



# WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER CLASSIFICATION AND PAY PARITY ACT

## *Tim's Act*

### Led by Congressman Joe Neguse

As the impacts of climate change worsen, wildfire seasons are turning increasingly more devastating. As these wildfires grow larger and last longer, federal firefighters answer the call of duty, leaving behind their lives and families for months at a time, working an average of 16-hour daily shifts, sleeping in the dirt, with incredibly limited time off to reset and reconnect with loved ones.

Every major wildfire in the U.S. relies on a federal wildfire response with federal wildland firefighters and the vital services their specialized crews provide to protect life and property. The Forest Service employs the majority of wildland firefighters in the nation, over 10,000 employees, combating wildfires in all 50 states and internationally. In addition, the federal government provides advanced-skill units such as Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers, Rappelers, Helitack Crews, and Wildland Fire Modules—along with the engines and hand crews it staffs at higher levels than its non-federal counterparts. Currently, wildland firefighters are primarily classified as “forestry technicians,” paid an hourly wage of \$13.45 at the GS-3 level, and are often not provided adequate health care benefits or housing while on the job. According to recent studies, firefighters nationwide commit suicide 30 times as often as the general public and have a 30% increased risk for cardiovascular diseases, and 43% increase for lung cancer.

The *Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act* would address pay, benefits and classification of wildland firefighter’s wholesale, the bill would:

- Raise federal wildland firefighter pay to at least \$20 an hour; and add compensation “portal-to-portal”, increasing annual pay to at least \$20,000;
- Create a federal wildland firefighter classification series, so wildland firefighters are appropriately classified for the dangerous work they are doing;
- Provide health care and mental health services to temporary and permanent wildland firefighters, including:
  - creating a national “Federal Wildland Firefighter Cancer and Cardiovascular Disease Database” to track chronic disease caused by on the job environmental exposure throughout the lives of current and past wildland firefighters, and
  - launching a mental health awareness campaign, a mental health education and training program and an extensive peer to peer mental health support network for wildland firefighters and immediate family.
- Ensure all federal wildland firefighters earn retirement benefits for temporary seasonal employment, retroactively applying to the last 10 years of service;
- Provide 1 week of mental health leave off for wildland firefighters;



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- Provide housing stipends for all firefighters on duty more than 50 miles from their primary residence; and
- Provide tuition assistance for all permanent federal employees in the wildland firefighter classification.

The bill is co-sponsored by: Liz Cheney (R-WY), Katie Porter (D-CA), Salud Carbajal (D-CA).

The bill is endorsed by Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), U.S. Hotshots Association, National Smokejumper Association, Wildland Firefighter Foundation, Eric Marsh Foundation, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), Mystery Ranch Backpacks and Team Rubicon.

## **QUOTES OF SUPPORT:**

**Michelle Hart, Tim Hart's wife:** “Tim would be humbled and honored to have this legislation be a part of his legacy and to represent the hard work and sacrifice of thousands of wildland firefighters. These issues were deeply important and personal to him. Wildland firefighters deserve to be recognized and compensated for the grueling conditions in which they work and for putting their lives on the line every day. This legislation is a major step forward in achieving that goal.”

**Kelly Martin, President of Grassroots Wildland Firefighters (GWF):** “*Tim's Act or the Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act* represents a significant legislative effort to correct systemic failures that have plagued the federal wildland firefighting community for decades. Grassroots Wildland Firefighters are grateful Congressman Neguse introduced this significant measure that if passed will benefit thousands of men and women who will finally be recognized as Wildland Firefighters. The bill will bring wages and benefits closer to parity with other firefighting agencies and will provide resources to support the unique mental, emotional, and physical challenges faced from increased wildfire intensity, duration, and frequency.”

**Edward A. Kelly, General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters:** “Federal firefighters are on the frontlines protecting our nation's most important military installations, laboratories, and national forests, yet the federal government fails to provide pay and benefits commensurate with the arduous and dangerous duties they perform. Plagued by low wages, extremely long work hours and a retirement plan that doesn't account for their full annual salary, our firefighters merit pay and benefit plans which recognize the sacrifices and risks they undertake in the service to our country. I applaud Representative Joe Neguse for his leadership on these important issues, and I thank him for introducing legislation addressing the classification, pay and benefits of federal firefighters ”

**Kate Dillon, a former federal wildland firefighter, who worked in Steamboat Springs, CO during the 2020 wildfire season:** “To my eyes, the scope of this bill is incredibly



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comprehensive. As someone who has struggled with both finances and mental health throughout the course of my work as a federal wildland firefighter, I'm heartened to see the potential of an expanded mental health campaign as well as pay commensurate with the skyrocketing cost of living in the West. The addition of a workers' comp safety net for those who have worked in fire for 5 years and have developed illnesses due to the job would go a long way in showing that the federal government values its employees that put their time and lives on the line. I'm truly hopeful, after reading this bill, that federal wildland firefighting could become a sustainable career path, and hope to see some solid dates as well as a roadmap to implementation for these actions.”

**Chris Ives, a Colorado based Federal Wildland Firefighter not speaking on behalf of his agency:** “*Tim’s Act* introduced by Congressman Neguse represents the most comprehensive and well thought out effort to date addressing the untenable working conditions of federal wildland firefighters. Creating a Wildland Firefighter classification series accompanied by fair compensation, as well as holistically addressing the long term mental and physical well-being of firefighters, is an investment in the future of America. I hope that this bill will serve as a starting point in cultivating better care of firefighters and in turn, the communities we serve.”

