

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4687

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to wildland firefighters in recognition of their strength, resiliency, sacrifice, and service to protect the forests, grasslands, and communities of the United States, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 11 (legislative day, JULY 10), 2024

Mr. BARRASSO (for himself, Ms. LUMMIS, Mr. BENNET, Mr. KING, Mr. RISCH, Mr. WICKER, Mr. HICKENLOOPER, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. HEINRICH, and Mr. DAINES) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to wildland firefighters in recognition of their strength, resiliency, sacrifice, and service to protect the forests, grasslands, and communities of the United States, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Wildland Firefighters
5 Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Wildland fires have increased in intensity
2 and severity over the 30-year period preceding the
3 date of enactment of this Act, causing catastrophic
4 destruction to homes, infrastructure, and valuable
5 Federal, State, and private lands. More than
6 1,000,000,000 acres of land across the United
7 States are at risk of wildfire, including approxi-
8 mately 117,000,000 acres of Federal land that have
9 been identified as high or very high risk for wildfire
10 potential.

11 (2) The Forest Service, the Bureau of Land
12 Management, the National Park Service, the United
13 States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of
14 Indian Affairs collectively employ more than 18,700
15 wildland firefighters to combat wildfires across mil-
16 lions of acres of public and private lands each year,
17 while thousands more workers and volunteers serve
18 as State, local, and contract wildland firefighters.

19 (3) As the wildland-urban interface expands,
20 wildfires increasingly find their way out of the
21 backcountry and into the backyards of communities
22 across the United States. Wildland firefighters are
23 evolving their skillsets, tactics, and strategies to ad-
24 dress the growing threat of wildfire in the 21st cen-
25 tury.

1 (4) While the protection of life and property re-
2 mains a top priority, wildland firefighters also have
3 an important role in responsible forest management
4 and conservation. Wildland firefighters perform pre-
5 scribed burns and other forest management activi-
6 ties, including timber harvests, contribute to healthy
7 forests, and reduce catastrophic wildfire risk.

8 (5) Each wildland firefighter is specialized and
9 trained to work in dynamic and extraordinarily dan-
10 gerous environments. Wildland firefighters routinely
11 work long days while on a 2-week rotation, often
12 sleeping in inhospitable conditions.

13 (6) According to the Forest Service, firefighters
14 generally work 16-hour days while fighting a fire,
15 and they typically exceed 2,500 operational hours in
16 a 6-month period.

17 (7) Wildland firefighter crews are all-hazards
18 frontline emergency responders that use any means
19 necessary to protect life and property while respond-
20 ing to floods, hurricanes, pandemics, and acts of ter-
21 rorism.

22 (8) Engine and hand crews, the primary fire-
23 fighting workforce, come in varying sizes and mod-
24 ules that can be tailored to fit the specific needs and
25 terrain obstacles that each fire presents.

1 (9) Interagency hotshot crews are highly skilled
2 mobile hand crews with elite knowledge about fire
3 suppression tactics.

4 (10) Pilots and aerial fire suppression crews
5 take to the skies with air tankers and helicopters to
6 drop water and fire retardant, supporting decision-
7 makers on the ground.

8 (11) Aerially-delivered firefighters, including
9 helitack crews and smokejumpers, exit helicopters
10 and jump from planes into remote and difficult-to-
11 reach areas, providing quick and targeted fire sup-
12 pression and emergency medical short-haul extrac-
13 tion. These fire personnel provide oversight and di-
14 rect action on initial and extended attack incidents.

15 (12) Wildland firefighters in the United States
16 also answer the call to fight wildfires internationally.
17 During the record-setting fires in Australia in 2020,
18 the United States sent 362 firefighters to help. Dur-
19 ing Canada's historic 2023 fire season, more than
20 2,000 Federal wildland firefighters answered the
21 call.

22 (13) As of the date of enactment of this Act,
23 the United States maintains mutual assistance and
24 cooperation agreements for wildland firefighting ef-

1 forts with Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand,
2 and Portugal.

3 (14) The increases in the severity of wildfires
4 and in annual fire season active months have also
5 increased the demand for wildland firefighters and
6 associated employees. Recruitment and retention of
7 wildland firefighters has been a national issue for
8 many years.

9 (15) Wildland firefighters put their lives on the
10 line to keep the people of the United States safe,
11 and some pay the ultimate sacrifice to do so. In the
12 5-year period preceding the date of enactment of
13 this Act, 91 wildland firefighters have lost their lives
14 fighting fires. Acute and secondary effects from
15 wildfire, such as wildfire smoke exposure, are di-
16 rectly linked to tens of thousands of firefighter and
17 civilian deaths each year.

18 (16) June 30 to July 6 of each year is recog-
19 nized as a Week of Remembrance to honor the fallen
20 wildland firefighters who sacrificed their lives to pro-
21 tect the wildlands of the United States.

22 (17) National Wildland Firefighter Day is held
23 annually on July 2 to recognize all who are devoted
24 to wildland firefighting.

1 (18) The exemplary efforts of wildland fire-
2 fighters are deserving of recognition, and it is appro-
3 priate and proper to honor those who have pre-
4 viously served, as well as current and future fire-
5 fighters. Wildland firefighters showcase principles of
6 duty, respect, and integrity in every aspect of serv-
7 ice. Each firefighter exhibits strength, resiliency, and
8 grit to protect the forests, grasslands, and commu-
9 nities of the United States. Wildland firefighters do
10 not shy away from dangerous situations, but instead
11 risk life and limb to help others. The outstanding
12 accomplishments of these brave individuals continue
13 an unparalleled legacy of public service.

14 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

15 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
16 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
17 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
18 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single
19 gold medal of appropriate design in honor of wildland fire-
20 fighters, collectively, in recognition of their strength, resil-
21 iency, sacrifice, and service to protect the forests, grass-
22 lands, and communities of the United States.

23 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
24 presentation described in subsection (a), the Secretary of
25 the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”)

1 shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems, devices,
2 and inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary, in
3 consultation with the National Interagency Fire Center.

4 (c) DISPOSITION OF MEDAL.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the presentation
6 of the gold medal under subsection (a), the gold
7 medal shall be given to the National Interagency
8 Fire Center, where the gold medal shall be dis-
9 played, as appropriate, and made available for re-
10 search.

11 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
12 Congress that the National Interagency Fire Center
13 should ensure that the display and availability of the
14 medal described in paragraph (1) be at appropriate
15 locations, particularly locations associated with
16 wildland firefighters.

17 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

18 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
19 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
20 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
21 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

22 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

23 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck under
24 this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51
25 of title 31, United States Code.

1 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
 2 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
 3 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
 4 items.

5 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
 6 **SALE.**

7 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
 8 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
 9 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
 10 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
 11 this Act.

12 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALES.—Amounts received from
 13 the sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under sec-
 14 tion 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Pub-
 15 lic Enterprise Fund.

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