

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSWOMAN BEVERLY B. BYRON
ON THE NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
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Mr. Chairman: I appreciate this opportunity to express my support for the authorization of the funds necessary to enable the National Fire Academy to begin operations at its site in Emmitsburg, Maryland in January, 1980. The mission of the Fire Academy is too important to allow further delay in its establishment. The site in Emmitsburg is much more economical for the American taxpayer and far more suitable for the Academy's programs than any alternative site. I urge this Committee to continue its impressive record of support for the Academy by authorizing the operating funds for the Academy for fiscal year 1980. To fail to do so would needlessly delay and irreparably damage the vital work of the U.S. Fire Administration in preventing the tragic losses suffered each year from fire.

THE NEED FOR THE NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY

Coming before this Committee to talk about the importance of the National Fire Academy is the equivalent of "carrying coal to Newcastle". This Committee was instrumental in the passage of the Fire Research and Safety Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-259), which created the blue-ribbon National Commission of Fire Prevention and Control. The work of this Commission produced the comprehensive and dramatic report America Burning in 1973. The Commission strongly recommended the creation of a National Fire Academy; in fact, its report devoted a full chapter to this subject. The Commission summarized the potential of the Academy as follows:

Federal support of the National Fire Academy is a worthwhile endeavor. Through the Academy, the management capabilities of the fire services can be improved. Priorities of the fire departments can be effectively shifted, through Academy training, in the direction of more fire prevention effort. Man's environment can be made less hazardous through special courses in fire-safe design. And most important, the National Fire Academy can help to reduce life and property losses and injuries from fire.

The Commission's report provided the motivation and guidance behind the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-418), which was drafted in large part by this Committee. The creation of the National Fire

Academy was a key feature of this legislation and the 1974 report of this Committee to the House emphasized the importance of the Academy. The establishment of a National Fire Academy was included as a Congressional declaration of national policy in the version of this bill reported by this Committee. The Committee's report devoted more space to the discussion of the Fire Academy than it did to any other section of the bill. The Committee report stressed that the Academy would supplement existing fire educational programs by filling critical gaps in the present education and training of fire services professionals, as well as professionals in other fields.

I might add that the Senate was equally supportive of the creation of the Fire Academy and the Conference Committee report on this legislation stated "a central training facility for the nation's fire fighting forces is of the highest priority if the effort to reduce the losses from fires is to succeed".

Throughout the consideration of the National Fire Protection and Control Act of 1974 and the earlier work of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, the Fire Academy was envisioned as a centralized physical facility. I note that this Committee has indicated its interest in the possibility of reviewing "the underlying justification of a centralized National Fire Academy". While a continuous review of federal programs is always commendable, several years of effort and several million dollars have already been invested in the establishment of the Academy, the development of its curricula, the assembling of an excellent educational staff, and the preparations for beginning its operations. Furthermore, a similar reassessment of the need for a centralized fire academy was recently conducted at the direction of the Office of Management and Budget and the decision to proceed with the Academy was reaffirmed. Certainly the Academy should be given the opportunity to prove its value before being evaluated, particularly in view of the many years of strong Congressional support for the establishment of the Academy. A clear departure from past Congressional policy, as expressed in the National Fire Prevention and Control Act, is not warranted. I cannot conceive of any developments during the last 5 years that would provide a reason for us to abandon the judgment of Congress and the Commission that a centralized Fire Academy would be the best and most cost-effective means of providing critical improvements in our fire training and education programs. This Committee does not need to be reminded of the 12,000

fatalities, 300,000 injuries, and \$3 billion in property loss from fire each year. The operating expenses for the Fire Academy, which this Committee needs to authorize, are exceedingly modest when one considers that fire results in a total economic loss to this country of approximately \$11 billion annually.

EMMITSBURG IS AN OUTSTANDING SITE FOR THE FIRE ACADEMY

As you know, the Fire Administration has purchased the former St. Joseph's College in Emmitsburg, Maryland to be the site of the National Fire Academy. It would be extremely difficult to exaggerate the wisdom of this decision.

