his office and had his TV tuned in to C-SPAN. He went on to tell me how impressed he

was that a congressman from Pennsylvania had taken time to visit the World Trade Center and then give a one-hour speech about the experience. The governor talked at length about the need for additional specialized resources, tools, and techniques both to prevent a similar attack as well as to assist and empower first responders as I had outlined in my speech.

The next day I told my staff to draft legislation to support Ray and the governor's suggestions, as well as my own thoughts and ideas. Because of Ray, I created and introduced legislation I was able to add to the Defense Authorization Bill that, among other things, mandated the creation and operation of a special commission to focus on formal recommendations that would force the Department of Defense and other agencies to directly interface with first responders. The bill established and funded the commission, and Chief Ray Downey and my friend Chief Bill Jenaway were both named as members. The White House asked former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore to chair the commission, which he did, and the Gilmore Commission became a reality.

Deliberately brushed aside by the administration and the media, the Gilmore Commission issued three full reports well before 9/11 and made dozens of recommendations, which everyone largely ignored. When Congress demanded and succeeded in creating the 9/11 Commission after the fact, more than half of the Gilmore Commission's published recommendations were included in the 9/11 Commission Report. It's

amazing how DC likes to control the “spin” of a story. But no one can take away the work, the effort, the dedication, the sacrifice, and the spirit and patriotism of Chief Ray Downey.



Weldon meets with FDNY Commissioner and Officials on several occasions to understand concerns and recommendations of FDNY leadership including the creation of a special commission to prevent and respond to a second attack like the '93 attack. Weldon's legislation created the Gilmore Commission (Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism).

My colleagues from Texas and the Armed Services Committee Solomon Ortiz and Sylvester Reyes joined me in the House of Representatives press gallery at 8:30 a.m. on September 11, 2001, to issue a call for \$5 billion in additional funding for America's readiness to battle terrorism and support our international and domestic defenders. With an elevated monitor carrying the news in the corner of the press room, we saw the first plane slam into the WTC. Shock went through the room. Amid the initial confusion, the

second plane struck the WTC, and we were numb with disbelief. As we left the press gallery, the Capitol Hill police were already screaming for everyone to leave the Capitol.

With total horror and confusion all around, we walked into the Capitol parking lot in a daze. Members and staffers alike were crying, sobbing, not knowing where to go or what to do. And then in the distance we saw the smoke coming from the Pentagon, and the reality set in. We were under a massive attack.

There were no preparations for members for a disaster or catastrophe. The Capitol Hill police, doing what they could, told us to get away from the Capitol building and proceed to wherever we felt safe. At that point, my DC home was my office so I had nowhere to go. Randomly as I walked and talked on the phone to reassure my wife and family, a CNN reporter asked me to do an interview. I agreed, and we walked to a local church not far from the Capitol where CNN had gotten approval to use the roof as a makeshift studio. Feeling a sense of outrage and anger, I couldn't control myself.

"Today, the government of the United States failed the people. We knew what should have been done, and we collectively did not do it," I said live on CNN world-

wide. Ray Downey and the Gilmore Commission gave us three reports, but we didn't act. We failed America, and we failed our first responders. I was especially outraged because I had focused on the need for a national integrated data fusion center that would link all 30+ classified and open sources data systems that our agencies controlled. I had requested my friends in the intelligence agencies who met with me informally on a weekly basis to prepare a proposal I could submit to the administration that would set up what I called the NOAH (National Operations and Analysis Hub), a policymaker and warfighters tool, to deal with emerging transnational terrorist threats.

On November 4, 1999, two years before 9/11, I had briefed senior leaders of the CIA and FBI with Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre on the NOAH in my office. Hamre had suggested the meeting when I had met with him five months earlier after he visited the Army's LIWA (Land Information Warfare Assessment Center) at my suggestion to witness the amazing 'cutting-edge' work that went well beyond the mandate of the Army for the creation of their information dominance capabilities. The LIWA top secret 'Able Danger' team was using 'neural networking' to assure information dominance as well as identify emerging threats worldwide.

National Operations and Analysis Hub (NOAH)

The Challenge

- The United States continues to rely upon decades-old approaches in dealing with threats to our national security. It is time to consider new approaches beyond those developed in the 1950s if we are to successfully meet the challenges and issues facing us in the 21st century
- This new approach supports the needs of the nation's policymakers, military commanders, and law enforcement agencies in taking action against asymmetrical threats such as terrorism, proliferation, illegal technology diversions/transfers, espionage, narcotics, information warfare and cyberterrorism
- The challenges facing policymakers, the military, and various law enforcement agencies are beginning to overlap, blurring their distinction and jurisdiction while posing an increasing threat to our nation, both domestically and internationally

Addressing the Threat

- Numerous federal agencies continue their efforts to deal with these threats, often separate and distinct from the work of other agencies. This presents a serious problem because agencies often fail to share or bring together vital information that can assist in a timely solution
- We don't need another analytical center. Instead, we need a national level "fusion center" that can take already analyzed data and offer courses of action for decision-making
- On July 30, 1999 I wrote Deputy Secretary of Defense Hamre on the need for such a central national-level entity — the National Operations Analysis Hub
- This central national-level hub would be comprised of a system of agency-specified mini-centers, or "pods," of participating agencies and services associated with growing national security concerns. In all, some 33 such agencies would initially participate
- Patterned after the Army's Land Information Warfare Activity center at Fort Belvoir, NOAH would display collaborative threat profiling and analytical assessments. With the aid of a variety of electronic tools, it would integrate various imagery, data, and analytical viewpoints for decisionmakers in support of national actions

Benefits

- For national policymakers, such a national collaborative environment offers situation updates across a variety of issues and offers suggested courses of action — based on analysis — to help government officials make more informed decisions.
- For the intelligence community, a national collaborative center such as NOAH will help end stovepiping and create more robust strategic analyses as well as near-real-time support to field operations
- For law enforcement, such a national-level center provides investigative and threat profiling support, and field station situational awareness
- For military commanders and planners, the national-level center offers full battlefield visualization, threat profiling, robust situational awareness, as well as near real-time support to special missions such as peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, national emergencies or special operations.

*Two page overview of the 9 page NOAH Fusion Center Proposal
presented to leaders of the DOD, FBI and CIA on 11/4/99 in Weldon's
office at the suggestion of DOD Dep Sec John Hamre.*

LIWA's capabilities so impressed Hamre that he asked them to prepare a data fusion of information relative to the Chinese access of our most sensitive military technology. The result of that data dump and analysis created a firestorm as prominent names surfaced in the unvetted data regarding US technology funneled to China.

Hamre told the agencies that DOD would fully fund the NOAH and that I would work for full support on the Hill, but the agencies said, "Thanks, Mr. Chairman, but we don't need this capability. We're pursuing an initiative called CI 21, so we have things under control."

For the next two years, as chairman of the Military Research and Development Oversight Committee which had been funding the LIWA, I gave dozens of speeches calling for the creation of a national fusion center. I even had plans developed to create a "smart" hearing room in the Capitol where members of Congress could have classified access to the work of the fusion center. I gave speeches to various intelligence forums and symposiums, including those the CIA and NSA organized and supported. I gave floor speeches and organized hearings calling for creation of the NOAH and placed language in the National Defense Authorization legislation calling for creation of the NOAH.

The Gilmore Commission and Ray Downey also called for inter-agency sharing of threat data, but no governmental agency acted on the recommendations. As chair-

man of the Fire Caucus and the voice of America's firefighters, after my initial shock, I felt outrage on 9/11 because we could have prevented it. We knew what to do and how to do it, but the bureaucracy did not respond.

Just as it was after the 1993 attack, my staff took the call from the office of the New York State Fire Marshal asking me whether I would come to Ground Zero as soon as possible. Just as it was in 1993, the FDNY wanted me to witness first-hand the response operations, and the real needs, of the New York City first responders as they handled the unthinkable.

I took the first Amtrak train into Penn Station once service resumed after the attack. The train was empty except for DC agents headed to NYC and support staff from neighboring states. In a call while on the train, I first learned that Ray Downey was missing. Like a sword in my side. I now realized that the most effective operations leader, who had aggressively screamed out to America to listen and help, was now himself missing in action. You see, on September 11, Chief Ray Downey was chief of all FDNY rescue personnel. He was at the base of the World Trade Center towers barking orders to his heroes who were desperately fighting to save people they had never met. On that day, 343 of those heroes, including my friend Chief Ray Downey, died valiantly as they fought to save lives. I was devastated and heartbroken.

NY State Fire Marshals picked me up and escorted me to a school, perhaps 20 blocks from Ground Zero. From that school, we walked as I had never walked in my life.

We walked through debris, past abandoned vehicles, alongside still-weeping business owners, and we walked past thousands of volunteer firefighters who had made the trek to NYC to see what they could do to help.

