



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO

June 1, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20415

Re: Recommendations for Implementation of the Federal Wildland Firefighter Pay Provision in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Haaland, and Director Ahuja:

The National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) is a national union representing thousands of federal wildland firefighters within the U.S. Forest Service and at land management agencies within the U.S. Department of the Interior. As you know, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 requires federal agencies to raise wildland firefighter salaries; an increase of \$20,000 per year or an amount equal to 50 percent of base salary anywhere in the country where recruitment and retention is a problem. I write to you today to strongly encourage you to implement this pay increase nationwide, and as quickly as possible.

Our wildland firefighters need pay raises to take effect immediately. Every single federal wildland firefighter is substantially underpaid regardless of their location. Numerous highly experienced federal firefighters are seriously considering leaving their jobs for better pay elsewhere if the pay increases they have been waiting for do not come through soon.

The time for you to act is now. Fires are already raging in the Southwest. There are also numerous places across the country where staffing levels are not sufficient at this time. We need experienced firefighters to stay with the federal agencies for which they work during this critical time. Further delay of the pay increase, or geographically limiting its implementation, would significantly

jeopardize our nation's ability to fight wildfires and protect communities.

The three of you have the legal authority to implement pay raises for wildland firefighters right now. The raises will go to firefighters in all geographical areas that you deem it is difficult to recruit or retain wildland firefighters. Our ask is an easy one: at the earliest possible moment, issue your written determination that Federal wildland firefighters are difficult to recruit or retain nationwide. That action will go a long way to alleviating the worry that thousands of federal wildland firefighters have that their area is going to be carved out of the much-needed pay increase.

In truth, there should be no complex analysis to do. Every geographical area in the country has a proven recruitment and retention problem. Furthermore, the USDA and DOI identified that a critical hiring need exists for wildland firefighters for the last three fire seasons. In addition, OPM confirmed this fact by granting Direct Hire Authority to fill critical positions in an accelerated manner across all locations in support of the 2020-2022 firefighting seasons. This is a nationwide problem, and it should be treated as such.

The only strategy to achieve pay equity across the Federal wildland firefighter workforce is to give pay increases nationwide. Firefighters who do not get the raise will undoubtedly feel undervalued and many will certainly quit. Recruitment and retention in these locations will go from difficult to impossible, which would significantly jeopardize our nation's ability to fight wildfires and protect communities. These are avoidable consequences if this Administration simply choose a nationwide geographic area of application for the pay increase to wildland firefighters, and implements it soon.

Congress appropriated this money months ago, and yet, federal wildland firefighters have still not seen a dime of it. Congress intended this money to move quickly into the hands of wildland firefighters, a very large percentage of whom experience significant difficulty making ends meet on their current salaries. You are uniquely positioned to end the long-overdue wait for a living wage for wildland firefighters. Please do take action immediately and do it across-the-board nationwide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Erwin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Randy Erwin
National President
National Federation of Federal Employees,
IAMAW, AFL-CIO

Cc:

President Joseph R. Biden
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