The site itself includes 14 buildings on 110 acres. As the March 12, 1979 memorandum of your Subcommittee staff observed, "the buildings are in excellent condition having been well maintained and having been originally constructed of high quality material". In fact, it is my understanding that the architectural consultant of the Fire Administration has estimated that it would cost approximately \$20 million to replace the buildings which were purchased at Emmitsburg. Taxpayers will be pleased to know that the land and the buildings combined cost the government only \$3.5 million. Reflecting their previous academic use, the buildings are well suited to the actual physical needs of the Academy, as is evidenced by the fact that the Academy will be ready to begin educating students in January of next year.

Emmitsburg is located one and a half hours northwest of Washington on U.S. 15 between Frederick and Gettysburg. It is at the base of the Catoctin Mountains about 10 miles from Camp David. I will not burden you with what could very easily become a travelogue for scenic and historic Frederick County, but it is remarkable that an area of such inspiring natural beauty exists so accessible to major metropolitan areas, such as Washington. Such factors are important because the Academy requires both accessibility and a site conducive to the intensive academic programs being offered. It is not coincidental that if you look at the locations of training programs and conferences of America's major corporations, I think you will find a clear preference for settings similar to Emmitsburg. The well-known Xerox training facility near Leesburg, Virginia is just one example. In addition to being accessible to Washington, Emmitsburg's location is also convenient to the fire research facilities at the National Bureau of Standards, the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency installation in Olney, and the excellent fire education program at the University of Maryland. In fact, this Committee specifically praised the University of Maryland's fire education

program in its Committee report accompanying the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974.

This Committee, when it drafted the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, established a Site Selection Board to conduct a comprehensive review of all potential Academy sites and make a recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce. St. Joseph's College in Emmitsburg would have originally been the first choice of the Site Selection Board, except for three conditions which existed at the time of the Board's 1976 report which no longer exist today. At the time the Daughters of Charity, owners of the College, were interested only in leasing the property rather than selling it, and they wanted to share the use of part of the facility with the Academy. Moreover, it was anticipated that all U.S. Fire Administration activities might be located at the Academy site. These three factors are no longer considerations because the Sisters became willing to sell the site and the location of the Fire Administration itself at the Academy is not being contemplated. Despite the three above considerations which existed in 1976, Emmitsburg was the second recommended choice of the Site Selection Board that was mandated by Congress under the legislation drafted by this Committee. While the Marjorie Webster site in Washington, D.C. was the first choice at that time, it is important to remember that Emmitsburg was the only alternate choice recommended by the Site Selection Board.

Mr. Chairman, you have expressed some concern that the site acquired in Emmitsburg may be larger than necessary for the Academy's operations. First of all, it is important that the primary reason Congress directed the Fire Administration not to pursue the use of the Marjorie Webster site for the Academy is that it lacked the capacity for future expansion. It hardly seems fair six months later for Congress to criticize the Fire Administration for acquiring a site that has the capacity for future expansion. Furthermore, the St. Joseph's property also gives the Federal Emergency Management Administration the capability of using the facility for related purposes.

Secondly, the possibility that the Academy may not have to utilize all of each of the buildings acquired should not be a critical concern, as long as taxpayers' funds weren't unnecessarily spent acquiring unneeded facilities. As I am sure the Committee can realize, St. Joseph's College was for sale as a unit and it would not have been in the best interests of the Academy to buy most of its buildings and leave some buildings for sale to other potential

purchasers. As I have previously indicated, the price for the purchase of the site was a rare bargain for the American taxpayer. An extremely important consideration is that Emmitsburg was the only Academy site that could be purchased and opened within the amount of funds and the amount of time authorized by law. In these inflationary times, how many other federal programs can you think of that were authorized nearly five years ago, yet can still accomplish their mission without needing an additional authorization or appropriation? It seems to me that rather than questioning the Fire Administration on the purchase of the Emmitsburg site, we should be commending and congratulating them. In fact, I hope the Committee will direct the Fire Academy to add a course to its curricula. It would be entitled, "How the federal government can purchase property efficiently and economically", and we should make every appropriate employee of the General Services Administration go up to Emmitsburg to take the course.

