

HR 10927

REDUCE STANDBY STATUS OF FIREFIGHTING  
PERSONNEL IN U.S. GOVERNMENT

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(Part II)

HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EIGHTY-NINTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

**H.R. 10294 and Similar Bills**

A BILL TO REDUCE THE TIME IN STANDBY STATUS OF FIRE-  
FIGHTING PERSONNEL OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND  
FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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APRIL 28, 1966

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well deserved, and which might be comparable to those in municipalities.

I also would like to comment just a minute on the third item of this amendment, and that is that the aggregate salary which would include the differential to be considered a part of the retirement. When the firefighter is employed he is told that his salary will be the total of the entrance step of grade 4 plus the 20 percent. In other words, he can go back home and he can make his budget on that basis. He knows that he has a guaranteed income so long as he performs the work satisfactorily, as long as he is on the job, of an exact figure which includes the differential. He knows when he gets an increment that the difference caused by the increment, the 20 percent, will also apply to it. In other words, it is a part of his salary. It is not like a person working overtime because the overtime is an uncertain factor. But this is just as certain as his paycheck and I recommend that it be included as a part of his base pay for the purposes of computing his annuities and other benefits under the fringe benefit system that we have in the Federal Government.

This organization is definitely opposed to any reduction in take-home pay. It is something that I don't know of any precedent for. The unions in private industry would frown on such a condition. Anytime that we have a reduction in hours, it is understood that there seems to be very little question that we expect that reduction in hours not to be accompanied by reduction in pay. The salaries of firefighters are too small now. Certainly their take-home pay should be continued as is.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear.

Mr. DULSKI. Thank you very much for your very informative statement and I want to commend you on the other aspect that you have brought out in the hearing this morning. That is the value of the property that the firefighters have to protect. It runs into hundreds of billions of dollars, and I feel, using another expression, we shouldn't be penny wise and pound foolish. Where we have billions of dollars invested in property and then quibble about such a relatively small amount—which brings relief to the people who are giving their lives to protecting these valuable assets—we are being neither wise nor fair.

Thank you again for your very fine statement.

Last but not least is our distinguished friend from the National Federation of Federal Employees, Mr. Wolkomir.

We meet quite often, don't we?

Mr. WOLKOMIR. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

**STATEMENT OF NATHAN T. WOLKOMIR, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL  
FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, ACCOMPANIED BY  
IRVING GELLER, DIRECTOR, EMPLOYEE RELATIONS STAFF**

Mr. WOLKOMIR. Mr. Chairman, as you can see, our testimony is short and, we believe, to the point. It augments that of the employee organizations who have already testified.

For the record, I am Nathan T. Wolkomir, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, and to my right is Mr. Irving Geller, director of the employee relations staff.

We have among our membership a substantial number of Federal firefighters, who would be affected directly by the legislation now under consideration; namely, H.R. 10294.

The NFFE favors the objectives sought by this legislation, and we have expressed that support in previous testimony on H.R. 10294. However, we must qualify our support by emphasizing that it is essential, in our view, to amend two key provisions, as follows:

1. When an installation has a firefighter tour of 48 hours or more on the date of enactment of H.R. 10294 it could reduce the tour below the 48 hours only upon an increase in compensation equivalent to the existing aggregate pay for the firefighter.

2. The current and future aggregate pay of the firefighter should be considered as the base pay for purposes of retirement, insurance, and health benefits.

The amendment regarding the tour of duty designed to protect the firefighter on the rolls on the date of enactment on a "saved salary" basis as provided for in section 2 is insufficient protection. Historically in municipalities and other firefighting settings whenever a reduction in hours was effected, the basic pay was increased to a point so as not to reduce the aggregate pay. This was not accomplished on a saved salary basis but on a new higher rate basis.

For example, a firefighter at the base of GS-4 working a 72-hour tour now receives a gross salary of \$5,569.20 whereas the salary a firefighter working 40 hours a week would receive is \$4,641 or more than \$900 less. Based on experience it will take many years for salary increases to raise the GS-4 base from \$4,641 base to \$5,569.20. In the meantime, the salary of the firefighter would be frozen.

