

NEWS

From the Office of

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Mitzelfelt Secures Funding for Rural Fire Stations

SAN BERNARDINO – First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt today secured approval to create a budget reserve that will reach approximately \$5 million to build fire stations in the remote areas of the County. The Board of Supervisors agreed during a final budget hearing today to set aside additional federal funds for construction of fire stations over the next several years.

“I would like to thank my fellow Board members for agreeing that this extra funding should be targeted to provide fire coverage in underserved and underfunded areas of the remote desert,” said Supervisor Mitzelfelt. “It has been a public safety priority of mine to build fire stations along the Interstate 40 corridor.”

Response times on Interstate 40 can be up to an hour or longer because fire crews have to come from Needles, the Barstow area or even Baker. The distance between Barstow and Needles on I-40 is 150 miles. Supervisor Mitzelfelt is committed to building a new fire station in Amboy, about halfway between Barstow and Needles, and another one near Goffs, about 40 miles west of Needles.

The additional funding is from the federal government’s Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which allocates money to states and local jurisdictions that have areas of federal land, which do not generate property taxes. PILT payments are meant to partially offset the cost of providing public services on and around public lands, but the program was never fully funded until last year.

The County had been receiving about \$1.8 million in annual PILT payments for the past few years. Congress last year agreed to fully fund the program through 2012 and the County received \$2,877,981 in 2008 and \$2,958,395 in 2009. Supervisor Mitzelfelt convinced the Board of Supervisors to use the difference, about \$1 million per year for five years, for the desert fire stations.

The Board had previously agreed to spend \$300,000 for design and engineering of the Amboy station, with another \$2.6 million budgeted for construction in Fiscal Year 2010-2011.

In a separate action today, the Board agreed to seek \$12.6 million from a federal stimulus grant program that is targeted for fire station construction and improvements. If the County receives the grant, it would pay for the new Amboy station, and for new facilities to replace aging fire stations in Wonder Valley and Angeles Oaks.