

REMARKS OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JOHN E. FOGARTY, SECOND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND BEFORE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS: SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON DONABLE PROPERTY ON LEGISLATION TO AMEND THE FEDERAL PROPERTY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES ACT OF 1949 TO PERMIT DONATIONS OF SURPLUS PROPERTY TO VOLUNTEER FIRE-FIGHTING ORGANIZATIONS, WEDNESDAY, JULY 21, 1965 AT 10 A.M.

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Mr. Chairman, I know that you are familiar with my long-term interest in the expansion of the surplus personal property program to the degree that it may be possible to include voluntary fire departments and I appreciate this opportunity to appear before your Committee in behalf of my bill, HR 9926, and similar legislation that has been introduced in the Congress to this end. I have for many years been a member of such a voluntary department and I believe that I have some appreciation of their problems.

There are many thousands of volunteer fire departments throughout the country which provide the only property protection their local communities have against fires and floods. 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.

Volunteer fire departments provide one opportunity for a community to enter into a cooperative program providing a positive social influence as well as economic benefits. Many of these organizations become the center of the community's activities. Individuals who take part in volunteer fire departments become better informed and conscious of fire hazards and will take steps to remove them. It is also a usual practice for such organizations to develop and conduct training programs in fire prevention. Many fires can be prevented by removing the causes and these causes can only be removed by better-informed citizens.

The property needs of a volunteer fire department are comparatively simple. They need some sort of modern fire truck, together with fire hose, portable extinguishers, ladders, and similar items. These items frequently generate a surplus property and often may be passed over by State screeners because there may be no known need for this type of property for health, educational, or civil-defense purposes.

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By making volunteer fire departments eligible to obtain surplus property, it would remove the inequities that now develop when certain volunteer fire departments obtain surplus property as being a civil-defense unit established pursuant to State law, and similar volunteer fire departments cannot obtain the property because they are not designated by the State civil-defense authorities as a civil-defense unit. Furthermore, the present law is causing FCDA compliance problems and local administrative problems inasmuch as it is difficult to draw a line as to what is and is not a legitimate civil-defense use for this property. In many States, fire trucks are not donated to fire departments unless the department already has a truck and the donated truck will be used as an auxiliary to one already in existence. It is logical to presume that any fire equipment donated to a fire department should always be available for use in all phases of fire protection.

Firefighting equipment may now be donated to health and educational institutions and many of these institutions are obtaining this equipment in order to have needed protection. However, this equipment has little value unless you have the personnel trained to use it in cases of fires. This trained personnel is not available to the average health or educational institution. These institutions cannot legally turn donated firefighting equipment over to the local fire department which

may have trained personnel available. As a result, the community does not receive the protection it requires and maximum utilization of the equipment is not realized.

Tens of thousands of civic minded individuals give unstintingly of their time, effort and resources to maintain these volunteer fire departments. The least we, in Congress, can do is to make available for them the much needed equipment which would otherwise lay unused in Federal warehouses. I am certainly hopeful that favorable consideration will be given to this legislation.