

Local Efforts Against Terror Require Federal Help

When two aircraft struck the World Trade Center towers on Sept. 11, the first emergency responses were not from the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the FBI, but rather from the men

JOHN B. LARSON

and women of New York City's fire department, police force, emergency medical response units and hospitals.

When another aircraft struck the Pentagon not long after, the first response did not come from the U.S. military. Dozens of fire and police departments from surrounding communities in suburban Virginia answered the call. The same was true in the fields of Pennsylvania.

As the nation's military fights the war against terrorism overseas, here at home we must arm cities and towns with the training, equipment and communi-

cation capabilities they need to battle terrorism on American soil. Municipal governments, local emergency responders, health departments and hospitals are integral to the defense of our nation, the first line of response to catastrophes in the United States.

Municipalities need federal assistance to meet these local needs. Unfortunately, of the nearly \$9 billion that is spent on counterterrorism each year by the federal government, less than \$350 million ever makes it to municipalities. The rest remains within federal agencies.

Though numerous local and regional authorities respond immediately to disasters, they have difficulty communicating among themselves, coordinating a re-

sponse. Most lack the training and equipment to most effectively deal with the fallout we witnessed on Sept. 11, or possible biological, chemical or germ attacks.

To address these needs, I and a bipartisan group of more than 70 colleagues have introduced a bill that would provide \$1.5 billion to municipal agencies for the planning needed to pre-

pare them for emergency and security issues that arise from terrorist attacks. It would also provide for a coordinated regional response utilizing federal, state and local agencies. The bill requires no matching funds from local governments.

Many municipalities in the state have their own emergency operation plans. The Capitol Re-

gion Council of Governments is consolidating local emergency preparedness in 15 central Connecticut towns to publish a regionwide plan. This endeavor would benefit greatly from federal assistance.

The Hartford Fire Department recently received a grant through the Federal Emergency Management Agency to purchase mobile data computers with imaging, global information systems and automated reporting software. Additional funding for this project and its training needs have grown in importance since Sept. 11.

For the West Hartford Police

Department, communicating within and beyond the town's borders is key. First responders in that town and many others need proper training and filter masks and breathing devices necessary to respond to bioterrorism.

The town of Bolton needs better radios, new laptop computers for public safety officials, encapsulated suits for those dealing with hazardous materials and training.

President Bush has taken the first critical step against terrorism in the creation of the Office of Homeland Defense. Tom Ridge, however, will have his hands full

coordinating the federal agencies involved. The cooperation of local communities and states is essential for the effective planning of homeland defense. Equally important, though, is that the coordinated effort not be foisted upon states and municipalities from the top down by federal agencies.

With this legislation, Congress can ensure that front-line responders receive the resources they need.

John B. Larson is the U.S. representative from Connecticut's 1st District.

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