The fire service is a noble tradition, a fraternal organization of like-minded men and women who each have the same mindset. No matter what the cause or danger, members of the fire service feel driven to action, putting aside personal fears and concerns.

As we neared Ground Zero and the control tent of the FDNY, sirens blared in the background as if automatically accepted as part of the landscape. Mountains of paper, desks, office supplies, and debris covered multi-story piles of twisted steel girders and beams from the WTC towers while firefighters frantically searched for victims, including their own fallen comrades and leader.

Inside, I was sick. Sick because I knew this was avoidable and preventable if only we had listened to Ray and others—and responded.

I was sick because I knew Ray's two sons were following in their dad's footsteps as members of the FDNY. Quite often, firefighting and first response is a family thing, almost a calling you automatically respond to as a child growing up in a fire service family.

My work at Ground Zero was to observe and respond to any request for federal assistance. If only every American could see the urgency and commitment in

the eyes and actions of every first responder on the scene, they would sense the need for America to support these brave heroes. And Ray was the bravest of the brave!

Returning to my home and then DC, I was even more determined to fight for the priorities Ray so eloquently articulated. I told my staff we must honor Ray as the national hero he was and that we must honor our young men and women who now went to fight the attackers.

One month after 9/11 in the brisk winds of October, we organized the tribute for Ray as the symbol of all America's heroes (domestic and international). I reached out to every emergency response organization in our region, every fire department, police department, military unit, schools, community groups, every organization that represented our people locally and nationwide. Starting from two large shopping malls on opposite sides of our county, we marched in solidarity, we marched in determination, and we marched in honor of our heroes to our county park. The estimated crowd size that day was that 40,000 people were in the lines of march and along our parade routes with over 100,000 watching.

I secured a luxury bus to pick up Ray Downey's family from their home on Long Island, Ray's dedicated wife Rosalie, Ray's five children and their spouses and grandchildren, including Ray's two FDNY sons Chuck and Joe, who eventually rose through the FDNY ranks in their father's footsteps. It's so sad that it took Ray's tragic death for America to listen - and respond.



On that brisk October day, we honored Ray Downey as America's hero. Ray was, and is, a role model for our nation, and, as a proud veteran and firefighter/fire chief, Ray symbolized everything that is right with America. Ray was the real 9/11 Hero!



Chief Ray Downey Husband, Father, Grandfather, US Marine, FDNY The Real 9/11 Hero

13

“We Were Meant to Be Here”

During my 20-year tenure in the Congress, I responded to hundreds of fires and disasters across the United States. I traveled with USA Fire Administrator Clyde Bragdon and California State Fire Marshal Jim McMullen to Loma Prieta one day after the earthquake devastated the San Francisco Bay area; took a planeload of generators and pallets of bottled water and arranged to have mobile homes towed into Metro Dade County and Homestead after Hurricane Andrew accompanied by Congressman Rob Andrews with Fire Chief Dave Paulison as our host.

I stayed with Congressman Elton Gallegly as we met with California leaders during the wildland fires in Simi Valley and other parts of Southern California; joined Congressman Denny Rehberg and the National Guard in Montana and flew into the Rocky Mountains during massive forest fires in Yellowstone; drove with Congressman Robert Aderholt, his wife, and baby as we visited local rural fire companies across Alabama; and interacted with thousands of firefighters and first responders (both paid and volunteer, forest and marine, rural and city) to observe, learn, and take that first-hand

information back to Washington to my colleagues and to the administration.



Congressman Bartlett (MD), Ortiz (TX), Engel (NY), Upton (MI), Reyes (TX) and Weldon delivered a plane load of relief supplies for first responders and residents of Banda Aceh one week after the impact of a Tsunami devastated the entire coastline of Indonesia.

But we also took a bipartisan congressional delegation (along with a planeload of relief supplies) to Banda Aceh immediately after the Indonesian tsunami; joined Amato Berardi and members of the Italian Parliament in L'Aquila after devastating earthquakes leveled towns, cities, churches, and homes; flew into Haiti after massive storms and flooding devastated the country; and flew into Somalia with Chairman Jack Murtha to use our influence to open up supply lines for food destined for starving children and families. We made ourselves available to first responders in any country as they fought to save lives and property.

Firefighters and first responders not only fight fires, they rescue people trapped in the most dangerous situations, respond to earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hazmat incidents, cyclones, and tsunamis, but they also respond to shootings, acts of terrorism, and man-made disasters. Whenever people are at risk of injury or death, firefighters and first responders are ready to risk their lives to save others.

Since I was at one time a teacher, I was horrified when news outlets around the world broadcast the dreadful images of a terrorist attack on a public school located in Beslan, Russia, which was under siege for days and, eventually, burned by the terrorists.

As reports surfaced that hundreds of children ages five to 15 were brutally slaughtered while meeting teachers in the school playground on the opening day of school in September 2004 and reports emerged of local firefighters and first responders risking their lives to rescue children, I immediately called the State Department.

“We need to get our ambassador in Moscow or any other US official to fly to Beslan and show the people of Russia that we care about their tragedy and that the American people care about the slaughtered children. Remember that President Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to call George Bush after 9/11 to extend condolences and offer unlimited assistance to the US, including use of former Soviet military bases in our

fight against the terrorists who committed the 9/11 attacks,” I said to the State Department official.

“Thanks for your call, Congressman, we’ll get back to you,” was the answer. Later that day, the State Department officials told my staff no one from the US would fly to Beslan although the US had offered condolences to Russia and the Russian people.

“Ridiculous,” I said to my staff. “Almost 400 children and family members slaughtered in the largest massacre in recent world history in a country where thousands of ordinary Russian families and children personally placed flowers, notes, and expressions of sympathy and prayers in the fencing surrounding our embassy in Moscow immediately after 9/11, and we do nothing,” I said.

Members of Congress who witnessed the outpouring of sympathy for our 9/11 victims felt deeply moved by the sight when we visited our embassy just a few, short days after 9/11. “I’m going to the Russian Embassy” I told my staff. “I want to personally extend my sympathies to Russian Ambassador Ushakov and sign the book of condolences at the Russian embassy,” I said.

Ambassador Ushakov met me upon my arrival at the Russian embassy and thanked me profusely for my condolences as I signed the book in memory of the children and families of Beslan.

And then I said, “Ambassador, I want to lead a US Congressional delegation to Beslan to extend the condolences of the Congress and the American people directly to the families of Beslan and Russia. I’m preparing a Congressional Resolution that will be voted in the Congress to frame and carry to Beslan along with an American flag that will be flown over the US Capitol in honor of the children and families and in honor of the first responders who braved the gunfire and explosions to rescue children and fight the fire that devastated the school,” I said.

“Thank you so much, Congressman, for your sympathies, your thoughts, and your offer to go to Beslan, but I’m afraid that such a trip is impossible. No one is allowed in Beslan, not even our own elected leaders in Moscow,” Ambassador Ushakov said to me.

Firefighters and first responders are known to make split-second decisions that in the end are usually correct and right on the mark. And so, as I recalled what our State Department and Russian Ambassador Ushakov had said to me, my instincts took over. “I must organize a delegation, and I must go to Beslan, no doubt about it,” I said to myself as I thanked Ushakov and left the embassy.

On the return ride to my Rayburn Building office, I told my staff to order a flag to be flown over the US Capitol in sympathy for the Russian families and chil-

dren, and I made calls to members who could join me on such a short notice, assuming I could get a plane and get into Beslan.

But firefighters let nothing stand in their way once they make a decision, and I wasn't going to be denied, either. We would draft and pass the legislation, we would fly the American flag, we would find a way to get to Beslan, and we would personally extend the condolences of the American people the same way the Russian people had extended condolences to our people after 9/11. And we would meet with local first responders in Beslan and thank them for their unselfish service.

Now, traveling to Russia is difficult and time-consuming; traveling to Beslan is next to impossible, but I was not going to be deterred. Votes, committee hearings, meetings, constituent events, and family concerns were all roadblocks to our success, but we would succeed. Within one hour of making calls to my House colleagues, I received two acceptances, Mark Souder of Indiana and Trent Franks of Arizona; both said, "Yes, I'll go Curt." My staff began preparations; now, I had to get a plane.

Because I founded and was co-chair of the bipartisan Duma/Congress relationship, I had traveled to Russia many times since I was first nominated in 1985 by the US State Department to a program for American young political leaders to meet, and debate, young Russian Komsomol leaders. In my travels, I met the young pres-

ident of the International Chess Federation Kirsan Ilumjinov, who also happened to be the elected president of Kalmykia, a small Russian Buddhist republic, located along the Volga River. Kalmykia is the neighboring republic to North Ossetia. If anyone could get us into Beslan, it was Ilumjinov.

“See if you can reach Kirsan Ilumjinov,” I told my staff when I returned to my office. Dr. Togrul Bagirov, who was a friend and CEO of the Moscow International Petroleum Club, first introduced me to Kirsan, so I suggested that we call Togrul.

