

From the President's Desk

Bill Webb

Executive Director, Congressional Fire Services Institute

To Serve and Support

From Shane Ray:

Dear NFSA Members,

Let me introduce you to Bill Webb, the Executive Director of the Congressional Fire Services Institute. I first went to the CFSI Annual Symposium and Dinner when I became fire chief in Pleasant View, Tennessee in 1998. Bill Webb was there leading the way, and he is still doing that today. I have been a supporter of CFSI and Bill ever since. Knowing the impact of involvement with all the national fire service and fire protection organizations was crucial then, as it is now, Bill's leadership and facilitation of all groups has been an honor to observe and support.

I'm happy to have Bill write my column and it's also an honor to have an article from Chief Jim Estep (ret.). Chief Estep was the leader of the first county in our country to require residential fire sprinklers in new homes. Chief Estep currently serves as the Chair of the Congressional Fire Services Institutes Board of Directors. Bill always refers to us as "his bosses", but we all know Bill is the boss and the team at CFSI, including Michaela Campbell and Emily Griffin, do a whole lot with a little.

It is an honor to serve with the CFSI team and it is an honor to serve NFSA. Let me say thank you to our Board of Directors and all NFSA members for supporting CFSI and all the amazing work they do in Washington D.C. and across the country to save lives and protect property.



Serving and supporting the fire service and fire protection industry has been an honor of mine for 30 years. Hello, my name is Bill Webb, and I am honored to serve as Executive Director of the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI). Since the founding of CFSI in 1989 and the Congressional Fire Services Caucus in 1987, the federal government has elevated its role and responsibility in improving fire and life safety in America, most recently through the reauthorization of the United States Fire Administration and the Assistance to Firefighters and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant programs.

CFSI's primary mission is to build consensus among the major fire service organizations – including organizations representing the fire service industry, such as the National Fire Sprinkler Association – on a broad range of public safety issues. The reauthorization of USFA and the two grant programs illustrate the impact of our work. Another illustration is the passage of the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act.

The date was February 20, 2003, when a fire caused by an illegal pyrotechnics display killed 100 victims at the Station Club, a small concert venue in West Warwick, RI. The club lacked a fire sprinkler system, which would have extinguished the fire within seconds of ignition. Shortly after the tragedy, a group of fire service leaders, including Jim Dalton and me, met with Congressman Jim Langevin, who represented West Warwick. Our goal was to develop legislation that could prevent another deadly disaster. After a series of meetings in which we discussed ideas for a federal solution, Congressman Langevin introduced the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act.

Passage of the measure was a monumental task that took 15 years for Congress to achieve. Most organizations and members of Congress lack the staying power to advocate for the passage of a bill for 15 years, let alone two or three years. However, CFSI and NFSA refused to quit. The issue was too important for public safety. The bill was introduced and reintroduced in eight different Congresses until it was finally approved as part of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

One of my proudest moments at CFSI was standing beside Shane Ray, US Fire Administrator Keith Bryant, and other fire service leaders at the Station Club Memorial on February 20, 2018. We gathered as a united fire service to let the survivors know we had not forgotten about their losses and achieved something positive to honor their loved ones' memories.

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CFSI has always valued the support we receive from the National Fire Sprinkler Association. Even though our friend, Jim, has long since retired from the organization, I still consider him a mentor and contact him frequently for some sage advice. I also never hesitate to pick up the phone and call Shane Ray, who serves on CFSI's Board of Directors. We've all heard the saying, "knowing a little about a lot." In Shane's case, he knows a lot about a lot. Fortunately for the fire service, he is always willing to share his knowledge with others, whether in group discussions or at state and national conferences.

And then there is my dear friend Vickie Pritchett, NFSA's Vice President of Advocacy and Outreach. Last April, Vickie was selected to serve as Vice Chair of CFSI's National Advisory Committee, a committee of 37 fire organizations that develop consensus positions on the issues CFSI addresses on Capitol Hill. She is currently working closely with CFSI's Director of Government Relations, Michaela Campbell, and your lobbyist, Andy Quinn, on the High-Rise Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act

and the Public Housing Fire Safety Act. Like the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act, these two measures would provide economic incentives for the installation of fire sprinklers in certain types of residential structures.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Your industry is that ounce of prevention that continues to save lives – the lives of the citizens in communities across the nation and the lives of firefighters. Your work is not just important to the fire service; it's lifesaving.

I would like to thank Shane Ray for giving me this opportunity to express my gratitude for your support and briefly describe how our two organizations have worked together to reduce the threat of fire in our nation. Thank you for your service and keep up the great job! •

*With thanks and appreciation,
Bill Webb*



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