



# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers



## NFFE News Release

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## NFFE President Erwin: Congress Must Act Now to Avoid a Mass Exodus of Federal Wildland Firefighters

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE-IAM) is calling on Congress to take immediate action to avoid a mass resignation of potentially thousands of federal wildland firefighters. In a [letter sent this week](#) to the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, a group of bipartisan Senators echoed NFFE’s request for Congress to act now to address this imminent crisis.

“Federal wildland firefighters have made it clear that they will leave the workforce if they are not paid what they deserve,” said NFFE President Randy Erwin. “These brave men and women risk their lives to protect our public lands and communities during wildfires and other national emergencies, but Congress has yet to give them a permanent living wage. Even with the temporary pay increase provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs (IIJA), federal land management agencies are struggling to retain and recruit qualified individuals. When the IIJA supplemental funding runs out, the workforce will see a mass exodus. In some places, the exodus has already started further impacting the country’s capability to efficiently manage large scale incidents. This is not a Western states-only issue, and this is not only about wildfires. This is about crippling the nation’s ability to respond to large emergencies across the country.”

“Wildland firefighters are highly skilled and trained professionals,” continued Erwin. “When experienced firefighters leave the workforce because they can’t pay their bills, that loss of talent will take years to replace. With that said, the federal land agencies cannot hire enough firefighters now with low unemployment causing mass vacancies at higher paying state and local departments. Ironically, when the federal land agencies are depleted of their firefighters, it is the state and local fire departments that will be pushed to the brink because of increased demand. In the end, Congress will have to approve more disaster relief funding to address the aftermath caused by the response gap. This is a proverbial ‘house of cards’ that is ready to fall.”

“USDA and USFS leaders have made great strides over the past few years to make significant improvements to pay, working conditions, and other internal changes to modernize the workforce,” continued Erwin. “These are legacy problems that all agencies face, but change is happening and USDA and USFS are committed to finishing the job. However, we have only 15 weeks to solve the impending pay crisis. As it stands, employees will see their base income cut by 50%, up to \$20,000. Many wildland firefighters will feel they have no choice but to take jobs with state and local fire departments. Congress must fix the pay cliff now before things get worse, and separately we can continue to explore badly needed programmatic improvements to working conditions, mental and physical wellness, career opportunities, and more.”

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*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. NFFE is affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO. For more information, go to [www.nffe.org](http://www.nffe.org).*