

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We request the urgent inclusion of a permanent salary increase for our federal wildland firefighters (WFFs) to any end-of-fiscal year appropriation package. Federal wildland firefighting programs have fallen behind state and local fire programs in terms of pay, benefits and care. As the scale of wildfires continues to increase, the systematic inadequacy of compensation for our federal firefighters is becoming more visible.

Wildland firefighters are on the front lines of environmental crises and their hard work deserves immediate and proper compensation and benefits. Alongside difficulties recruiting and retaining WFFs, the ever-lengthening fire seasons have stretched the current firefighter workforce to its limits.

Nevada is particularly vulnerable to the threats posed by wildfires. In fact, the Bureau of Land Management's Nevada Fire and Aviation Unit is responsible for protecting more land than any other such unit in the lower 48 states. The sheer amount of federally-managed land in Nevada, coupled with pervasive and unprecedented drought conditions, have left the state uniquely exposed to catastrophic wildfires.

While the temporary pay increase within the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) acted as a stopgap for declining Federal firefighter retention and recruitment, agencies have signaled to Congress that funds will be exhausted in the near future. Without legislative action, firefighter pay rates will return to a rate that is unsustainable and unacceptable.

It is imperative that the Congress resolve this situation by at least making permanent the increased pay granted through the IIJA. Without action, the over 15,000 Federal wildland firefighters will have to endure longer and more dangerous wildfire seasons with unjust compensation to adequately meet the needs for their families.

As the impacts of increasingly hazardous wildfires spread to all parts of our Nation, it is imperative that we act to support these essential workers. We urge you to include permanent firefighter pay provisions in the next major legislative package considered by Congress.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator