

07/12/08

**This is a federal bill, so please contact your Senators Schumer & Clinton and Congressmen Hinchey or Arcuri in support of this.**

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Sent: Friday, July 11, 2008 4:36 AM  
Subject: Fuel bill would aid fire companies

By Rick Dandes  
The Daily Item

SUNBURY -- Someone is finally coming to the rescue of volunteer fire departments.

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., said Wednesday he is co-sponsoring legislation to help volunteer fire companies with rapidly rising fuel costs. The Supporting America's Volunteer Emergency Services Act of 2008 would establish a grant program under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help fire companies pay to fuel fire trucks and emergency vehicles.

"High gas and diesel prices have put a strain on millions of Americans, particularly those operating on razor-thin budgets like our volunteer fire companies," Casey said. "Many companies are finding it difficult to cope with the added strain, making it impossible for them to respond to emergencies with enough equipment and vehicles. We have to help firefighters so they aren't forced to choose between their budgets and saving lives."

This was one of the problems brought up a recent Upper Augusta Township Fire Company meeting, where Deputy Chief Bill Brown and President Dan Switzer said fuel and electricity are major and climbing expenses in running the station.

"And it's not going to get better," Brown said.

"We can't let high gas prices stand in the way of our ability to provide families with the help they need," Switzer added. He said the company's fundraisers have "not made money."

Penns Creek Fire Company Chief Todd Sprenkel said Wednesday night that he didn't know about the proposed legislation. "Certainly, the cost of fuel is a factor nowadays," he said. "After all, we're not in the position of passing along the cost, as other businesses can. I'll look into this grant program if it becomes law."

The act would set a baseline of gas and diesel prices using average prices from 2007. Volunteer companies would be eligible for reimbursement of 75 percent of budget overages due to the rising cost of gas over the baseline cost. The companies then would receive a grant to help cover the additional costs.

A volunteer fire company, for example, that uses 1,000 gallons of gasoline and 700 gallons of diesel under current levels would receive about \$1,725 in reimbursements. Between June 2003 and June 2008, regular gasoline prices rose 171 percent and diesel prices rose 229 percent.

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Andy Pilecki