

Rothman Urges Ridge To Provide New Jersey More First Responder Funds

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Meets With Bergen County Fire Chiefs & Says More Federal Dollars Are
Needed To Fully Protect Millions Of Residents From Future Attacks

Washington, DC - Following meetings on Capitol Hill today with Bergen County Fire Chiefs and members of the New Jersey State Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association to discuss homeland security, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) intensified his efforts to have Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge allocate all federal, first responder funds on a high-risk basis and to make sure that New Jersey would be included on that list given the state's proximity to New York City and its own critical infrastructure. Rothman's call for the new, high-risk category comes after Congress' approval this month of \$2.2 billion in new first-responder funds, including \$700 million designated to "high-threat, high-density urban areas." This constitutes the first time ever that first responder funds will be allocated on a non-capita basis.

"I am very concerned that the current method for distributing federal homeland security dollars does not adequately reflect the heightened state of alert that has been and must be maintained in the State of New Jersey," said Rothman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, who wrote a letter to Ridge earlier this month on the matter. "In addition to our proximity to New York City, which has already been the target of two terrorist attacks (in 1993 and 2001), New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation. Any biological, chemical, or radiological attack would take a massive toll in lives. New Jersey is also home to the nation's largest port at Newark/Elizabeth, critical regional transportation infrastructure such as the George Washington Bridge and Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, three nuclear plants, and facilities such as Giants Stadium and Continental Airlines Arena that attract millions of visitors each year."

Congress allocated \$2.2 billion for grants to first responders through the Office of Domestic Preparedness. Of this amount, \$1.5 billion is provided for the Office of Domestic Preparedness' basic grant program to the states, and the remaining \$700 million has been provided to address security requirements in high-threat, high-density urban areas with critical infrastructure. Rothman's call is for New Jersey to be considered in the "high-threat, high-density urban area" group which will receive the \$700 million, as well as for the Department of Homeland Security to award the remaining \$1.5 billion of the \$2.2 billion total appropriation on a high-risk basis.

"While I recognize the security threats faced by New York City and other cities, such as Washington, DC, the State of New Jersey should be at the top of the list for areas considered for risk-based funding by virtue of its location across the Hudson River from New York and its high-density areas with critical infrastructure," wrote Rothman in his letter to Ridge. "Despite the responsibility to protect our people from the many potential sites that are within our jurisdiction, New Jersey's share of homeland security funding is based on population, and does not address the heightened risk faced by the state and its residents. This must be remedied immediately."

Rothman attempted to secure an additional \$7.5 million in first responder dollars for New Jersey as part of an amendment to the national homeland security spending bill that already included the \$2.2 billion for first responders across the nation. Those efforts to obtain the additional first responder dollars for New Jersey were denied by the Republican leaders on the House Appropriations Committee. As a result, New Jersey is slated to receive \$37.7 million for first responders instead of the \$45.2 million level Rothman was seeking. Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ11), New Jersey's other Congressman on the House Appropriations Committee, also urged Ridge to commit more homeland security funds to the state.

Seventeen current and former Bergen County Fire Chiefs took part in the first meeting with Rothman, including Bergen County Fire Chiefs Association President Robert Moran, who also heads the Englewood Fire Department. Ten firefighters from across the state, took part in the New Jersey Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association meeting with Rothman, including State Fire Marshal Director Lawrence Petrillo.

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