Sure enough, we got Togrul on the phone, and he agreed to make the connection for me and push to assist my efforts to travel to Beslan. “Give me 24 hours,” Togrul said.

Togrul had been the key person facilitating our Duma/Congress relationship. No one did more to foster a new era of bi-lateral cooperation focused on energy than Bagirov.

And so, once again, we began the planning process. The staff drafted the Resolution of Condolences and Solidarity with the families and children of the Beslan attack, and we ordered a US flag to fly over the US Capitol as a symbol of citizen and first-responder solidarity with the people of Beslan, North Ossetia, and Russia. Once the resolution passed in the House (by a unanimous vote), the staff framed the resolution and packaged the flag in a special case.

Togrul called and told my staff we needed to fly to Moscow ASAP where President Ilumjinov and his private plane would meet us. Because we didn't want objections, we notified neither the US nor the Russian governments. However, we did ask Ilumjinov to notify the leadership of North Ossetia that we were flying in for a brief visit.

My delegation from the US consisted of three members of Congress as well as my staff director Doug Roach. Doug was the best staff person any member could have. He had a career as an Air Force pilot and flew with the famed Thunderbirds team. Never married, Doug devoted his entire life to our nation and, as my staff director, flew with me to Russia many times, North Korea twice, Libya three times, and numerous other difficult locations. He was with me on every difficult trip I undertook.

My staff blocked out my schedule, and we arranged to meet Kirsan's plane in Moscow. My four-member delegation flew by commercial airplane to Moscow. Once in Moscow, Togrul met us with his son Adil, who had served as an intern in my office. Now married with twins, he became a US citizen and is serving as an elected school board member in Ohio. Togrul and Kirsan explained to me that we would first fly to Elista (capital of Kalmykia) and stay overnight and then fly to Beslan early the next morning.

As we left Moscow, our small private plane flew directly to Elista and arrived at 3 a.m. Because we were the first ever US Congressional delegation to visit Kalmykia, arriving in Elista was like arriving at a New Year's Eve celebration. Hundreds of well-wishers, children, and young women dressed in traditional Kalmyk dresses anxiously awaited our arrival to give us bread and salt. Elista town leaders embraced us and music filled the air as "the Americans" had arrived in their proud republic.

Because of Kalmykia's Buddhist heritage, the country is surprisingly well known among certain leaders worldwide. Kirsan told us the Dalai Lama visits Kalmykia on a regular basis, and actor Chuck Norris owned a home in Kalmykia and visited often. Because of his obsession with the game of chess, Kirsan constructed a "chess city" in the heart of Elista.

Our delegation stayed overnight in a nice chess city condo, and early the next morning, we took a quick tour of Chess Palace located in the center of chess city. Because of Ilumjinov's love of chess and his long-term leadership as president of the World Chess Federation, Kalmykia produces more chess masters than any other similar area worldwide. As president, Kirsan mandated that every child, in every grade, must play chess every day.

With only a few hours of sleep and a quick tour of the Chess Palace, we were ready to board the plane

for Beslan. With only a few hours' flight time, we discussed our hopes and plans for the visit while flying. Kirsan and Togrul informed us the local leadership in Beslan awaited us, excited we were coming.

As our plane descended into Beslan air space, the simple beauty of the fields and pastures struck us. Small towns and villages dominated the landscape since the population of Beslan is only about 35,000. As our plane landed and taxied to the small reception area, we saw a small group of people waiting for us.

One week after the attack of September 1, we had landed in Beslan. The official "host" and "greeter" for our delegation was Alexandr Dzasokhov, president of North Ossetia, who would later become the senator for North Ossetia in Moscow. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he welcomed us with open arms and huge embraces as if we had known each other for decades.

"We're so happy you're here, that you took the time to come from America to share our grief, hear our story, and honor our children and families and first responders," the president said. "We're a poor city in a poor republic, we're peace-loving, and we've never sought to harm anyone. We're in shock," he continued.

"I attended that school as a child, and my children were in the school on the day of the attack," the leader spoke through sobs as tears flowed. "My children survived although one was injured, but many of my friends and their children are gone forever," he said.

As we drove in a small, old bus from the airport to the school, President Dzasokhov told us about Opening Day on September 1 as children assembled on the playground, meeting old friends and new teachers, just like a typical first day at a US school. "Happiness and joy filled the air in our proud school until a large package truck pulled up to the playground," the president said.

"Dozens of men armed with weapons jumped out of the back of the truck, some with covers over their heads, all shouting to get into the school," the president said.

"As the small children began crying and screaming because of the confusion, the terrorists shouted louder and began to pick up children by their collars and pants and actually threw them into the doors and windows of the school," he continued.

The gunmen ordered parents who were with their children to get into the gymnasium and sit on the floor. Of the 1600 students enrolled in the school, approximately 600 ended up inside the school crammed in the small gym sitting and crying hysterically.

Once they secured the doors and windows from within, the terrorists randomly ordered male parents to stand and executed them one at a time in front of the children. They tossed the bodies outside for horrified witnesses to see.

They forced children as young as five to sit on the floor of the gymnasium for hours (no food/no bathrooms)

as the terrorists began communicating with officials outside. First responders bravely surrounded the building trying to gain entry but preparing for the worst. Wounded parents and children who escaped received quick treatment, and first responders took them to the local infirmary/hospital.

For 24 hours, the siege continued as tension filled the air. Police had cordoned off the entire school grounds as they began to understand the demands of the terrorists. On the second day, police and firefighters could no longer hold back the frantic parents whose children were inside the school, especially after gunshots rang out from inside the building.

Like a civilian militia, hundreds of parents and friends (with few or no firearms) swarmed the school. All hell broke loose inside and outside of the three-story brick school building, like many school buildings in America, as an all-out firefight commenced.

Screams, shouts, gunfire, and explosions rocked the school as the enraged parents and local first responders sought the terrorists while other firefighters and first responders escorted hundreds of children to safety.

Unfortunately, when the firefight stopped and the screams ended, explosions, fire and smoke having ravaged the school, first responders frantically searched for the children, almost all of whom they found lying on the floor of the gymnasium (some with their parent's bodies huddled over them). The gunmen slaughtered

more than 390 children, teachers, parents, and grandparents that day for their political ends.

As our bus arrived at what remained of the school, we felt overcome with emotion. Having taught in similar buildings in the US, I felt the emotion even more deeply. Surviving parents, grandparents, and friends wandered around the schoolgrounds, and a huge four-foot-high pile of flowers, teddy bears, bottles of water, dolls, and personal mementoes was at the center of the gymnasium with roof and interior fixtures scorched and burned. Bottles of water were in the gym because the terrorists wouldn't give water to the children for two days of captivity. Charred basketball hoops were visible at each end of the gym.



Weldon, Souder (IN), and Franks (AZ) place flowers on three-foot mound of teddy bears, dolls, flowers and tributes left in the Beslan school gymnasium after 390 were slaughtered by terrorists on the opening day of school in 2004. Most of those slaughtered were children ages 6-14 who were forced to sit on the floor of the gymnasium without food or water for two days.

My job, as leader of the delegation, was to speak to the families and leaders of Beslan who had assembled near the gymnasium. By far, this would be the most difficult speech of my career, of my life. We prayed with the Russians that day, we mourned their losses as fathers and grandfathers, and we extended the condolences of the American people whom we represented.

The framed Congressional citation and US flag seemed inconsequential, but the leaders and people filled with emotion as we told them that America was crying with them for their losses, just as they cried for us after 9/11. I related my story as not only a member of the Congress, but as a public school teacher and as a father of five and grandfather. Words couldn't express our grief as the Russians hugged us, embraced us, and thanked us in Russian and in broken English for coming to their city and their school to express our condolences and the condolences of the American people.

The only media allowed in the city and near the school were local Russian reporters and TV stations. No international media was allowed in Beslan, and so, we did no interviews. But the Russian media watched, they followed, they took notes, and they interviewed the families.

As one of my original priorities, I asked to meet with firefighters and first responders who were on the scene since day 1 and who had fought the terrorists and the fires and rescued and treated hundreds of children who had survived. Once again, even though we were 7,000



Standing in the burned out Beslan school surrounded by local first responders and families, Weldon, Souder and Franks present a US flag and framed citation of sympathy from the US Congress and people of America to the families of Beslan and Russia on the tragic loss of their children and loved ones.

miles from home in a nation that had been our enemy for more than 70 years and whose people largely did not speak our language, we fully understood each other. Firefighters and first responders in Beslan were no different from firefighters in Moscow, Idaho, or Miami-Dade, Florida. We shook hands, we embraced, and we thanked the local heroes for their work.

