



*Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515*

*Anna G. Eskoo
Fourteenth District
California*

July 15, 2004

The Honorable Tom Ridge, Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Secretary Ridge,

I write regarding a recent incident that occurred in my Congressional District. Two hundred pounds of high explosives belonging to the San Francisco Police Department, the FBI and the local county bomb squad were stolen from a storage bunker located on SF-PUC property near the Crystal Springs Reservoir over the 4th of July weekend. Law enforcement and county officials cite inadequate funding and budget cuts as major factors in this failure of security. While this incident highlights several serious flaws in the security of this particular site, it also demonstrates the broader flaws inherent in the federal government's chronic underfunding of local first responders and the misallocation of Homeland Security funds.

It's important that the federal government help local agencies protect our communities and I want to share with you what I've been hearing from first responders in my district.

I've been informed that first responders are severely limited in how they can spend the resources they receive from the Department of Homeland Security. For example, the highly prescriptive list of Authorized Program Expenditures in the State Homeland Security Grant Program permits our local first responders to buy night vision goggles and euthanasia kits, but prohibits them from using this money for fundamentals such as fire hoses and turnouts. Furthermore, there's no money allocated to hire experienced staff who have the requisite "homeland security" skills to use the advanced equipment funded by the grants. As one fire chief explained to me, "this is like getting your dessert before your dinner." By limiting local responders from spending grant money on true necessities, we seriously diminish their effectiveness in real emergencies.

Bureaucratic complications have also made it extraordinarily difficult for small departments to carry out the grant request process. The Authorized Program Expenditures list changes from year to year, making it difficult for departments to keep track of which items will qualify and which will not. Questions about grant fund use pass first through the state, and then on to the federal level, further complicating the process. For example, the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services waited a full year for an answer to one of their grant use questions. Another Santa Cruz County first responder told us he didn't receive the guidelines for the grant program until after the application was due. This sort of red tape defeats the purpose of funding emergency agencies, but relatively simple solutions could be devised in the form of a standardized

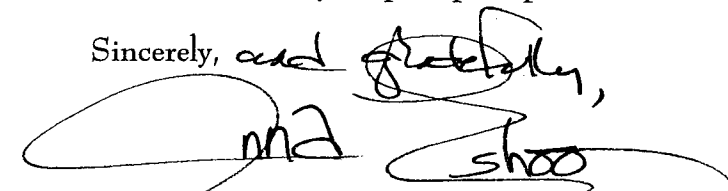
and less prohibitive Authorized Program Expenditures list and the establishment of a direct federal contact for each county and state to expedite questions about the program.

This problem is further compounded by the fact that funds for homeland security have been grossly misallocated. A far more comprehensive approach to grant distribution is needed. Under the current system, people living in Wyoming – a low risk area – receive up to seven times the homeland security funding per capita as is received by residents of California. If the federal government were to raise the alert level to red, there are inadequate funds in California to pay for the immense increase in overtime salaries and costs. Level red overtime in Wyoming doesn't cost nearly what it does in San Mateo County. The allocation of this security funding should be based on a careful risk assessment, not along arbitrary state lines. I applaud recent congressional actions toward finally addressing this issue and I urge you to use your position to further their efforts in any way possible.

My colleague, Representative Tom Lantos, has initiated field hearings on the subject of the break-in at Crystal Springs, and will be looking into ways in which the federal government can assist local law enforcement in the storage and security of munitions and explosives. We must go further and examine the broader issues that inhibit the effectiveness of our first-responders in California and around the country. A good start would be to expand the list of Authorized Program Expenditures in the State Homeland Security Grant Program and to establish a federal contact for local grant inquiries so that first-responders can purchase the necessities they require to serve and protect our neighborhoods.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely, *and gratefully,*

Handwritten signature of Anna G. Eshoo, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' and 'E' followed by 'shoo'.

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

cc: Bay Area Congressional Delegation
Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
Sheriff Don Horseley