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# U.S. Senator Ron Wyden

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Hearing of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space  
"Needs of Fire Services in Responding to Terrorism"  
Remarks of U.S. Senator Ron Wyden, Chair**

"The Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space is acutely aware that information technology and scientific information are critical to combating terrorism.

"The subcommittee has already begun efforts to improve scientific research into fighting terror, targeting key fields, such as aviation technology, that have been suggested by Senator Allen. This subcommittee will hold hearings shortly to consider the creation of NET Guard – a technology equivalent of the National Guard that I proposed after the September 11 attacks, to enable volunteer specialists from the nation's leading technology companies to quickly recreate and repair compromised communications and technology infrastructures.

"In each of these areas, this Subcommittee will work closely with the Bush Administration and in a thoroughly bipartisan way.

"However, I am of the view that no matter how good your technology and your science are, it always comes down to people. That is why our hearing today is so important.

"Our country has more than a million firefighters, and the Federal government must be a better partner in working to ensure that these dedicated, courageous Americans have the tools they need to do their jobs. Today the Science, Technology and Space Subcommittee, having jurisdiction over the United States Fire Administration, will hear first-hand from firefighters about what is needed to afford them the human and the technological resources to confront future events effectively and safely as possible.

"On September 11<sup>th</sup>, the firefighters of New York and Arlington, Virginia were the first responders to a disaster of unimaginable proportions. They more than met the task that faced them, despite immediate infrastructure challenges. In New York, the collapse of the World Trade Centers destroyed \$47 million in equipment in just seconds, from pumper trucks to satellite units. At the Pentagon, I understand that responders faced daunting communication problems between responders across varying radio frequencies. And again in New York, firefighters were stricken with mass casualties among their own – a huge loss of personnel.

"Now, as we hear that further acts of terrorism are possible and even likely, we also hear the call from our first responders for our support and our help. We will hear today that two-thirds of all fire departments nationwide operate with inadequate staffing. That 75 percent of our nation's firefighters are volunteers. That most fire departments can't afford the technologies that could make their work safer and more effective.

"And as we hear today's testimony, we must listen for opportunities to act – to guarantee that as America asks these public servants to put themselves in harm's way for our protection, all that can be done *is* done to ensure their success and safety. There are three opportunities I'd like to note briefly.

"First, while the Federal government has aided local police departments, spending more than \$11 Billion annually, Congress offers just \$100 Million in direct aid to local fire departments through the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement Act, or FIRE Act.

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"To illustrate very clearly the limits of that Federal grant money, let me share some startling numbers. With \$100 Million available, last year fire companies across this nation applied for \$3 Billion in assistance.

"The testimony I have read makes it clear that additional resources are needed and needed now. There is neither the time, nor a need, to wait for a tortuous legislative process to begin equipping fire companies now.

"Congress has already appropriated \$40 billion in emergency supplemental funding to respond to the events of September 11. Today, I am sending a letter to the Office of Management and Budget requesting that \$600 million of that money be allocated immediately for additional FIRE grants. I want to see this funding help local departments on two fronts: giving them both the training and the equipment they need.

"Secondly, this Subcommittee wants to make sure that the Federal resources that are available are appropriate and wisely used. To that end, we are looking at the coordination among training programs. Currently, Weapons of Mass Destruction response training is offered by the Department of Justice and by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"The General Accounting Office has repeatedly criticized the lack of coordination and communication between these programs. It's my understanding that, despite improvements, these programs still can be confusing and duplicative. Here is my bottom line: I want to either consolidate these programs or clearly differentiate them so that doubled-up efforts do not waste the time of our first responders or the resources of our government.

"We will hear pleas today for a single point of government contact and training for first responders, instead multiple contacts at DOJ and FEMA. I hope that Governor Tom Ridge's Office of Homeland Security can take a look at this idea and eliminate some of the current confusion and duplication, and commit this Subcommittee's efforts to help that come about.

"Third, and finally, I intend to ask today how information technology specialists, through a NET Guard or similar approach, could back up our firefighters as they respond to emergencies. There may be ways that our nation's best and brightest technology professionals could assist with communication and monitoring systems to help keep firefighters on top of a developing situation, hearing from each other and from experts independently assessing situations such as compromised buildings and threats posed at disaster sites.

"But the main point of the hearing today is to get to hear from those who were on the scene on September 11 and those who represent the fire fighters across this nation. The best way to honor the brave fire fighters who fell doing their job in New York is to support their colleagues still in service."

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