

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN E. FOGARTY, SECOND DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND BEFORE THE SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON DONABLE PROPERTY OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF HIS BILL, HR 7929, TO PROVIDE FOR THE FREE DISTRIBUTION OF SURPLUS GOVERNMENT PROPERTY TO VOLUNTEER FIRE-FIGHTING ORGANIZATIONS, 8/1/58

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you in support of the bill which I introduced in the House of Representatives in June of 1957. This bill, HR 7929, proposes to amend the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 to permit the donation of surplus property to volunteer fire-fighting organizations. To me its purpose, and the purpose of the other similar bills now before you, is of the greatest importance. I would like to commend each of you on this Committee for having recognized this importance by scheduling the present hearing.

Volunteer fire companies have a long and proud history in this country of ours. Due to its widespread rural population, the vastness of the land, and the very great number of small towns and villages, America has actually become a nation of volunteer fire departments. These organizations, manned by civic minded, dedicated persons, have contributed perhaps more than any other group to the well-being and the safety of the smaller communities. Most of the communities served by these volunteer fire departments are small and cannot afford a paid fire department. Even if they could afford a paid department, it would not be economical for them to do so.

In these communities many public buildings, such as schools and hospitals, require fire protection not only to avoid the loss or damage to these buildings due to fire or other disaster but at the same time to provide trained fire fighting personnel so as to reduce the chances of injuries and loss of lives as a result of such disasters. Fire insurance rates for all property holders in a community are greatly reduced when some form of an organized fire department is available. Fires each year destroy property valued at hundreds of millions of dollars and these losses not only reduce the wealth of the nation but also cause insurance rates to increase even for those individuals served by paid fire departments.

I have personal knowledge of the contributions of these volunteer firemen, Mr. Chairman, for I have been a member of such an organization for close to thirty years. My activity with the Harmony Fire District in my own home town and the Woonasquatucket Valley Firemen's League, which I had the privilege of serving as President, has given me close insight into the devoted service in the protection of life and property which such organizations perform. Through this association I have become aware of the continuing problem they face in trying to secure adequate equipment to carry on their excellent fire-fighting work. Over the years there has always been the ever present struggle

to raise funds for badly needed equipment. Funds are often meager and the available equipment, too often, insufficient.

It would be difficult for me to think of more deserving recipients of Federal surplus than the volunteer fire departments of the Nation who would put this equipment to the direct use of saving lives and property. At present, such equipment can be donated free of charge to educational and public health institutions which are required to pay only the costs of care and handling. I would like to see the same opportunity offered volunteer fire departments.

The bill which I have sponsored would authorize the Administrator of the Federal Properties and Administrative Services Act to donate surplus equipment and materials to volunteer fire-fighting organizations throughout the country. It would put these organizations in a position to be able to improve their services by permitting them to secure equipment and materials which are now denied them through lack of financial ability to buy.

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that no better use could be made of supplies and equipment which have been declared surplus to the needs of the executive agencies than to donate them to those protectors of life and property - - our volunteer fire fighting organizations.

I urge you and the members of this Committee to favorably report my bill, or one which has the same objectives, in order that action can be taken by the House and Senate before adjournment of this session of Congress. I am confident that should such a bill be presented with Committee approval it would quickly be enacted into law. By so doing we in the Congress will be indicating our appreciation to the members of these volunteer companies for their great contributions in the past. At the same time we will be providing them with the tools by which they will be able to do an even better job in the future in providing fire-fighting services to the rural and suburban communities of this country.