

U.S. Congressman Andy Barr (KY-06)

Testimony Before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Thank you Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Roybal-Allard, and distinguished committee members, for allowing me the opportunity to testify before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Homeland Security today in order to urge this body to adequately fund critical federal grant programs such as Assistance to Firefighters Grants (FIRE) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants.

As you know, SAFER Grants provide much-needed funding to fire departments across the United States to hire and retain career and volunteer firefighters, as well as to enhance a fire department's ability to protect the health and safety of its firefighters and the people in the local communities in which it serves.

FIRE grants provide critical funding to local Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments to purchase crucial equipment used to help aid first responders to do their jobs in the selfless service of saving lives.

For example, because of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant, Red Lick Volunteer Fire Department located in the Sixth Congressional District of Kentucky, which I represent, was able to supplement pitfalls in their small budget and purchase new personal protective equipment used to enhance the safety and health of its firefighters.

I would also like to ask this Committee to do everything it can to ensure that the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) is fully funded at the highest amount possible.

As you may know, the Sixth District of Kentucky is home to one of the remaining sites for demilitarization under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) arms control treaty at Blue Grass Army Depot (BGAD) in Richmond, Kentucky.

BGAD currently guards a stockpile of chemical agents, comprising of approximately 523 tons of nerve agents GB (sarin) and VX, and mustard gas.

If a fire or atmospheric release were to occur at BGAD, it would threaten public health and safety and the environment. An immediate Depot workforce of over 1,500 and a population of well over 600,000 Kentuckians in the surrounding communities would be at risk in the event of an emergency.

The CSEPP program provides vital funds to state and local governments to enhance emergency response management for our constituents in the event of an accident or fire at BGAD.

Funding for this program as well as the FIRE and SAFER grants are appropriated by Congress to the Department of Homeland Security and are administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In order to continue to protect the health and safety of the American people and the people of the Sixth Congressional District of Kentucky, I urge this Committee to provide the highest funding possible to ensure our state and local emergency responders have the adequate personnel and equipment it needs to effectively respond to possible life threatening emergencies.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.