



Congress of the United States

September 28, 2023

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and
Accountability
Washington D.C., 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and
Accountability
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Chairs Comer, Westerman, and Thompson, and Ranking Members Raskin, Grijalva, and Scott:

We write to request urgent action on a bipartisan bill which is currently before your committees: H.R. 5169, the Wildland Firefighter Paycheck Protection Act of 2023.

Nearly every major wildfire in the U.S. relies on a response from federal wildland firefighters and the vital services their specialized crews provide. The need for their services has only become more pronounced as we experience longer fire seasons where wildfires are both more frequent and more severe. The federal government additionally provides advanced-skill units not offered by state or private entities, such as Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers, Rappellers, Helitack Crews, and Wildland Fire Modules.

A recent study conducted by the Government Accountability Office found that low pay was the most commonly cited barrier to recruiting and retaining federal wildland firefighters. Until

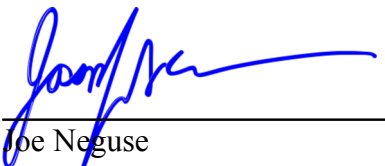
recently, many Federal wildland firefighters earned minimum wage incomes that did not keep pace with industry competitors, such as state agencies or private sector employment.

As you know, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included \$600 million to boost firefighter pay and convert seasonal firefighters to permanent, year-round employees. Specifically, section 40803 of the law provides a supplemental salary increase of \$20,000 per year, or 50% of base salary, for wildland firefighters employed by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior. **However, these funds will begin to run out at the end of this month, reverting all wildland firefighters to the pay levels seen just a few years ago.** The United States Forest Service estimates that up to 50 percent of our firefighting workforce would leave the Forest Service and go elsewhere if this looming pay cliff becomes a reality. Such an event would be catastrophic for America's forests and nearby communities.

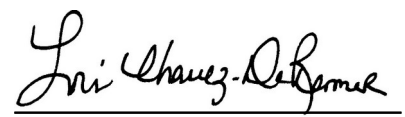
The Bipartisan Wildland Firefighter Paycheck Protection Act would make last year's pay raises permanent for wildland firefighters and establish a daily pay supplemental for firefighters working on long-duration wildfires, prescribed fires, or deployed away from their duty station to preposition in a high-fire risk area. This legislation, drafted to ensure fiscal responsibility, was reported out of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs with broad bipartisan support. Our federal firefighting workforce continues to be severely undercompensated for their sacrifices and their ongoing service.

Thank you for your leadership. We look forward to working with you to swiftly bring this bill to markup and ensure that this critical legislation is signed into law before the end of the fiscal year.

Sincerely,




Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



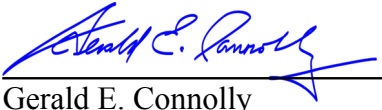
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Member of Congress



Katie Porter
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