

Pennsylvania Homeland Security Week

April 21-25, 2003

Good Morning! Thank you all for coming out to participate in this event. We are here today as part of the House Republican Caucus' Homeland Security Week.

Even though we have achieved major military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, and have apprehended several high-level Al-Qaeda operatives, the threat of terrorism here at home still looms.

All of us must remain vigilant, aware and prepared to respond to emergency situations, whether they be acts of terrorism or natural disasters.

We are confident in saying that this Commonwealth is doing everything in its power to assure the safety and security of all Pennsylvanians.

Led by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and the Pennsylvania Office of Homeland Security, thousands of dedicated, experienced and well-trained professionals at the local, county and state level have been working tirelessly over the past few years to prevent terrorism and to prepare emergency response plans.

In the coming fiscal year, more than \$113 million in total state and federal funds will be devoted to Pennsylvania's homeland security efforts.

Our state and our nation remain on alert, with elevated levels of security. By now, we all should be familiar with the color-coded terrorism threat levels established by the Office of Homeland Security and it's a good idea to monitor that indicator daily.

With this event and others like it across Pennsylvania, we want to:

- 1. Raise public awareness about the necessity for vigilance and emergency preparedness.**

WE

- 2. Express our support of and commitment to Pennsylvania's emergency responders.**

They are really the foot soldiers of the war against terrorism here at home.

The 2003-04 state budget will include a \$25 million appropriation for a grant program to assist the roughly ²⁵⁰⁰~~2,400~~ volunteer fire and EMS companies that serve Pennsylvania.

I am proud to be the prime sponsor of House Bill 8, which is the enabling legislation for this grant program. (Along with Reps. Stern and Hess who are co-sponsors – Acknowledge if they are in attendance) This legislation has been voted out of Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee last week, and, ^{B1 - PARTISAN EFFORT} hopefully, will be given full consideration in the upcoming weeks.

The brave men and women who volunteer as emergency responders in their communities would be the ones on the front lines of any domestic terrorist attack. So the pressure on them has certainly intensified in the wake of 9/11.

Those dedicated organizations benefited from the landmark \$25M direct grant program established under Republican leadership in the 1999-2000 budget, and we've been fighting for the past two years to get this funding back in the budget as a permanent fixture.

The rising cost of equipment and declining membership among volunteers have put many fire and ambulance companies in dire financial straits, so it's reassuring to see Pennsylvania move forward with this.

Now more than ever, it's imperative that they be well-prepared and well-equipped. This grant program will help ensure that they are.

We in the General Assembly are supporting Pennsylvania's emergency responders and our communities by initiating legislative measures designed to augment the homeland security effort.

House Bill 8 is one bill in a legislative package designed to augment the homeland security effort. In the coming days, the House will vote on the legislative package designed to increase support to the men and women on Pennsylvania's frontlines, providing them with the tools they need to better serve and protect our communities.

Proposals include:

- **Prohibiting issuance of Pennsylvania driver's licenses to non-residents (HB1091)**

- **Shoring up the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP) that provides low-interest loans to Pennsylvania's volunteer fire and emergency response departments. The proposal would use \$50 million of the newly approved bond issue to increase the VLAP bond debt level to \$100 million. The VLAP offers 2 percent low-interest loans to volunteer fire and ambulance departments to purchase needed equipment, apparatus and vehicles. (HB 900)**
- **Amending the Hazardous Material Emergency Planning and Response Act to include specific requirements for training and equipment necessary to respond to biological or chemical emergencies that are a result of terrorist activities. (HB 780)**

- **Integrating modern communication technology like voice mail and caller ID to the Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance Control Act. This bill also would make it a felony to possess, as well as use, any telecommunication interception devices without permission. (HB 1065)**
- **Creating a firefighter education and training program under the State Fire Commissioner...requiring all newly hired municipal firefighters to complete a basic instruction course established by the Office of the State Fire Commissioner. (HB 767)**

- **As part of providing an enhanced 911 system, creating a wireless E-911 emergency telephone system, funded by a monthly one dollar surcharge on wireless telephones registered in the Commonwealth. This would enable cell phone users to be located by satellite for emergency response. (HB1018)**

A vigilant public is essential to Pennsylvania's preparedness. In the war against terrorism, vigilant citizens on the home front are every bit as vital as the valiant soldiers on the battlefield.

The eyes and ears of 12 million Pennsylvanians cannot be underestimated.

Law enforcement relies on the public to spot and report unusual or suspicious activity or individuals. You can call your local 911 center, your local police or the Pennsylvania State Police. The State Police has established a statewide, toll-free Tipline: 1-888-292-1919.

Citizens must be vigilant, but they also must be informed and prepared with respect to their own safety. The times we live in demand that we learn how to protect ourselves.

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency's Citizen's Emergency Personal Protection Guide provides families with information on what to do before, during and after an emergency. (Note: Copies are provided in press packet and are available through our office.)

