

Tim's Act, legislation for Federal Wildland Firefighters, introduced in U.S. Senate and House

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The already active 2023 wildfire season is underway as the most concerning summer months approach. After early spring fires in the New Jersey [Pine Barrens](#) and Wisconsin, [record-breaking temperatures](#) are scorching the Pacific Northwest and melting the California snowpack, while evacuation orders for the Las Tulas Fire in New Mexico are just being lifted. Federal wildland firefighters are busy: training new hires, traveling to battle blazes in Alberta, Canada, and defending communities across the Southwest. Meanwhile, the future of their profession is at stake.

Recently, Senator Michael Bennet and Representative Joe Neguse, both of Colorado, introduced bicameral legislation to overhaul federal wildland firefighter pay and benefits. The Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Pay Parity and Classification Act ([Tim's Act](#)) is named in honor of Tim Hart, a Wyoming

smokejumper who lost his life after parachuting into a New Mexico wildfire in 2021. The legislation overhauls federal wildland firefighter pay and benefits to support recruitment, retention, and firefighters' well-being.

As climate change fuels larger, more destructive, and more frequent wildfires across the nation, wildland firefighters are increasingly overworked and put at risk; their families and [mental health suffer](#) as a consequence. Yet despite their critical role in protecting lands and communities, federal firefighters have not received adequate compensation or benefits [for decades](#). Tim's Act will build a robust, resilient workforce by ensuring wildland firefighters are compensated fairly.

"We owe so much more to our nation's wildland firefighters," said Michelle Hart, widow of Tim Hart and firefighter pay advocate. "Named in Tim's honor, this bill will address the challenges that have plagued this workforce for decades."

Specifically, Tim's Act would:

- Significantly increase base pay by establishing special pay rates at all grade levels and ensuring that all federal wildland firefighters earn at least \$20 an hour
- Pay wildland firefighters for all hours they are mobilized to fight a fire by creating a new form of premium pay, "incident standby premium pay"
- Provide rest and recuperation leave following work on wildland fires
- Create a national database to track chronic disease caused by on-the-job environmental exposure; develop recommendations to minimize exposure
- Launch new mental health programs and provide 7 days of annual mental health leave for all firefighters

- Allow firefighters to credit temporary years of service to retirement; include premium pay in the calculation of retirement pay
- Provide housing stipends for all firefighters on duty more than 50 miles from their primary residence
- Provide tuition assistance for all permanent federal employees in the wildland firefighter classification
- Allow firefighters who are not eligible for the Family and Medical Leave Act unpaid leave to care for family members with serious health conditions

As Lucas Mayfield, President of the Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, says: "Tim's Act is the holistic solution to workforce reform – addressing pay, benefits, housing and comprehensive well-being. We are grateful to Congressman Neguse and Senator Bennet. A senate companion bill to Tim's act is a momentous move forward in seeing Tim's Act become law."

In 2021, President Biden enacted elements of Tim's Act through the implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which created a new classification series specifically for wildland firefighters, temporarily increased pay, and established new support systems for firefighters through mental health services. Additional provisions, such as presumptive health coverage and ensuring that federal firefighters qualify for full retirement benefits if they are injured on the job, were also signed into law by President Biden in 2022.

While the new occupational series and temporary pay raises are a significant step forward, Bennet and Neguse and the Grassroots Wildland Firefighters believe Congress must provide federal firefighters with a permanent increase in wages while also ensuring that federal benefits are closer to parity with those received by state, county, and municipal firefighters. The temporary pay raises run out in September, and wildland firefighters across the nation are wondering what if anything will replace them.

"These dedicated women and men are on the frontlines of the climate crisis and show up every time to defend our public lands, communities, and businesses," says Riva Duncan, Vice President of the

Grassroots Wildland Firefighters. "The American people deserve a federal wildland fire workforce that is appropriately compensated and cared for. Tim's Act does just that."

The text of the bill is available [HERE](#). A summary is available [HERE](#).