I asked to visit the local infirmary/hospital where many of the children had gone for treatment. The most serious were airlifted to large cities throughout Russia, especially those who were shot or burned. Hospital personnel led us into a building where we could hear children whimpering and crying. We met the local doctors, nurses, and paramedics who were just as dedicated

as those in hospitals throughout the US. The doctors spoke some English so they filled us in on the terror, the trauma, and the treatment they provided under the most difficult circumstances.

They told us that they had successes, and failures, but they valiantly performed their jobs. As we looked around and toured the building, we noticed the lack of modern equipment, surgical supplies, and medical materials we take for granted in the US.

Without any discussion, we each reached into our pockets and gave the doctors every dime we had brought with us for use in their hospital. Tears welled in their eyes as they hugged us, embraced us, and asked us to tell the Americans they were thankful for our friendship.

It was time to leave. We took one last walk through the school, one last prayer inside the gym, and one last look at anyone's worst nightmare. As the Russian reporters and cameras followed us, I asked my colleagues as we boarded the bus, "Do you remember the cemetery we passed on the way here to the school? That cemetery had hundreds of graves covered with fresh flowers; that's where they buried the children. We must stop there on the way back to our plane and say a prayer over one of the graves," I said.

"The Russian media is following us; the people of Russia who are not here but watching their TV sets need to see American leaders praying for their children in this, their darkest hour," I said.

As our bus slowly drove along the road to the airport, we approached the cemetery, and I asked the driver to stop. I led the delegation out of the bus and into the cemetery filled with hundreds of freshly covered graves. Because Congressman Trent Franks had served as a local church official, I asked him to say a prayer after I randomly stopped at a grave amidst this mass of gravesites. We surrounded the gravesite and bowed our heads as the Russian TV cameras rolled.

As Trent started to pray out loud, I had one eye open, and I looked down at the grave. What caught my attention for a moment were the red, white, and blue flowers. But then I remembered that the colors of Russia are the same as the United States.

Then, it happened. My eyes caught a glimpse of the ribbon attached to the flowers on the grave. Because I read Cyrillic, my heart started to pound as I read the last three letters on the ribbon, tse/schwa/a. Those three Cyrillic letters spelled out USA. How could that be? On a random gravesite in the middle of hundreds of other graves in a cemetery along a dirt road in a city of 35,000 people in North Ossetia, 5,600 miles from Washington, DC, one week after a devastating terrorist attack that caused Russia to shut down the entire region were flowers from the USA.

My heart was pounding, but I let Trent finish the prayer. Then, I quietly motioned to my colleagues to kneel as I unfurled the rest of the ribbon attached to

the flowers. I read the Cyrillic, and I said to my colleagues, "You won't believe this, but the community of Columbine, Colorado, sent these flowers somehow, someway to the people of Beslan."



Standing over a random grave in a simple Beslan Cemetery 7,000 miles from America one week after the horrific attack on young school children that killed almost 400, our delegation stopped to pray. To this day unexplained, the gravesite was covered with red, white and blue flowers sent from the "Families and Community of Columbine, Colorado, USA to the Families and Community of Beslan, Russia.

At that moment, we knew we were meant to be at that place at that time to witness the people of America who

had suffered a similar nightmare at Columbine High School five years earlier sharing their love with the people of Russia in Beslan. As we walked slowly back to our bus, I said to my colleagues, “we were meant to be here.”

14

Ultimate Political Arson— The “Big One” Takes Me Down!

An arsonist is one of the most despicable people alive. Deliberately setting a fire for revenge, profit, personal gain, or to end a life is never acceptable. The worst nightmare for a firefighter is arson, and the worst villain is the arsonist. The arsonist is a vile, cowardly individual who intends to cause harm while remaining anonymous. Arson fires are also extremely difficult to prove and are the ultimate challenge for firefighters.

Firefighters never back down from a challenge when someone's safety is at risk or when they know they're right. All my life (and career), I fought battle after battle as a public official, firefighter, fire chief, Pennsylvania state fire instructor, teacher, mayor, county commissioner/chairman, member of Congress and vice chairman of both the House Armed Services Committee and the House Homeland Security Committee.

My personal battles in life - motivating underachieving kids in impoverished areas to achieve positive self-images and personal success, leading the fight against the Pagan motorcycle gang as mayor of Marcus Hook,

changing the negative perception of Marcus Hook among the residents as well as those who continually put the town down. I also served as a deputy fire chief on the largest disaster in the nation in 1975, as mayor and fire chief handling the overfilling of a massive Sunoco underground storage cavern pushing volatile liquefied gas into the basements of residents' homes that destroyed five homes by fire and forced me to evacuate sixty families from their homes. Taking on the political leadership in my home county, I helped to gain recognition and respect for my hometown and 10 other smaller communities that suffered neglect for years and I led the consolidation of countywide economic development programs into a partnership to increase job growth in our county. I served as one of five incorporators of the county-wide community action agency anti-poverty program serving the needs of the poor and disadvantaged in our county, which is now one of the most successful anti-poverty agencies in the United States.

Nationally, my battles included successfully fighting the leaders of Boeing Corporation when it announced the closing of its Delaware County plant and the loss of 5,000 jobs; battling the US Secretary of Defense and bipartisan leaders of both Houses of Congress to reverse Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney's cancellation of the Marines Corps V-22 Tiltrotor Osprey aircraft top priority; and conceiving, organizing, and leading the national political empowerment of America's 1.2

million firefighters and first responders. I authored and sponsored the national legislation to mandate a national missile defense system, which required the abrogation of the ABM treaty passed by a veto-proof House majority; drafted and created a bilateral strategic plan for US/Russia relations, personally endorsed by one-third of the US Congress (including Mike Pence and Bernie Sanders), as well as the Russian DUMA and Academy of Sciences. I also organized and led an 11-member bipartisan Congressional delegation to Vienna to collaborate with six Russian legislative leaders to create the framework to end the Balkan War, led the creation of seven bilateral legislative exchanges between the US Congress and the Russian Duma, Ukraine Rada, Azerbaijan Majlis, Uzbekistan Majlis, Moldovan Parliament, Kuwait Parliament, and Israeli Knesset security caucus.

From small battles that affected communities and small numbers of people to large battles that changed international relations and stability, I and my colleagues fought for positive change. As in life, we won many battles, and we lost many battles, but this firefighter never backed away from the fight when I knew it was for a good cause.

That is, until the early morning of Monday, October 16, 2006, just three weeks before my last election. As I campaigned in Swarthmore Borough at a 9 a.m. event, my beeper and cell phone started buzzing with the news that my eldest daughter Karen's home and attorney John Gallagher's Philadelphia law office had been raided by

FBI agents largely based in Washington, DC. The raids were conducted after someone had tipped off TV crews and reporters, who were stationed at the front door of my daughter's home at 7 am as agents carried boxes out to awaiting vans and trucks.

Helicopters flew overhead and dogs sniffed materials to create the impression of some massive criminal operation at Karen's home and Gallagher's office.

The unannounced raids had been preceded by a national story carried by McClatchy News the previous Friday that screamed headlines that "Congressman in tight race for reelection comes under federal investigation."

As a fighter to my core, I had never experienced such an emptiness in my stomach, an inability to explain what was happening and a genuine concern for my eldest daughter that transcended my senior position in the Congress and my campaign for reelection, which would have paved the way for me to become the chair of the House Armed Services Committee.

I immediately cancelled appearances already scheduled for the day as reporters, cameras, helicopters, media vans and media operatives local and national descended on my offices and my home. With just three weeks until my election the national news networks focused on the Weldon raid, the Weldon scandal. Questions about my integrity and honesty erupted like an earthquake.

Supporters of my opponent lined up within an hour after the raid with pre-made posters at my office and my home, declaring me to be a crook and criminal. Without a trial, the news convicted me daily for the next two weeks leading up to the election. Fearing that my daughter might be accused of having done something wrong, I canceled all campaign TV commercials to save funds in case she needed to be defended.

New TV ads, newspaper articles, and mailings from my opponent screamed that Weldon was a part of the corruption in the Congress and must be defeated. There was no place to go, no place to hide, no explanation for what happened – or for the relentless attacks on my family and my children.

Every step, every day as the election approached, reporters stuck microphones in my face asking me for comments and cameras followed me everywhere. All I could say was “it is what it is” and “I have done nothing wrong.” No battle in life could prepare someone for the pain and agony of relentless attacks on your character but even worse - relentless attacks on your family.

Election day couldn't come fast enough for I knew I could not win this battle. I could work with dysfunctional families on behalf of their kids. I could organize and lead the effort to stop the closing of the local Boeing plant and save 5,000 jobs. I could garner a veto-proof bipartisan vote in the Congress on my missile defense bill despite fierce opposition by President Bill Clinton

and his administration. My bill became law and mandated the national missile defense system that today defends our nation.

I could lead the fight to defeat Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney's attempt to slash its budget and restore full funding for the Marine Corps V-22 aircraft program. I could assemble and lead an 11-member bipartisan Congressional delegation to Vienna to lay the foundation to end the Balkan War.