THE ALTERNATIVE NEW YORK SITE IS NOT ACCEPTABLE

Mr. Chairman, as you know, your Subcommittee staff and the New York Congressional Delegation have expressed an interest in the possibility of locating the Fire Academy on a site in Ward's Island in New York City. I am sure that any objective analysis of this matter would confirm the decision of the Fire Administration to select Emmitsburg. The Ward's Island site is not suitable for the Academy's needs and it would be far more expensive to establish the Academy there. I am sure that this Committee will agree that it makes no sense at all to spend approximately \$5 million more to acquire an inferior facility. If for some reason this Committee would prevent the use of Emmitsburg for the Fire Academy, then it is clear that New York would not be an acceptable alternative. Therefore, in order to be fair the entire site selection process would have to be reopened if additional sites are to be considered at this late date. The resulting delays would be unconscionable and would jeopardize the future of the Academy.

New York City has proposed the use of a former mental institution on Ward's Island. As the March 12, 1979 memorandum of your Subcommittee staff concluded, "the actual site offered by New York is unsuitable. There are only two buildings; one should be demolished and the other building, approximately 60 years old, is in a deplorable condition requiring complete 'gutting'. Secondly, the site is

badly situated with limited access." It is estimated that adapting this site to the use of the Academy would be at least \$14 million--far higher than Emmitsburg and far higher than the amount authorized by Congress for this purpose.

In its memo, your Subcommittee staff raised the possibility of allowing New York City to offer still another site on Ward's Island for possible consideration, even though the Fire Administration had already signed a contract obligating the government to purchase the Emmitsburg site. Certainly there can be no justification for encouraging further delay to allow the consideration of yet another site that would be less suitable and more expensive than Emmitsburg. Furthermore, if New York is given the extraordinary privilege of submitting additional Fire Academy proposals ad infinitum, shouldn't other cities expect the same opportunity? Clearly we should not scrap the years of work that has culminated in the purchase of the Emmitsburg site and reopen the entire process again.

The fact that the Ward's Island sites for the Academy would be in close proximity to the Randall's Island New York City Fire Academy is not a reason to locate the Fire Academy on Ward's Island. Congress made it clear that the Fire Academy was to be an academic institution and should not duplicate fire training programs that are offered at the excellent fire training facilities that already exist, such as New York City's. The 1976 Site Selection Board did not regard proximity to a fire training facility as a consideration to be evaluated in the selection of Academy sites. I also understand that the New York facility would be available to the Academy only after business hours and on weekends, since it is already heavily used for the City Fire Department's own needs.

New York City has also argued that there would be advantages to locating the Academy in the middle of the nation's largest city with the nation's largest fire problem. However, these same factors mean that New York City would offer a very atypical environment for the Fire Academy that would not be directly relevant to a majority of the people attending the Academy. For example, 80% of the firefighters in this country are volunteers. The Vigilant Hose Company in Emmitsburg probably offers a far more relevant experience to most of the nation's firefighters than New York does. Furthermore, the Senate Commerce Committee specifically noted that fire is not an exclusively urban problem when Congress decided to place the Fire Administration in the Department of Commerce rather

than the Department of Housing and Urban Development, as originally recommended.

The New York City Delegation has also raised the issue that the selection of New York would be consistent with the President's urban policy. Certainly the goals of the urban policy are commendable. However, this policy does not provide a basis for selecting the New York City site. I would like to direct the attention of this Committee to Title IX of the Agriculture Act of 1970 (42 U.S. C. S 3121) which includes the following:

Congress hereby directs the heads of all agencies of the Government to establish and maintain departmental policies and procedures giving first priority to the location of new offices and other facilities in rural areas...

