



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

NEWS from Fire Fighters

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Fire Fighters President Joins Democrats to Push for Comprehensive Security Priorities to Protect our Homeland

IAFF President Harold Schaitberger statement at March 29 Security Press Conference

WASHINGTON, DC - The General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters, AFL-CIO/CLC, Harold Schaitberger, issued this statement today after speaking at a press conference called by House and Senate Democrats pushing for a stronger homeland security program:

“Since that tragic day on September 11 almost five years ago, when the sacrifice of 343 of my members -- New York’s Bravest -- became etched into the minds of all Americans, the current White House administration has been long on rhetoric and praise for first responders, but has provided little in the way of meaningful resources or commitment to our communities.

“Just six months ago, when Katrina, Rita and Wilma hit, we witnessed the result of that lack of a true commitment -- a complete breakdown of our government at every level.

“Following these storms, the emergency response operations continued for days, and the federal government should have done much more to assist in the rescue mission.

“At the same time, my members in the Gulf states and in south Florida never left the frontlines. They continued to perform heroically, rescuing thousands of citizens and responding to hundreds of fires and related emergencies. But the simple truth is, they didn’t have the support they needed to efficiently do their jobs. And people suffered and died needlessly as a result.

“The federal response to Katrina operated as if it had not just spent the last five years developing new systems for responding to major disasters. What was the point of creating the National Response Plan and the National Incident Management System... if no one at DHS understood them or tried to implement them?

“Katrina, Rita and Wilma were the test of a new paradigm of federal-local partnership in emergency response -- and the system failed miserably. That’s a damn shame, and it’s a failure of leadership that starts at the top with our President.

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“The members of the bi-partisan 9/11 Commission, who served our nation so well, made significant recommendations about what needs to be done to improve the security of our airlines, ports, rails, intelligence, borders and emergency response capabilities. Everyone has praised their work, including the administration. But frankly, we’ve heard enough talk -- it’s time that all of the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission be implemented.

“Almost five years after the attack on our nation, America’s hometowns continue to face critical staffing shortfalls for both fire fighters and police officers -- the first responders who are always first in on any disaster scene or in response to the next terrorist attack. Yet these men and women still have not been provided the resources, staffing, training, equipment and technology needed to do their jobs effectively and to protect the communities and citizens they serve.

“Simply put, this administration has not prepared our nation to respond adequately to the next disaster. We can and must do better.”

The IAFF, headquartered in Washington, DC, is the 12th largest union among the 54 national unions that makeup the AFL-CIO, and has one of the largest political action committees in the nation -- FIREPAC. The IAFF represents more than 272,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel who protect 80 percent of the nation’s population. More than 2,900 affiliates serve nearly 6,000 communities in Canada and in every state in the U.S. For more information, visit www.iaff.org.

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