I could confront and interact with Kim Jung Il (North Korea), Paek Nam-sun (North Korea), Zoran Dindic (Serbia), Moammar Qadaffi (Libya), Boris Yeltsin (Russian Federation), Vladimir Putin (Russia), Li Peng (China), Hu Jintao (China), Saddam Hussein (Iraq), King Fahd (Saudi Arabia), Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (Kuwait), and King Zahir Shah (Afghanistan in exile) and other world leaders. I could deliver speeches to the Moldovan Parliament, the Azerbaijan Majlis, the Ukraine Rada, the Russian Duma, the Libyan Jamahiriya, Fudan University (China), Moscow University, MGMO Diplomatic Academy, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Hungary) and the Russian Academy of Sciences on the occasion of my nomination to the academy.

I could not, however, fight the anonymous governmental bureaucratic 'arsonists' that deliberately violated the constitutionally mandated Separation of Powers to undermine my 11th re-election and ascension to

Chair the House Armed Services Committee.

My firefighter instincts kept telling me to fight on as hundreds of firefighters from across the country came to my district to spend the last days before the election walking the streets of my district, speaking to my constituents and talking about their personal friendships with me. Galveston Fire Chief Willie Wisko flew in from Texas, Harry Carter drove down from northern New Jersey, Delaware fire leader Steve Austin drove up from his home and firefighters from across Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, and across America flew, drove, and took the train to help their brother Curt in his time of need.

At the time, it felt like a blur, a mistake, a bad dream, a nightmare—30 years of dedicated public service and now this? No explanation, no advance notice, no consideration for my family. Like a soldier on the field of battle, no matter how demoralized, I kept going, speaking at events, and tried to explain the unexplainable. Loyal supporters and friends remained strong and continued to make my case for reelection until the final day. But the political arsonists had scorched the earth and my reputation was destroyed. Despite previous landslide victories with 60, 65, and 70 percent margins, the election had been poisoned.

Election Day 2006, I spent much of my time in my hometown of Marcus Hook visiting old friends and stopping at polling places in the borough hall where

I had served as mayor, the fire house where I spent countless hours, and the community building just two doors from my family's home as I pondered the fight that was now being lost.

As expected, on election night, the extended families of my wife (the Gallagher's – no relation to John Gallagher) and the Weldon's all gathered to count the returns. Over the past thirty years, we had done this routine two dozen times during my races for County Council, national delegate to the Republican National Convention and for Congress. But this night, we knew the end would be sad.

I could sense the loss as the early returns started coming in. Towns I had easily won in previous elections were now reporting neck-and-neck results and even losses for me. Within an hour after receiving early results, I called my opponent and conceded the election.

I remember holding my eldest granddaughter Reagan (who was two at the time) and proclaiming to my supporters and national TV networks and reporters that "my public career had been a good run" and that I wished my opponent well.

As I held Reagan, I asked her to tell the assembled crowd and the national media what she affectionately called her papa. "Kuku," she exclaimed, breaking the sadness and emotions that were so thick throughout the room. "Kuku" was the sound Reagan heard every 30 minutes from the bird in the Kuku clock in our dining room.

The battle had been waged, the arsonists had succeeded - and I had been defeated. There was nothing I could do to reverse the decision of the voters. My public career was over. The smear was successful.

Looking back on my last term, I realized I had created many enemies inside the beltway. In September 2006, the prestigious *National Journal* had published a front-page story calling me “The Troublemaker” for my investigations of numerous and serious Clinton scandals, ignored pre-9/11 intelligence, US/Russia bilateral stupidity, and the whereabouts of Bin Laden.

Fighting the DC “deep state” bureaucracy, especially intelligence operatives, had created anonymous enemies eager to remove me from office. In my book *Countdown to Terror* published in 2005 (actually dedicated to “unsung heroes in the intelligence community”) I had publicly criticized CIA leadership regarding the lack of a coherent policy to deal with Iran, presented evidence of Iran’s secret plan to undermine and control local civic groups throughout Iraq and the Middle East, and, for the first time ever, publicly revealed details about my unsuccessful efforts in 1999 to establish and fund a national data mining center that I named the NOAH Fusion Center (National Operations and Analysis Hub - Policymaker and Warfighter’s Tool to Deal with Emerging Transnational Terrorist Threats) – through which the Intel agencies could collaborate with the Pentagon in sharing “raw intelligence data”.

Both the FBI and CIA, along with Dep Sec John Hamre met in my office on November 4, 1999 to be briefed on my proposal for the NOAH. Each agency respectfully declined and told me, “Thanks, Mr. Chairman, but we don’t need a NOAH.”

My book also raised the issue of pre-9/11 intelligence that our agencies and bureaucracy largely ignored. During its investigations, the 9/11 Commission refused to interview anyone associated with “Able Danger”, a top-secret program created in 1999 by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton to collect actionable intelligence against Al Qaeda worldwide yet there is *no mention* of the Able Danger program anywhere in the 9/11 Commission Report.

Military intelligence officers from the Army and Navy revealed to me and others that Able Danger had identified Mohammad Atta and the leading 9/11 masterminds in the US two years before the attack but had been prohibited from transferring that information to the Justice Department, and were now instructed to remain silent.

Having failed to convince the State Department, Intelligence Agencies or Congress to act on what I and others knew. I published ‘Countdown to Terror’ to share what I knew with the American people. The book does not contain hair brained conspiracy theories. The information in it was vetted by former CIA intelligence analysts; checked and double-checked.

Former CIA Director Jim Woolsey and Jack Caravelli, Al Gore's National Security Advisor both endorsed the book.

On September 11, 2001, 343 firefighters and 3,000 innocent people lost their lives. My friend, FDNY Deputy Chief Ray Downey, who since the 1993 World Trade Center attack had been warning the government about specific steps it needed to take to prepare for the next attack, provide interoperable communication capabilities and to mine and fuse raw data collected by the myriad of federal intelligence programs to provide enhanced terrorist assessments. All those families and all Americans deserve to know exactly what we knew and when and why no one acted prior to 9/11.

After I published my book and revealed the Able Danger story in 2005, former FBI Director Louie Freeh opined in the *Wall Street Journal* that we might have been able to prevent the 9/11 attack if we had allowed the transfer of Able Danger information to the Justice Department.

In the national best seller *Horse Soldiers*, Army Special Operations General Geoffrey Lambert admitted that "within seconds [after 9/11] I knew who had done the attack." Contrary to the still-professed DOD narrative, Lambert went on to relate that he knew it was an Egyptian by the name of Mohammad Atta, about whom he had been briefed by a top-secret Army Intelligence Program (Able Danger) identified several years earlier.

In the book, Lambert acknowledged that his involvement in the decision to block the transfer of the military-collected intelligence to the Justice Department was one of the worst decisions of his career. No mention of these facts is in the 9/11 Commission Report.

There is, of course, much more to this story, but I will need to share that elsewhere.

The job of an elected member of Congress, as mandated by our Constitution, is to provide oversight of our executive branch agencies. I took that responsibility seriously from day one of my tenure in the House. A year after I left office, still baffled by the anonymous leaks that fueled attacks on my children and myself, a former Presidential Chief of Staff, whom I highly respect, confided to me that I had broken the Beltway rule. “You’re either on the Republican track or on the Democrat track in this city. But, Congressman, you went down the middle and took on both political parties. In this city, that’s the kiss of death.”

“When I took the oath of office in 1987,” I responded, “it was not an oath of allegiance to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. My oath of allegiance was to the Constitution of the United States and the people who elected me.”

As a firefighter, I feverishly pursued the details of the 9/11 nightmare until I felt comfortable we knew enough of the facts and details regarding what we “could have done” and “should have done” to go public.

Amazingly, the most significant recommendation of the 9/11 Commission was the call for a National Intelligence Data Fusion Center, exactly what I had proposed in 1999 in the creation of the NOAH and what the Gilmore Commission Reports had also suggested. Ray Downey was a valued member of the Gilmore Commission and knew that the fusion of raw intelligence data was critical if we were to prevent another World Trade Center attack like the bombing in 1993.

And so, it's now fully transparent – crystal clear. The only way to stop Weldon from ascending to the Chair of the House Armed Services Committee - was to defeat me.

In Congress, the chairs of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have unlimited subpoena power regarding any investigation involving national security.

And everyone knew that, as chairman, I would have convened formal hearings on pre-9/11 intelligence, Able Danger and the whereabouts of Bin laden. And that we would have issued the subpoenas necessary to get the truth to the Congress and the American people.

Hindsight is always 20/20, and we now know some interesting facts about the pre-election raids of my daughter's home and Gallagher's law office:

- No one ever questioned me or my daughter Karen in any way.
- When the FBI raided John Gallagher's Law Office, he was working on highly sensitive initiatives for the

US government. (In a public setting, I cannot go into more detail.)