**Brian Gold, a Federal Wildland Firefighter based in the state of Colorado, speaking as a private citizen and not on behalf of the federal government or any public land management agency stated:** “*Tim’s Act* stands to be the single most transformative piece of legislation for the federal wildland firefighting workforce in the last fifty years. The bill definitively establishes a professional wildland firefighting job series and with it the wages, benefits, and welfare protections that have been absent from the service for far too long. This legislation will go a long way in alleviating the high levels of attrition and low morale that have plagued the federal wildland fire apparatus in the last few decades. The attrition and moral issues are direct results of numerous factors: longer duration fire seasons, higher intensity fire behavior, high cost of living in western towns, cities, and remote duty stations, housing shortages and inflation, low pay and benefits compared to private, state and municipal wildland resources, absence of professional development opportunities and career ladders, lack of workplace protections, a cumbersome workers compensation program, mental healthcare, and presumptive illness protections. The Bill, introduced by Congressman Neguse, resolves many of these issues through a comprehensive effort to provide holistic support for federal wildland firefighters. This is an important step in demonstrating the federal government’s commitment and obligation to care for its wildland firefighting workforce. It is my firm belief that this piece of legislation will aid the federal land management agencies in building and strengthening a resilient, effective, and aggressive professional wildland fire management and suppression program. On a personal level, the successful implementation of this legislation will allow my peers and I to find better work-life balance, one in which I can continue to take pride in serving our people and land while at long last pursuing the most basic elements of the American Dream: a home, a family, and financial stability.”



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**Matt Dorsey, Communications Director for the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE):** “The National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) fully supports the Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act. As fire seasons have become increasingly long and dangerous, it is imperative that federal firefighters have the resources they need to protect our country from this crisis. Due to the strenuous nature of the duties wildland firefighters undertake, we must support these brave public servants with better pay, housing, health care, and mental health services. This legislation provides long overdue programs and resources that significantly improve the lives of wildland firefighters and their families. Congress must pass the The Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act.”

**Burk Minor, Executive Director of the Wildland Firefighter Foundation:** “The Wildland Firefighter Foundation applauds this legislation as a major step to meaningful reform for the wildland firefighting workforce. Too long this brave group of men and women have been underappreciated and undercompensated for the grueling and life threatening work they undertake on behalf of millions of Americans. The issues of pay, classification, mental and physical health, recruitment, retention, and housing instability have long plagued this workforce. We are confident that these changes will lead to a more robust workforce which is desperately needed to tackle the challenges of the increasing length and intensity of wildfire seasons.”

**National Smokejumper Association:** “The National Smokejumper Association strongly supports the direction of the Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act: To reform and enhance the pay and retirement benefits of Federal firefighters. Pay and benefits for Federal wildland firefighters must be drastically improved to be commensurate with the difficult, dangerous work they do. Improved pay and benefits are required for the Federal Government to attract and retain the highly skilled, professional workforce necessary in today’s fire environment. Moreover, increasing the pay and benefits of Federal wildland firefighters is simply the right thing to do!

**Eric Marsh Foundation:** “The Eric Marsh Foundation is pleased to support the Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act of 2021. We are in full support of designating a classification, and series for wildland firefighters. This bill ensures federal wildland firefighter pay, leave, and benefits are commensurate with non-federal, state, and local firefighters. As a whole, these changes equal greater care for our wildland firefighters and their families and ultimately will aid in retention. These men and women are a national resource and must be treated with compassion and Respect.”

**Chief James Keating, Red, White & Blue Fire Protection District in Breckenridge, CO:** “I strongly support every measure to increase the salaries and benefits for Federal Wildland Firefighters as they are the primary and most important resource that is available to combat wildfire in Colorado and elsewhere.”

A photograph of a wildland firefighter in full gear, including a helmet and a backpack, standing in a field with smoke in the background. The firefighter is wearing a yellow and black jacket and a red helmet. The background is dark and smoky, suggesting a fire scene.

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**Chief Brad White, Grand Fire Protection District:** “Wildland firefighters not only put themselves on the line physically during increasingly difficult and long fire seasons, but often sacrifice family life, health, and long-term financial stability to pursue a job that often serves communities they seldom have a tie with. The Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act will help these men and women turn that job into a respected career with a future, at time when we need more people, experience, and skills in the field than ever before.”

**Larimer County Commissioner Kristin Stephens:** “Having seen the largest wildfire in our state’s history tear through our county, we know firsthand the incredible sacrifice that federal wildland fighters make to save our homes and our forests. I applaud this bill by Congressman Neguse which seeks to fairly compensate the firefighters who put themselves in harm’s way to protect our communities.”

**Rex Laceby, Team Rubicon:** “I am a Wildland Firefighter and Team Rubicon Leader in Colorado. I fully support Joe Neguse and this The Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act.”

**Steve Kjonaas, Retired DoD Fire Chief and past U.S. Forest Service Firefighter:** “Our Federal Firefighters are genuine American Hero’s who need our support with real benefits and opportunities that allow us to retain and onboard the best. Competition from state, county, and private hire fire crews have resulted in severe under manning. During dangerous operations America’s bravest need of each other’s back when they need it the most.”