



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers



NFFE News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 26, 2022

Contact: Matt Dorsey

Phone: (202) 216-4451

Federal Wildland Firefighters' Union (NFFE) Calls on Biden Administration to Increase Firefighter Pay Nationwide, and Fast, or Face Disaster

Washington, D.C. – Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) National President Randy Erwin is calling on the Biden Administration to use its authority granted under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 to increase federal wildland firefighter pay across-the-board nationwide, and to do so immediately. The union warns that federal agencies are currently experiencing critical staffing shortages nationwide and further delay of the pay increase, or geographically limiting its implementation, would significantly jeopardize our nation's ability to fight wildfires and protect communities.

"I do not think folks are aware of just how serious the wildland firefighter staffing issue is in this country," said President Erwin, "Federal firefighters are so woefully underpaid that agencies are unable to hire and retain the staff they need to operate. All indications are that the United States is going to face a very difficult fire season, and right now, fire agencies are simply not going to have the personnel they need to contend with it. Frontline workers will be forced to use skeleton crews filled with highly inexperienced firefighters. This is a recipe for disaster, both for our brave wildland firefighters and the communities that will not be sufficiently protected."

The Biden Administration is at a critical juncture right now because federal wildland firefighters who overwhelmingly live paycheck to paycheck have been holding out hope that this long overdue pay increase authorized by Congress last year would finally come through. Just this week, wildland firefighters are starting to get a glimpse of what might be forthcoming on pay, and many are infuriated by proposals that will exclude certain locations. The infrastructure legislation called on agencies to "increase the base salary of a Federal wildland firefighter by the lesser of an amount that is commensurate with an increase of \$20,000 per year or an amount equal to 50 percent of base salary, if... the Federal wildland firefighter is located within a specified geographic area in which it is difficult to recruit or retain a Federal wildland firefighter." Even though recruitment and retention are clearly nationwide problems, it appears that the Biden Administration is not currently committed to that interpretation as it relates to this pay increase.

"It is absolutely imperative that the Biden Administration get this right - that means implementing the wildland firefighter pay increase right away and nationwide," continued Erwin. "Everyone knows that recruiting and retaining wildland firefighters is extremely difficult right now everywhere across the country. If this Administration chooses a path that involves significant raises for some wildland firefighters, but not others, it will be met with outrage from those – the loyal few who did not seek employment elsewhere – drawing the short end of the stick. Recruitment and retention will go from difficult to impossible. That means more wildland firefighters being put in harm's way and more communities burning because of a lack of adequate fire personnel to stop it. The Biden Administration needs to get this done right and get it done fast."

###

Established in 1917, the National Federation of Federal Employees is America's first union representing civil service federal employees. NFFE represents approximately 110,000 federal employees in 35 departments and agencies government-wide, including 10,000 federal wildland firefighters. NFFE is affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO. For more information, go to www.nffe.org.