- Just one among many indications of the “political” agenda of the DC operatives who “used” FBI professionals to conduct the raids was indicated by the absolute dumbest (and yet most revealing) comment made to John Gallagher by one of the DC based FBI agents when he entered Gallagher’s office. The same comment had been made previously by State Department staff in our Moscow embassy to my staff dozens of times – “You’re related to Congressman Weldon, right”.
- My wife Mary Gallagher is NO relation to John Gallagher. Imagine agents from the absolute premier investigative agency in the world making such a baseless and stupid allegation because of information that had obviously been given to them by the DC arsonists out to bring me down!
- We found an e-mail sent to my campaign chairman in September 2006 (eight weeks prior to the election) from the National Congressional Committee advising us that my opponent had decreased his weekly Philadelphia TV purchase by \$463,000 for one week only during the eight weeks prior to election day. The week of the decreased advertising purchase happened to be the exact same week following the raids. Maybe just a coincidence – maybe not! Obviously, the raids generated huge national and regional negative “earned media” that entire week, appearing to indicate that someone knew exactly when the raids would occur six weeks prior to the raids.

– There's much more, but that's enough for this book.

The US Justice Department has had a longstanding policy that no raids or aggressive legal action should be initiated that might adversely affect any election.

When US Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald announced the indictment of Illinois governor and former Congressman Rod Blagojevich on December 9, 2008, he stated publicly that he could have indicted Blagojevich prior to the November election but held off until December because of the Justice Department policy of not taking any public action that might have an impact on an election.

Contrast that to the planted news stories and public raids conducted three weeks prior to my last election, which caused my defeat. There was no indictment, no arrest, and no questioning of my daughter or myself.

I don't blame FBI agents for what happened in 2006. FBI agents sacrifice themselves every day in protecting our nation and our people. Having worked with the FBI against organized crime, including the Pagans motorcycle gang and in the fight against terrorism and foreign espionage, I have nothing but the greatest respect for FBI agents and their professionalism. I remain outraged, however, by the anonymous political arsonists who ordered and carried out my 'takedown'.

In December 2015, I gave my personal and Congressional archives to my Alma Mater (West Chester Uni-

versity). Once processed, its more than 480 cases of files and original documents, letters, memos, charts, and graphs along with thousands of photographs and mementoes from my career will be openly available to researchers. In addition, since 2015, I have cooperated with West Chester University and oral historian Dr. Charles Hardy to produce close to 100 hours of oral history interviews in which I document my own career and that already includes close to 20 interviews with bipartisan members of Congress, former US government and DOD officials, former intel operatives, foreign leaders and others.

All firefighters and arson investigators doggedly pursue every effort to save lives, protect property, and uncover those who commit anonymous acts, including arson, that threaten our civilized society. In the course of our work we sometimes suffer setbacks that cause us to momentarily question our resolve.

My good friend and Fire Caucus Co-Chair Joe Biden, who spent two hours with my family last year at the funeral of our eldest son Curt, Jr, who was a high school classmate of Joe's daughter, has frequently said "the measure of a man is not how often he gets knocked down, but how quickly he gets up".

I accepted my fate because I love this country and what it stands for. Our nation's history is replete with patriots who gave far more than me. But NO ONE has the right to ruin the lives of children seeking to cause harm to

their father – not in America!

But a firefighter/first responder never retreats, never gives up, and never relents from the responsibilities that we accepted when we joined the fire service. This book and my heretofore untold story is evidence of my continuation and passion to unite and empower firefighters and first responders worldwide.

Our battle has just begun. Firefighters and First Responders in America, it's time to identify, unify and collaborate with our brothers and sisters in every nation – it's time to save the world!

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First Responders Save the World

Firefighters and first responders are the same world-wide. Dedicated, unselfish, community-minded with a strong inner drive to help people they've never met in the most professional and efficient manner possible. Whether volunteers in the small towns of rural America, part-paid firefighters in suburban areas near our large cities, full-time paid firefighters in New York, Chicago, Miami, or Los Angeles, all of whom I've met, they're the same. Industrial firefighters, maritime firefighters, forest and wildfire firefighters, or aviation firefighters, they're all the same.

While experiencing unparalleled success in political empowerment at the national level, firefighters in the US are facing new challenges in the 21st century. Paid firefighters in the large cities are experiencing cutbacks and staff shortages due to squeezed municipal budgets. Volunteers in some regions of the US are experiencing extreme difficulty in retaining and recruiting new members. In my home county and state mergers of local volunteer fire departments are occurring at an increasing frequency.

It's time for the US to activate another national strategic task force to analyze the fire service problems and challenges facing both paid and volunteer forces. This strategic task force should be driven from the fire service but empaneled and fully supported by the federal government, similar to the President's Commission on Fire Prevention and Control created under Richard Nixon. Instead of 'America Burning' a new report entitled 'America Surviving' should provide a detailed assessment of the American fire service as well as a comprehensive agenda of actions that need to be taken to stabilize fire and emergency services in paid departments as well as strategies that will create a new generation of volunteers in every state in the nation. Empaneled by both the President and the Congress following the bi-partisan lead of the Fire Caucus, this national task force should chart the milestone-based plan for the future.

Firefighters and first responders worldwide are experiencing the same challenges as those within the US. In Austria, as it is in Germany, there are 4,500 fire departments that are totally volunteer and six career departments in the largest cities; in Brazil, the fire services are militarized as part of the military police. In Botswana, municipal governments operate the fire brigades; in China, fire brigades are provincial agencies, and firefighters are part of the military police. In Canada, like America, large cities have paid departments while other municipalities have part-paid volun-

teers; in Costa Rica, 70 fire stations protect the entire country with paid and volunteer forces. Finland and Denmark have paid and volunteer firefighters; in France the Sapeurs-Pompiers include 190,000 volunteers with paid military firefighters in the large cities. Japan has almost 900 fire departments and 3,600 volunteer fire corps with almost 1 million volunteers; Portugal has volunteer fire departments in every town. The UK has paid fire brigades but also has fire stations manned by part-paid firefighters.

No exact total is available for firefighters and first responders worldwide, although a study and analysis is underway to determine this number on a country-by-country basis. Initial estimates have determined that at least 20 million firefighters and first responders operate worldwide. Imagine the impact if all these local heroes united in their mission and cause and if they were to develop a unified lifesaving agenda.

Worldwide, firefighters and first responders stand ready as volunteers and career professionals to respond to any call, any emergency, at any time. Collectively, these brave men and women protect the people of the world while often receiving minimal support for their life-saving actions. Yet, in every nation, polls consistently show that firefighters and first responders are almost always the most respected people in their communities.

With firefighters and first responders, the type of government doesn't seem to matter, communism, socialism,

autocracy, democracy, royal kingdom, dictatorship, the fire service prevails and responds. I remember 32-year-old Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Fire Chief Kenan Slinic attending our annual fire dinner during the height of the war in his country. He spoke to our audience with pride and humility. "We respond to calls from everyone, and we don't care about their religions," he started out in his written speech. "Muslims, Christians, Jews, nonbelievers, we don't ask questions. We rescue them, we save their lives, we respond with bullets flying over our heads; that's what we do," he went on.

Chief Slinic returned to Sarajevo carrying thousands of dollars of donations that the 2,000 attendees at our dinner that year collected to support the work of Kenan and the Sarajevo Fire Brigade. Two weeks after he returned to Sarajevo rejuvenated from the support of his brothers and sisters in America, Chief Slinic was gunned down as he carried out his duties.

Every day across the continent, across the globe, firefighters and first responders are ready to respond to any emergency. Fighting fires is only one of many services performed by firefighters, they also respond to tsunamis in Indonesia, nuclear meltdowns in Japan and Ukraine, chemical plant explosions in India, floods in the US, wildfires in Russia, pandemics in Africa, earthquakes in Armenia and Italy, floods in Haiti, airplane crashes in Scotland and China, mine rescues in Chile, more than 200 ship fires and explosions, hurricanes, typhoons, terrorism, railroad crashes,

industrial accidents, building collapses, famines, mass migrations and more. Firefighters and first responders never know what lies ahead, but they're always ready to respond. No organization exists today to represent and empower firefighters and first responders worldwide. It's time to awaken the international network of giants; it's time to organize and empower firefighters and first responders worldwide.

Firefighters and first responders never know whether the next call will be the final call. Firefighters and first responders never know whether civil unrest will negatively affect their work and their quest to save people they've never met. And each year thousands of firefighters and first responders make the ultimate sacrifice; more than 100 firefighters die annually in the US alone in the line of duty.

Time and again, we see them respond to assist neighboring firefighters when they need extra assistance, firefighters from the US regularly travel to other countries to assist. Urban search and rescue teams have traveled to earthquake sites in Europe, and Central and South America. Wildland and forest firefighters have flown across the globe to support their colleagues, as needed. First responders can truly proclaim their mission is "to save the world."