Establish a family emergency plan. Discuss with household members possible emergency events, including fire, severe weather, hazardous spills or terrorism. Establish two designated escape routes.

Designate two meeting places – one near your home and one outside your neighborhood, in case you cannot return home after an emergency. AND, very important, teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1.

Prepare an “emergency go kit” and include: At least a 3-5 day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day) and a 3-5 day supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food.

Take along a change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes. Also include an extra set of car and house keys, battery powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries and tools.

Homeland Security Week is the perfect time for residents to become involved in their local Community Emergency Response Training program, or the CERT program.

CERT training promotes a partnership between emergency services personnel and the people they serve. The County Emergency Management Directors should be contacted for more information on this program by interested individuals.

I would like to provide some closing thoughts. Emergency responders, law enforcement, the general public and government agencies must all continue to work together to make sure Pennsylvania stands ready to defend itself in the ongoing war against terrorism.

The horrific and unprecedented terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001 awakened all of us to the harsh reality that the barbarians have gotten past the gates. We have no choice but to strengthen our defenses here at home.

Once again, thank you for being here this morning. A special thank you to our volunteer emergency responders and law enforcement agencies for stepping up to the front lines of safety and security for the residents of the 81st District and of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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House of Representatives

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

March 6, 2003

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Proposed Legislation
TO: All House Members
FROM: Representative Larry O. Sather

In the near future, I will be introducing legislation that establishes the Volunteer Fire Company and the Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Act. Grants would be used to improve and enhance the capabilities of volunteer fire companies and ambulance services across the Commonwealth. The sum of \$22,000,000 is allocated for fire company grants and \$3,000,000 is allocated for ambulance service grants. This \$25,000,000 in funding will come from the state budget line item, which was proposed by the Governor in his 2003-2004 budget proposal.

Grants to volunteer fire and rescue companies may range from a minimum of \$2,500 to a maximum of \$15,000 and may be used for: construction or renovation of the fire company's primary structure; purchase or repair of firefighting, ambulance or rescue equipment; training; or debt reduction associated with the above.

Grants to volunteer ambulance services may range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 and may be used for: construction or renovation of the ambulance company's primary structure; purchase or repair of ambulance equipment; office equipment and support services, training or debt reduction associated with the above.

If you would like to co-sponsor this legislation, please contact Jennifer in my office at 787-3335 or by e-mail at jhaines@pahousegop.com.

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Press Statement

May 5, 2003

I'd like to welcome everyone to this homeland security awareness event.

Before September 11, 2001, if a person were to mention the necessity for homeland security, he or she would have been rebuffed. The thought of having foreign agents kill thousands of Americans in a matter of minutes seemed impossible. And then the impossible happened and our world changed forever.

Every few weeks, we uncover a new plot, or credible threat, against Americans at home or abroad. We live in a new age, an age where a concept like homeland security is known even to children. But homeland security is not just about fortifying the gates against the barbarians, it's about planning for any large-scale disaster, whether natural or human-made.

Homeland security is a team effort. Planning, preparation and implementation takes the cooperation of fire services, emergency planners, the health care community, law enforcement, justice, and even legislators.

Recognizing the importance of emergency preparedness and homeland security, members of this caucus declared April Twenty-Second to Twenty-Fifth as homeland security week. Homeland security awareness events were held across this great commonwealth. Legislators joined with their local first responders and community leaders to raise awareness about the importance of being prepared. They also unveiled a package of bills that will strengthen homeland security in Pennsylvania.

I am pleased to say the House is now prepared to vote on these important measures that will support our volunteer firefighters and emergency responders and give law enforcement officers the tools they need to fight terrorism. Ultimately, this legislative package will make Pennsylvania a safer place to call home.

Now I would like to introduce Rep. Ron Marsico to review legislation that will help law enforcement officers fight terrorism.

[MARSICO REMARKS]

Thank you, Ron. Now I would like to introduce Rep. Paul Semmel to review legislation that will help support firefighters and emergency responders.

[SEMMELE REMARKS]

Thank you, Paul. Now I would like to ask Tom Savage of the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute to offer his thoughts on the importance of this legislation.

[SAVAGE REMARKS]

Homeland security is everyone's business. We all have a responsibility in protecting our fellow citizens and our communities. But no role is more important than the one played by our police officers, firefighters and emergency responders. I would like to extend a special thank you to all of our first responders who are joining us today. You are on the front lines of the effort to protect Pennsylvania from all types of emergencies—from natural disasters to man-made ones—and you do an extraordinary job.

Let's give them a round of applause.

Thank you all for attending this event today.

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Press Statement

May 5, 2003

Thank you, Rep. Saylor.

State government has a responsibility to help Pennsylvanians be safe. We have a responsibility to help Pennsylvanians be prepared. I am pleased we are taking a major step to meet that responsibility this week as we prepare to vote on a comprehensive package of homeland security legislation.