While this Committee may share my sympathies with the objectives of the President's urban policy, I hardly think that it is in a position to encourage the Fire Administration to ignore a mandate enacted into law by Congress.

I can understand the interest of the New York Congressional Delegation in having the Academy located there. Any community would be proud to have such a fine facility located nearby, as Frederick County is. However, I don't think those who advocate the New York site have reviewed this matter objectively, as I hope this Committee will. For example, on September 14, 1978 the New York Congressional Delegation wrote to President Carter urging the selection of Ward's Island. After reviewing the 1976 work of the Site Selection Board, they advised the President as follows:

This arduous selection process found Ward's Island in New York City to be the third most suitable site. Since then, the board's first choice has been rejected by Congress and the second choice has become unavailable.

As I am sure the Committee realizes, this information is simply not correct. In fact, Emmitsburg was the only recommended alternative site of the Site Selection Board; there was no third choice. Furthermore, Emmitsburg was available, as is evidenced by the fact that it has already been purchased. Had the New York Delegation realized that they were mistaken and that the second choice was still very much available, I am sure they would not have persisted in advocating a mythical third choice.

I cannot conceive of this Committee or any other Congressional Committee sitting still for a minute if an executive agency had made a decision as unimaginable as choosing the site New York City was offering. This would have committed the federal government to spending an amount exceeding the Congressionally authorized ceiling on a facility that could not be opened within the deadline prescribed by statute.

OPERATING FUNDS FOR THE ACADEMY SHOULD BE AUTHORIZED

Mr. Chairman, it is sad that we are now approaching the fifth anniversary of the enactment of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 and the National Fire Academy created by that law has not yet opened its doors. Yet it is exciting that we are on the verge of reaching this important step. The Academy is prepared to begin its vital mission of education our nation's fire service professionals just 8 months from now. It is time to put all of the controversy surrounding the Academy site behind us and proceed with the important work the Academy was created to do. The tragic losses from fire are too important a national problem to allow further delay.

If we do not authorize the operating funds for the Academy to open next January in Emmitsburg, we are placing the future of the National Fire Academy in jeopardy. Reopening the site selection process to consider alternative sites at this late date is unnecessary. We already have an outstanding facility in Emmitsburg and it is difficult to conceive of it being possible to find a better site. Further delay would make it virtually impossible to stay within the amount appropriated by Congress. A prime consideration in these inflationary and budget conscious times is the fact that the remarkably modest cost of St. Joseph's College is a prime consideration and could not be duplicated elsewhere. Furthermore, an additional postponement of the opening of the Academy would have serious adverse consequences on the Academy staff, which has been working hard towards the rapidly approaching opening date, as well as the professional fire service community, which is looking forward to the Academy operations with much anticipation.

Mr. Chairman, hardly a day goes by in Congress when we don't listen to a colleague of ours either in Committee or on the House floor criticize a federal agency for a failure to act on some national problem. Fortunately, the Fire Administration has proven that it has not acquired all of the bureaucratic attributes that inflict so many federal agencies. In selecting the Emmitsburg site, it has demonstrated that it has the capacity to act without unnecessary and frustrating delays. Even more important, it has acted wisely. I don't think we in Congress are acting responsibly if we are constantly criticizing federal agencies when they fail to act, and continue to criticize them when

they do act--particularly when they make what is obviously the correct decision.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by directing the attention of the Committee to the following statement contained in America Burning, the Report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control:

One thing is certain: Federal support of the National Fire Academy, both in its own programs and those it assists at local levels, is vital.

I urge this Committee, which has provided the leadership necessary to bring us so close to the establishment of the Fire Academy, to provide the vital support referred to by the Commission by authorizing the operating funds for the Academy in fiscal year 1980.