Connecting firefighters and first responders worldwide can have a huge positive impact on humanity. Firefighters are leaders and problem solvers. Firefighters are also humanitarians.

Uniting and empowering firefighters and first responders can have a massive impact worldwide. Exchanging techniques and success stories, sharing technology innovations, establishing regional cooperation agreements and cross-training to maximize effectiveness can influence every nation. Disasters provide a common language among people and provide an opportunity for better understanding. The 'Sleeping Giant' in America has awakened; the fire services have demanded and received respect, admiration, and support. Now it's time for first responders to save the world.

It's time for a new disaster paradigm in the world. A new paradigm that moves the world away from today's focus on response, mitigation, and recovery to a new focus that includes prediction and prevention.

To achieve this new disaster paradigm, we need a new organization. Firefighters and first responders have no comprehensive international voice. They have no mechanism to meet periodically to share ideas and to benefit from new technologies. Firefighters and first responders can truly save the world, and One World for Life, an organization I'm proposing, will provide that empowerment mechanism to make that happen.



One World For Life[®]

16

One World for Life and Beyond

The awakening of the Sleeping Giant in America has taken place during the past 30 years with unprecedented success. The Congressional Fire Services Caucus and Institute has united all US-based fire service groups and organizations and includes a National Advisory Council that meets twice each year.

It's now time to take that model and expand the empowerment of firefighters and first responders worldwide. In 2014, I first proposed establishing a new worldwide initiative to unify and empower firefighters and first responders worldwide.

One World for Life

An International Disaster Mitigation Initiative

Congressman Curt Weldon (1987-2007)

Premise—Each year, natural and man-made disasters devastate nations of the world and disrupt economies, create havoc among innocent people, and result in casualties and loss of life. When disasters occur, nations and multinational organizations struggle to mobilize resources and assistance to respond as quickly as possible to the plight of the affected. Until now, efforts

have been reactive and often result in uncoordinated and disjointed responses that waste valuable time and energy in maximizing success to those most in need.

One World for Life is the first-ever international policy planning and working group effort to empower nations and leaders of the world to coordinate comprehensive efforts to predict, mitigate, respond, stabilize, and recover from natural and man-made disasters of every nature and magnitude. A new paradigm of understanding and coordination of efforts among nations using available technology, best practices, and lessons-learned from previous incidents will create a multinational planning and implementation process that will save lives and property on any continent at any time as the need arises.

Technology Opportunities—With the 20th century world-wide technology revolution, the world has dedicated billions of dollars and countless resources to the development of systems and resources for military and security use. Many of those same systems have relevant applications and unique capabilities to predict, mitigate, prevent, respond, stabilize, and assist people and nations in recovering from disasters.

- Thermal and imaging technologies in orbiting satellites that detect rocket launches worldwide can also detect forest and wildland fires, so nations can respond, control, and suppress fires before there's any massive damage.

- Oceanographic sensors and technologies used by the world's navies can establish coordinated capabilities to identify and predict climate change and specific phenomena that can allow nations to know in advance probable occurrences of floods, droughts, tsunamis, hurricanes, and typhoons. Seismographic research and systems can provide predictive analysis of probable earthquakes and tremors in advance.
- Data mining and neural networking programs used to identify potential terrorists can be used to identify carriers of communicable diseases to prevent and control pandemics.

These are but three of dozens of similar technologies already on the shelf ready for new missions of saving, not destroying, lives.

Policy Planning Opportunities—The proposal will establish a formal process for public policymakers and individual nations to meet on a regular basis to discuss policy actions to better plan and coordinate response to disasters. Coordinated ongoing multinational analysis of past disasters can provide vital lessons-learned for actions that can mitigate future loss of life and property from similar incidents in the future. Multinational planning and coordination can stimulate preemptive assemblage and strategic positioning of disaster response and mitigation resources on every continent in advance of disasters occurring.

The Model—Established in 1988, the US Congressional Fire and EMS Caucus and Institute (www.cfsi.org) provides a template for a new international ministerial and inter-parliamentary policy planning forum that will meet at least once each year. The multinational forum will provide a process for policy leaders to meet and establish a path for coordinated action relative to disasters.

With more than 300 members of the US House and Senate, the Fire Caucus has served as a coordination vehicle for policy options, legislative actions, and resource allocation relative to disasters in the US. The nonprofit Institute has served as the connecting point between US policymakers and the multitude of associations and agencies involved in disasters in the US. Each year, the caucus sponsors a national first-responder tribute dinner and policy-planning sessions and networking opportunities that bring leaders together from across the United States.

Milestones—One World for Life will sponsor an annual international conference and work session for ministers and parliamentarians worldwide, in effect, a forum on disasters. The focus will center on lessons-learned from recent disasters and policy options for better world disaster coordination and response.

The proposal establishes working groups on topics and initiatives as identified by planning coordinators, based

on such topics such as:

- Inter-Operable Communication
- Resource Pre-positioning
- Disaster Resources Prefunding and Location
- International Urban Search and Rescue Teams
- World NGO Coordination and Collaboration
- Short- and Long-Term Housing Options
- Creation of a World Disaster Response Plan
- Data mIning and neural networking for pandemic prevention
- Specific Priorities Suggested by World Disaster Leaders

Interested parties can schedule regional conferences and workshops, as needed, focused on specific priorities and needs as identified through the policy planning process.

A One World Disaster Institute will staff all operations of the initiative that will serve as a working clearing-house for and between policymakers and world disaster stakeholders.

Mission Statement—One World for Life identifies and empowers first responders worldwide by fundamentally changing the international disaster paradigm using technology to protect our global first responders, as well as to enable the prediction, prevention, and enhanced mitigation of both natural and man-made disasters.

Vision and Mission Statement—One World for Life, by linking first responders worldwide, will enable an

interconnected network focused on enhancing preparations, training, resources, and the latest technology to enhance and protect those brave individuals who respond to every type of natural and man-made disasters.

All first responders, both volunteer and compensated, deserve the absolute best intelligence, resources, training, protection, and technology to ensure their safety.

- Every nation deserves to have an interconnected first-responder network that benefits from relationships worldwide.
- Enhanced safety of citizens across the globe is directly dependent upon enhanced information, tools, and resources for its first-responder network.
- The new international disaster paradigm must focus on prediction and prevention of disasters using new and existing technologies.
- Disaster planning and preparation is the responsibility of every community and every government—worldwide.
- Governments must provide coordinated and full support for disaster response, mitigation, and recovery as well as resources necessary for national first responders.
- First responders worldwide deserve full and annual recognition for their heroism, quality of services, and response.

Fundamental Principles of One World for Life

- **Recognition**—Every first responder deserves recognition for their dedication, service, and heroism displayed on a regular basis—often in the most difficult situations.
- **Resources**—Every first responder deserves the necessary resources, training, and technology to confront all natural and man-made disasters.
- **Information**—Citizens of the world need the best timely information available to predict and prevent disasters.
- **Unity**—Citizens and first responders of the world deserve to have the information, tools, and resources necessary to save lives and protect property.
- **Nondiscrimination**—Citizens and first responders of the world deserve equal support in their efforts to protect the people and property of their respective countries.
- **Universality**—There should be no man-made boundaries when it comes to disasters.
- **Information**—Instantaneous and comprehensive information is the key to successful prediction, prevention, response, mitigation, and recovery of disasters worldwide.

Goals and Objectives

1. Empower first responders worldwide—Modeled after the highly successful Congressional Fire Services Caucus and Institute (CFSI), One World for Life

(OWFL) has the primary purpose of empowering first responders worldwide. Varying from country to country, first responders include paid law enforcement, firefighters, EMS, military personnel, militia, and/or, in most cases, trained and untrained volunteers. In the United States, for example, the majority of the 32,000 Fire and EMS departments are fully volunteer or part volunteer. Most of these organizations are independent 501(c)3 nonprofits operating independently of governments and unifying organizations. When disasters occur, anywhere in the world, first responders make themselves available to support the efforts of other first responders. But there's a pressing need to assist these first responders.

- Create a first-responder repository and establish a network (real and virtual) of our first responders worldwide
- Establish first responder points of contact in every nation
- Arrange an annual international forum and dinner, providing operational lessons-learned, specialty networking, and recognizing leadership for outstanding effort
- Conduct OWFL sub-sessions, on a regional basis, worldwide focusing on specific types of natural and man-made disasters
- Empower a first-responder intersection with world NGOs such as the UN, Red Cross, The Weather Channel as well as dozens of international disaster

and relief organizations

- Explore and create regional and specialty alliances among first responders worldwide
- Generate updated inventory and empower the donation of surplus emergency equipment worldwide, as needed
- Pre-plan necessary inventories of resources as identified by first responders
- Create direct relationships and networks between first responders and government disaster leadership (whether elected or appointed)

2. Identify and leverage appropriate military and civilian technology to predict and prevent disasters, enhance response and recovery, mitigate severity of losses, enhance protection and safety for first responders, and enhance recovery operations.

