

# NFFE News



## **An Update Regarding the Debt Ceiling Bill as it Relates to Wildland Firefighter and Federal Employee Pay**

June 2, 2023

As you have likely heard, the debt ceiling bill was passed by Congress and will head to President Biden's desk for final approval today. Like many in the federal workforce, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) is disappointed that during a time of extreme inflation, when paychecks are already stretched, an agreement was reached by all parties to hold non-defense spending at flat levels. This amounts to a major cut for all agencies except Defense.

For all federal employees, it is critical that the FAIR Act—the annual bill that provides an increase to federal employee wages—must pass, giving federal employees an 8.7% pay adjustment. Given the high inflation levels of the past few years, NFFE will continue to push Congress to act responsibly and pass the FAIR Act to avoid what is essentially an economic recession for federal employees and their families.

For federal wildland firefighters who are in desperate need of Congressional authority to extend their temporary pay raises, please know that the pay increase as outlined in President Biden's original budget request is still on the table even if spending is essentially flat for FY 2024. This is because the President's budget included a permanent fix for wildland firefighter wages and for other program improvements, therefore it remains a high priority during the continuing negotiations with Capitol Hill over the next few months. NFFE is working literally every day with USDA, USFS, OMB, and with a bipartisan group of lawmakers to see that a permanent fix is passed that will provide some permanent relief for firefighters and their families.

Even though overall funding levels may stay flat for FY 2024, the federal budget is a complex process with many layers. Agency numbers go up and down for various reasons so it is very likely that unrelated offsets will clear the way for the permanent fixes to wages and for the other improvements.

NFFE and USDA/USFS continue to work in concert to secure a path forward before the pay cliff in the next fiscal year. The cost to budget for the continued raises is not insignificant but it is not insurmountable either. For instance, a better staffed and prepared federal wildland firefighting service can significantly reduce the cost to the federal budget for disaster relief provided to communities, lands, and critical infrastructure that are vulnerable to fires and other disasters on federal lands.

Other potential offsets include the many programs across the government that will expire at the end of this fiscal year with no renewal demand. There is a lot of funding within current expenditures that will become available in October. If all else fails, NFFE is prepared to ask for special consideration to exempt the cost of the permanent fix from the immediate spending limits to avoid what will be a major failing in the government's ability to protect life and property.

NFFE has been planning for each of these scenarios since last year. While the debt ceiling agreement is certainly an unwanted development, it was anticipated and changes little in our overall strategic goals to get the permanent fix done this year.

Lastly, it is not too late to sign up for the NFFE-IAM Legislative Week that starts on June 19th here in Washington, DC. Please consider joining your sisters and brothers on the Hill to fight for the future of federal wildland firefighters and all federal employees. See you soon!

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