

Congressional Fire Service Institute

by Ronald P. Kubicki, Legislative Liaison

As in years past, Illinois sent a delegation made up of fire chiefs and fire protection district trustees from around our state. President Bill Hoffmeister and I were proud to be part of the delegation.

The CFSI is attended by almost 4,000 fire service personnel from across our nation. The purpose of this three day institute is to share issues with members of Congress to share issues that concern the fire service as a nation as well as our local needs in Illinois.

ISSUES ADDRESSED IN WASHINGTON DC

Safer Grants: President Obama's FY2016 Budget proposes cutting the FIRE and SAFER Grant Programs by \$5 million each, and the US Fire Administration by 5.5%. Congress was asked to support the 2011 level of \$405 million for each grant program and fund the USFA to \$45.6 million.

Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Reauthorization Act: SB 609 will protect state and local tax benefits and raise the \$360 cap to \$600 through the end of the 2018 tax year. Protecting these meager benefits for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel is a crucial component of any approach to address recruitment and retention challenges faced by fire departments and districts across our state.

Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act—Amend the Internal Revenue Code to allow accelerated depreciation of retrofits of commercial and residential buildings with live saving sprinkler systems.

Rail Car Safety: According to the US Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the overall volume of crude oil moving by rail has quadrupled in less than a decade. The Illinois fire service is concerned that proper and necessary training to respond to rail car incidents is not being provided because of unavailable funding for "in-person" training. Web-based training would provide more up to date training. Currently the HMEP grants are not allowed to provide web-based training and must be done in-person.

Illinois Delegation

IL Association of Fire Protection Districts

President - Mike Dillion

IL Fire Chiefs Association

President - Chief Sean Maloy

Vice President – Chief Bryan Doyle

Executive Director – Chief Tim Sashko

IL Fire Service Institute

Deputy Director-Jim Keiken

Northern IL Alliance of Fire Protection Districts

President – William Hoffmeister

Legislative Liaison – Ronald P. Kubicki

Barrington Countryside Fire Protection District

Marvin Hill

Frankfort Fire Protection District

Chief Jim Grady

Ottosen Britz Kelly Cooper Gilbert & DiNolfo, Ltd.

Attorney - Robert Britz

Delegation met with

U.S. Senator Dick Durbin

U.S. Senator Mark Kirk

Congressman Daniel Lipinski D-3rd

Congressman Mike Quigley D-5th

Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth Staff D-8th

Congressman Robert Dold R-10th

Congressman Bill Foster D-11th

Congressman Mike Bost R-12th

Congressman Rodney Davis R-13th

Congressman Adam Kinzinger R-16th



Presented information to staff

Congressman Peter Roskam Staff R-6th

Congresswomen Jan Schakowsky Staff D-9th

Congresswomen Robin Kelly Staff D-2nd

Congressman Randy Hultgren Staff R-14th

Congressman John Shimkus Staff R-15th

Congresswomen Cheri Bustos Staff D-17th.

Pleasantview Fire Protection District

Chief John Buckly

Trustee Juan Giron

Deputy Chief Steve

Norvilas

Tri-State Fire

Protection District

Chief Jack

Mancioni



History and Purpose of the Illinois Fire Service Legislative Caucus

by Representative Carol Sente & Representative Don Moffitt

In December of 2001, State Representative Don Moffitt and Mike Smith, while attending a holiday reception in Peoria, were discussing some recent member grants they had been able to get for some of their area fire departments.

However, there was no new funding source to assist fire departments to purchase fire trucks, equipment, and funding for training. The Representatives were trying to figure out what could be done to provide some ongoing financial and legislative support for the fire service. Out of that discussion came the idea to form the House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding. The House Resolution was approved in the spring of 2002 to establish the House Task Force and then 26 members of the Illinois House were appointed, with Representative Smith and Moffitt as co-chairs. The House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding held 22 hearings across the State of Illinois starting on April 12, 2002 and finishing on November 20, 2002. A total of 211 witnesses attended those hearing.

There were 41 recommendations that came out of the Task Force hearings, and many of those ideas have been implemented. One of the most successful ideas was the establishment of the 0% interest revolving loan to help fire departments purchase fire trucks. To date, the 0% interest revolving loan program has been in place 11 years has loaned \$23 million to help 92 fire departments, and there are no defaults on the loans.

Another recommendation developed from the House Task Force was to establish a "Legislative Fire Caucus" to help advance legislation for the fire service, to be an advocate for the fire service and to try to obtain financial support to purchase equipment and promote training.

The Fire Caucus is bipartisan and bicameral. The bylaws call for the selection of one co-chair from each of the four legislative caucuses. The bylaws also state that the Fire Caucus will only support legislation that has been adopted by a unanimous vote of all the organizations representing the Illinois Fire Service. If the Fire Service is divided on an issue, the Fire Caucus will not support the issue.

A second task force was established in 2011, "The House Task Force on EMS Funding", which began hearings on September 20, 2011 and completed the last of 17 scheduled hearings on De-

cember 19, 2011. The House Task Force on EMS Funding was co-chaired by Representative Don Moffitt and Representative Lisa Dugan, who each drove over 4,000 miles attending hearings all across the State. There were 24 House members on the Task Force and a total of 192 witnesses attended the hearings.

From the testimony at the various hearings, 16 issues were identified that should receive consideration from the legislature. Many of the ideas and recommendations presented to the Task Force have been addressed and implemented. Most recently, the "In Field Upgrade" policies have been approved so that on a volunteer EMT Basic Ambulance Unit or First Responder Unit, the volunteers may perform the level of skills for which they are licensed and not be limited to the level of skills of First Responder or EMT Basic Service. With this change, paramedics working as volunteers on EMT Basic Service could use their advanced skills.

Looking to the future, there are several very important issues to be addressed that would really help the fire service. First, we need to keep the 0% interest revolving fire truck loan program in operation and we actually should increase funding in the future. This is not a "give away" program, but a "self-help" program. Secondly, legislation was passed, but never funded, to establish a 0% interest loan program to build, rehab or remodel fire stations in Illinois.

Funding this program would not only improve public safety in Illinois, but it would also create construction jobs across the State. Thirdly, we should further develop the 2% interest loan program to purchase brush trucks. This program incentivizes purchasing an Illinois assembled truck with Illinois sold and installed apparatus.

As co-chairs of the Fire Caucus, we urge all fire departments to invite your legislators to events at your department to get to know them and to let them know what the legislature can do to help the fire service.

In the House, Representative Mike Smith was followed by Representative Lisa Dugan, then by Representative Carol Sente, as Democrat co-chair. In the Senate, Senator Chapin Rose is the Republican co-chair and former State Senator, Michael Frerichs was the most recent Democratic co-chair. Rep. Don Moffitt has remained as co-chair.