

**Statement of Senator Gregg on Introduction of
The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2003
March 12, 2003**

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, today, I am pleased to be joined by Senators Kennedy, DeWine, Harkin, Smith, Mikulski, Collins, Bingaman, Snowe, Sarbanes, Kerry, Bayh, Corzine, and Dayton in introducing the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2003. This legislation would extend to firefighters and police officers the right to discuss workplace issues with their employers.

With the enactment of the Congressional Accountability Act, State and local government employees remain the only sizable segment of workers left in America who do not have the basic right to enter into collective bargaining agreements with their employers. While most States do provide some collective bargaining rights for their public employees, others do not.

Studies have shown that communities which promote such cooperation enjoy much more effective and efficient delivery of emergency services. Such cooperation, however, is not possible in the States that do not provide public safety employees with the fundamental right to bargain with their employers.

The legislation I am introducing today is balanced in its recognition of the unique situation and obligation of public safety officers. To accomplish this the bill: 1. Requires States, within 2 years, to guarantee the right of public safety officers to form and voluntarily join a union to bargain collectively over hours, wages and conditions of employment; 2. Protects the right of public safety officers to form, join, or assist any labor organization or to refrain from any such activity, freely and without fear of penalty or reprisal; 3. Prohibits the use of strikes, lockouts, sickouts, work slowdowns or any other action that is designed to compel an employer, officer or labor organization to agree to the terms of a proposed contract and that will measurably disrupt the delivery of services; 4. Continues to allow States to enforce right-to-work laws which prohibit employers and labor organizations from negotiating labor agreements that require union membership or payment of union fees as a condition of employment; 5. Preserves the right of management to not bargain over issues traditionally reserved for management level decisions; 6. Exempts all states with a State bargaining law for public safety officers that are equal to or greater than the rights granted under Federal law; 7. Gives States the option to exempt from coverage subdivisions with populations of less than 5,000 or fewer than 25 full time employees.

Labor-management partnerships, which are built upon bargaining relationships, result in improved public safety. Employer-employee cooperation contains the promise of saving the taxpayer money by enabling workers to give input as to the most efficient way to provide services. In fact, States that currently give firefighters the right to discuss workplace issues actually have lower fire department budgets than States without those laws.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2003 will put firefighters and law enforcement officers on equal footing with other employees and provide them with the fundamental right to negotiate with employers over such basic issues as hours, wages, and

workplace conditions.

I urge its adoption and ask unanimous consent that the text of this bill be printed in the Record.