- Identify and inventory existing dual-use technologies worldwide
- Identify laboratory and university-based research potentially affecting disaster prediction, prevention, response, mitigation, and recovery
- Identify commercially available technology potentially affecting disaster prediction, prevention, response, mitigation, and recovery
- Enable new international and regional capabilities derived from the above technologies
- Identify and catalog dual-use modeling and simulation programs to enhance disaster success

- Virtually engage first-responder groups and associations worldwide (AGVE)
- Generate web networks for first responders (fire/rescue TV)
- and new customized apps
- Connect first responders using real-time social media networks
- Identify first-responder requirements and technology needs worldwide and submit to governments for their response and action

In addition, OWFL will seek to establish relationships between locally based community organizations to establish first-responder awareness and support groups worldwide (modeled after the US national network of 1,100 community action agencies).

OWFL will establish formal first-responder recognition programs through organizations such as the Knights of Malta, Nobel Family Networks, and other entities OWFL will include first responders in every nation worldwide—period!

Changing the international disaster paradigm from response, mitigation, and recovery by adding prediction and prevention will save lives and property, will better allocate resources necessary in developing countries and will unleash firefighters and first responders to do what they do best—bring people from different countries, different regions, and different governmental

systems who speak different languages to band together for the benefit of all humanity.

Visit One World for Life at www.oneworldforlife.org.

Epilogue

With the world in such disarray, we must look to common themes or human priorities that bring people together. During my 20 years in Congress, I used the themes of maritime/ocean, environment, energy, and disasters to unite leaders of disparate lands and cultures to work together for one common agenda. More often than not, these international initiatives worked, and we established and nurtured regional relationships. Contained in my archives and in detail in a future book are specific examples of those initiatives and our many successes.

Disasters also unite people regardless of the political leadership or type of government in place. Firefighters, and more broadly first responders, are the men and women worldwide who possess the common personality traits of unselfishness and dedication to helping others by mitigating and responding to disasters of all types.

These first responders (potentially 25 million strong) are the most respected civic and community leaders in every nation whether it's a democracy, socialist state, communist rule, royal family kingdom, tribal, or theocracy. Power or politics don't drive these leaders, rather it's a desire to bring people together for a common good.

This book documents the success we achieved in awakening the 1.2 million first responders in America, and

the monumental results have lasted 30 years. Now it's time to take our template and unite first responders worldwide for that common network focusing on the greater good of all humanity.

Along the way, there will be scores of naysayers, as there were when we conceived the Fire Caucus and Institute. There will be scores of defeats such as what happened to me as I challenged the system.

But, in the end, I'm convinced we can prevail in uniting one segment of humanity that speaks the same language despite regional and national differences.

As evidenced in this book, firefighters and first responders do so much more than respond to disasters. Our challenge is to unleash them and empower them to change the world.

Acknowledgements

As with any new organization and effort, especially in dealing with as many interested groups, members of the House and Senate, Democratic and Republican administrations, and ongoing new out-of-the-box initiatives, the organization behind the scene determines ultimate success.

My staff during the early creation and evolution of the Fire Caucus and the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) were unwavering in their commitment to fully implement my vision and dream for the nation's firefighters. For the first few years, my DC-based staff carried out all organization and coordination efforts.

Once I formed the nonprofit CFSI organization, hand-picked founding board members Art Glatfelter, Chet Henry, Jim Estep, Bill Jenaway and Lou Amabili handled the oversight organizational and fiduciary responsibilities that would enable the institute to develop and maintain an impeccable financial reputation.

Obviously critical to any organization is the lead staff person who directs the operations and meets with all interested parties. Dr. Bill Jenaway was a friend, colleague, and fire chief and was my choice to guide the early development of the caucus/institute relationship while working full-time for INA/Cigna.

The director of the Congressional Fire Services Institute shoulders all responsibility for day-to-day operations and is the ultimate reason why we achieved phenomenal success for almost 30 years. John McNichol was the first CFSI staff director who provided the nurturing leadership necessary for the solid foundation of the organization. Pat Patterson was my district staff director who moved to DC to continue John's leadership and foster solid bipartisan respect from members and staff of the House and Senate.

But the long-term success of CFSI as an organization belongs to current CFSI Director Bill Webb. Bill's wife Kate was one of my initial hires in my DC office and my trusted administrative staff director. I met Bill through her. Bill's qualities of leadership and integrity balanced the delicate relationships between hundreds of diverse members of Congress and their staffs, dozens of national associations, and participating groups each vying for recognition, while ensuring full compliance with the rules and regulations of the US House and Senate.

While Bill never actually fought a fire, Bill's steady leadership, integrity, and innovative thinking provided (and continues to provide) the internal empowerment of CFSI. Bill has devoted his life and career to the American fire services, and for that, Bill Webb receives my ultimate acknowledgement.

Appendix

Congressional Fire Services Caucus Co-chairs (1987)

Founder/Chairman

Congressman Curt Weldon (PA-7)

House

Congressman Rob Andrews (NJ-01)

Congressman Sherwood Boehlert (NY-24)

Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson (MO-08)

Congressman Elton Gallegly (CA-24)

Congressman Steny Hoyer (MD-05) *

Congressman Peter King (NY-02) *

Congressman Bill Pascrell (NJ-09) *

Congressman Dave Reichert (WA-08) *

Congressman Tim Valentine (NC-02)

Congressman Doug Walgren (PA-18)

Congressman Curt Weldon (PA-07)

Senate

Senator Joe Biden (DE)

Senator Richard Bryan (NV)

Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (CO)

Senator Tom Carper (DE) *

Senator Susan Collins (ME) *

Senator Mike DeWine (OH)

Senator Chris Dodd (CT)

Senator Al Gore (TN)

Senator John McCain (AZ) *

Senator Bill Roth (DE)

Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (MD)

Senator Jon Tester (MT) *

Congressional Fire Services Institute Board of Directors

Original Board Members

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Arthur J. Glatfelter

Chet Henry

Doug Ritter

Louis J. Amabili *

Robert Barraclough

M.H. "Jim" Estepp, Vice President *

William F. Jenaway, President *

Christopher Neal *

William "Giff" Swayne, Secretary/Treasurer *

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Center for Campus Fire Safety
Center for Public Safety Excellence
Common Voices
Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firemen's Association
Fire Department Safety Officers Association
Federation of Fire Chaplains
Fire and Emergency Manufacturers & Services Association
Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association
Fire Engineering Magazine
Firehouse Magazine
FireRescue Magazine
FireRescue1/Fire Chief
Institution of Fire Engineers –
United States of America Branch
Insurance Services Office
International Association of Arson Investigators
International Association of
Black Professional Firefighters
International Association of Fire Chiefs
International Association of Fire Fighters
International Association of Wildland Fire
International Code Council
International Fire Buff Associates
International Fire Marshals Association
International Fire Service Training Association
International Municipal Signal Association
International Society of Fire Service Instructors

National Association of State Fire Marshals

National Board on Fire Service

Professional Qualifications

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

National Fire Protection Association

National Fire Sprinkler Association

National Volunteer Fire Council

North American Fire Training Directors

SimplexGrinnell

Society of Fire Protection Engineers

Underwriters Laboratories

USA Sprinkler Fitters

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ACCLAIM FOR AWAKENING THE SLEEPING GIANT

"You often heard Curt [Weldon] speak of the fire service as the 'Sleeping Giant.' When I was President, if it appeared that I wasn't giving proper attention to your issues, I could always be assured of a phone call from Curt, and I'm sure the other Presidents would all say the same.

To his credit, the fire service was never a partisan issue. It was a personal issue, based on his own experience as a volunteer firefighter. He's the reason why both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue have heard the fire service's voice and answered so many of your calls. He's the reason why you, the fire and emergency services, was awakened twenty years ago, and has become such a political force in our nation's capital.

It's the goal of every political leader, who is blessed with the opportunity to serve the public, to leave behind a legacy – a legacy that in some way makes our nation stronger, better, and safer. Curt, you've done just that through your dedication and your commitment to our nation's 1 million first responders. So on behalf of Barbara and myself, thank you for your 20 years of incredible service to this great nation, and best wishes as you begin a new chapter in your life.

Thank you, and may God bless America."

- President George H. W. Bush address to America's fire and emergency services

"In the history of the United States there has been no better champion of the fire service than Congressman Curt Weldon. His decades of hard work made the fire service visible on Capitol Hill while developing unparalleled funding and system improvements through the creation and expansion of relationships with people who can effect positive change. His "win-win" philosophy was not only effective, but should be emulated throughout government at all levels. The book speaks to this effectiveness and success. Simply stated, without Curt, our local, state, and national readiness would not be as profound, as it is today."

- William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFO



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