Further, with the 72-hour workweek, a firefighter who finds it necessary to undertake part-time employment to supplement his modest income is better able to do so than if he worked the usual 5, 8-hour day workweek. The 48-hour tour will provide a salary slightly higher than that presently received. For these reasons, the protection offered by section 2 is considered inadequate and should be supplemented along the line proposed.

The purpose of the second amendment is to give the firefighter the same benefit now enjoyed by the wage board employee who works between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Since the latter has his premium pay included in the base for retirement, insurance, and health benefits purposes, NFFE believes the firefighter should have the same privilege as a matter of simple equity.

Mr. Chairman, with the adoption of the basic amendments proposed, or similar essential safeguards, the NFFE heartily supports H.R. 10294 and urges a favorable report on it.

I appreciate the opportunity of appearing before the subcommittee today and I believe our testimony can stand as is.

Thank you very much.

Mr. DULSKI. Thank you very much for your contribution. I am sure that all the witnesses who have appeared have presented a very basic picture that this subcommittee has to consider. As I stated before, the entire transcript of the hearing will be submitted to Mr. Beckworth upon his return.

Without objection, there will also be inserted in the record at this point, statements in support of this legislation submitted by Repre-

sentatives John E. Fogarty (sponsor of H.R. 10927), Don Edwards (sponsor of H.R. 4377), Robert L. Leggett (sponsor of H.R. 488), and Bob Wilson (sponsor of H.R. 5257).

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN E. FOGARTY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

On September 9, 1965, I introduced H.R. 10927, a bill to reduce the present 72-hour workweek of Federal firefighters.

The present workweek of Federal firefighters is much longer than that of other Federal employees who generally have 5-day, 40-hour workweeks.

While the hours of Federal employees as well as the hours of practically all municipal firefighters have been substantially reduced, the workweek of Federal firefighters has remained static for more than 20 years.

My observation of these firefighter employees in my congressional district has motivated my interest. I find them to be highly skilled and loyal employees of our Federal Government.

Their responsibilities as well as the vast knowledge requirements have increased immeasurably over the past years.

These men must be physically fit and mentally alert in order to execute efficiently their responsibility of saving lives and property.

While it is true that firefighters have been provided with numerous items of protective equipment and more advanced apparatus for fighting fires, there still remains the danger of collapse of structures involved, explosions, etc. This statement is substantiated by recent records which show that firefighters sustained injuries seven times more often than the average worker and that the odds of being killed in the line of duty were three times greater than that of the overall work force.

The records further show that of the firefighters who died while actively employed, 48 percent died from heart disease, and 44 percent had not reached the age of 50.

Over the past years the Post Office and Civil Service Committee of the Congress have proposed and both bodies have enacted legislation regarding hours, salaries, retirement, etc., for all classified employees.

However, it appears to me that sufficient language concerning the hours of Federal firefighters has been left too broad and indefinite, therefore, the Federal agencies have seen fit to fix the hours of these employees from time to time in their own way.

The existing laws do not leave it up to an agency to fix the hours of other classified employees; I strongly favor that this Congress act to set the hours of firefighters regardless of what agency might employ them.

As I understand the bill as amended, now before your committee, it serves not only to reduce the 72-hour workweek of Federal firefighters, it also gives credit on retirement for premium pay which is certainly a part of their annual salary.

I heartily endorse H.R. 10294 as amended and respectfully urge favorable consideration.

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STATEMENT OF HON. DON EDWARDS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I wish to lend my support to H.R. 10294, by Mr. Beckworth, to correct certain employment inequities for Federal firefighters.

On February 4 of last year, I introduced H.R. 4377, a bill which was designed to correct one of these inequities. Now, retirement and other employee benefits for Federal firefighters are not computed on the basis of their aggregate rate of compensation. Benefits are computed on base salary, as are the benefits for other civil servants. But the wages of Federal firefighters are handled in a way different from the handling of other Government salaries. Premium compensation is paid to a civil servant on the occasions on which he works overtime, on holidays, and so forth. Firefighters work overtime and on holidays as part of their regular routine. Therefore, 20 percent of their annual salary is automatically designated as premium pay. Thus a substantial proportion of the regular salary of firefighters is omitted from retirement and other benefit computations. My bill