Pennsylvania's state and local police officers – as well as firefighters and emergency responders – are on the front lines of the battle against terrorism here in our homeland, and the bills we will vote on this week will give them some new and better tools with which to fight that battle. Just like our military men and women need the best weapons available to fight the war on terrorism overseas, our law enforcement officers need laws that are both up to date and strong to prevent acts of terrorism here and protect our citizens.

I am proud to sponsor two measures that are aimed at improving safety and security at our airports. The first measure prohibits the possession of cutting instruments at airport security checkpoints. Our nation will be forever haunted by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and the men who took over those four airplanes were armed – not with guns or knives – but with box cutters. Under my bill, box cutters and any other cutting instruments are prohibited at security checkpoints either on someone's person or in his or her carry-on luggage.

My second bill provides increased protection for transportation security administration airport screeners. A person who causes serious injury to these officials while they are performing official duties would face aggravated assault charges punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$25,000. This is a testament to the importance of their jobs.

In addition to my bills, Rep. Jacqueline Crahalla of Montgomery County is sponsoring a very important measure that prohibits actions to support terrorism or hinder prosecution for terrorism. Her bill also allows for up to an additional 10-year prison sentence and up to a \$100,000 fine when terrorism can be proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

Rep. Tom Gannon of Delaware County is sponsoring bills that update the state's wiretapping and electronic surveillance law to include modern technologies like voice mail and caller ID and that impose increased penalties for terroristic threats for possession of a firearm at a school. To

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protect consumers, he is sponsoring legislation to prohibit price gouging during a declared state of emergency.

Rep. Rick Geist's bills prohibit issuing Pennsylvania driver's licenses to non-residents and create a Deputy Secretary for Transportation Security.

These measures are designed to give our law enforcement officers the tools they need to fight back against terrorist acts. By working together, we can make our Commonwealth and our citizens safer, and I'm sure I speak for all of the members here today when I say we look forward to continuing to work with our state and local police officers to achieve that goal.

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Press Statement

May 5, 2003

Thank you, Rep. Saylor.

The House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, of which I am chairman, played a significant role in developing six of the bills in the Homeland Security package, including legislation establishing the Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program.

Our firefighters and emergency responders need financial help so they can spend a little less time fundraising and a little more time training and responding to emergencies. Under House Bill 8, sponsored by Rep. Larry Sather of Huntingdon County, grants will provide financial assistance to these organizations for construction or renovation of their buildings; purchase or repair of firefighting, ambulance or rescue equipment and support services, training; or debt reduction.

Further financial support will be available through the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP), which provides low-interest loans to Pennsylvania's volunteer fire and emergency response departments. House Bill 900, which I sponsored, shores up this valuable program by doubling the bond debt level and making more funds available to our volunteer organizations.

Emergency response will be easier and citizens will be safer under a bill I sponsored that creates a wireless E-911 emergency telephone system. This system will enable cell phone users to be located by satellite for emergency response, and it will create a reverse 911 system, allowing 911 call centers to notify individuals in the event of an emergency in the community.

Just as important as financial assistance and up-to-date technology is the need for training. It helps these dedicated first responders do their jobs even better. So Rep. John Taylor of Philadelphia sponsored legislation requiring all newly hired municipal firefighters to complete a basic instruction course established by the Office of the State Fire Commissioner. The state would reimburse municipalities for 100 percent of allowable tuition, necessary living expenses and travel expenses, as well as 80 percent of the regular salary for firefighters while attending training. This means that – although the program would be mandatory – we're not going to place any additional undue financial burdens on our municipalities.

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My House Bill 780 amends the Hazardous Material Emergency Planning and Response Act to include specific requirements for training and equipment necessary to respond to biological or chemical emergencies that are a result of terrorist activities. The current law does not adequately prepare these teams to respond to incidents where biological agents or “weapons of mass destruction” may be involved.

The final bill reported from the committee goes to the heart of preparing Pennsylvania for unforeseen future acts of terrorism by creating the Pennsylvania Office of Homeland Security and elevating the position of Homeland Security Director to a cabinet level position, to be confirmed by the Senate. This new office will be the state’s direct link to the federal government in securing federal homeland security money and it will serve as a clearinghouse to coordinate state, local and regional resources for homeland security and terrorism prevention and response measures.

Finally, the House is considering a resolution sponsored by House Speaker John Perzel directing the committee to hold additional hearings to comprehensively evaluate the state’s homeland security preparedness status.

The resolution calls for a bipartisan effort to identify Pennsylvania’s security-related needs and communicate those needs directly to Washington. Our findings and recommendations will help Pennsylvania leverage new federal homeland security investment dollars for critical infrastructure like seaports, airports, bridges, tunnels and rail lines.

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JTS/May, 2003