

California lawmakers react to Arizona colleague being shot

By Michael Doyle, Sacramento Bee Washington Bureau

The shooting of Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords on Saturday struck home with California public officials of all stripes, reminding them anew of their own vulnerabilities.

Shortly after the shooting, Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Atwater, said he and other House members received multiple e-mail warnings from Capitol Hill law enforcement officials.

"They told us to increase our vigilance, and to have more security at our public events," Cardoza said, adding that "we will follow the recommendations of the police."

One e-mail advised lawmakers that "the U.S. Capitol Police are directly involved in this investigation" and urged members and staff to "take reasonable and prudent precautions regarding their personal security."

The Saturday meet-and-greet Giffords was attending with constituents is not unlike those that occur frequently in federal and state legislative districts across California.

U.S. Rep. Dan Lungren, R-Gold River, called the shooting a tragedy and said Democrat Giffords is an upbeat and open member of Congress who, by virtue of her Republican past and moderate present stances, is known on both sides of the aisle.

"We'll keep her in our prayers," Lungren told The Bee.

Such a shooting would be less likely there. "We have, I consider, very good security at the Capitol, at the office buildings and so forth," said Lungren, who serves on the committee that oversees security. "Obviously, the Capitol of the United States is a tremendous symbol. ... When members go to

their districts, security does not follow them,” Lungren said.

“It’s a real problem,” Cardoza said of the security conundrum. “You want to be accessible, but I also care very deeply about the security of my staff and of the people who attend these public events.”

Cardoza said security considerations contributed to his previous decision to relocate his Modesto and Merced congressional district offices to government buildings that already maintain a security presence. He indicated security concerns also played into his earlier decision to curtail some public town hall meetings during the politically heated summer of 2009.

Threats against lawmakers are not uncommon. Cardoza said his office has been on the receiving end of some. He added that Giffords, a friend and political ally for whom he campaigned in Arizona during 2008, had previously reported that one of her own congressional offices had been vandalized.

“She’s been concerned,” Cardoza said.

Giffords and Cardoza are both members of the so-called Blue Dog Caucus, largely comprised of moderate House Democrats.

One of the conservative Republicans in the House, Rep. Tom McClintock, whose Northern California district includes Placer and El Dorado counties, expressed outrage that Giffords “was struck down in the performance of a duty central to representative democracy – reaching out and listening to her constituents.

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