

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 4847, the U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008, a bill I introduced with the original cosponsor, my good friend from Georgia, Dr. Gingrey.

Firefighters are often the first to arrive at an emergency scene and the last to leave. Whether it is putting out a house fire or a wild fire, or responding to a terrorist attack or car accident, we depend on firefighters every day. But firefighters also depend on us; they depend on the public and their elected officials to make sure that they have the resources, the equipment, and the training they need to do their job. Without those tools, we put them and all of us at risk.

The U.S. Fire Administration is an invaluable resource for our Nation's firefighters and the communities they protect. Through training, data collection, fire education for the public, and support for fire-related research and development, the USFA provides critical tools and leadership to the Fire Service.

Fire is one of nature's most destructive forces. In 1973, when USFA was created, over 6,000 Americans died each year in fires and another 100,000 were injured. Through the leadership of USFA and others, the number of people killed by fires each year is now between 3,000 and 3,500, with approximately 16,000 people who were injured. We can all be proud of the significant reduction. However, 3,000 Americans a year is still too many, especially when so many of these deaths and injuries are from our most vulnerable populations, children and the elderly.

In addition, the Nation still suffers over \$11 billion per year in direct losses due to fire, and the trend for this number is going up, not down. With statistics like these, it is clear that fire continues to be a major problem for the U.S. H.R. 4847 reauthorizes this important agency for 4 years at funding levels that will enable USFA to carry out fully its mission.

At a hearing with the Technology and Innovation Subcommittee held last fall, we heard the priorities of the Nation's fire service communities for USFA. This bill directly reflects their priorities.

This bill authorizes the USFA to focus on the pressing challenges of fighting fires in the wildland-urban interface, and fires involving hazardous materials, as well as advanced topics of emergency medical services.

Back home in Arizona, one of the toughest challenges our firefighters face is wildfires in the wildland-urban interface. This is an important year for wildfires. We have had a pretty wet winter which means a great deal of shrubs and bushes have grown at lower elevations. When the summer months heat up and the vegetation dries out, those shrubs and bushes will turn into tinder that can start a fast-moving wildfire in urban areas. Those fires threaten homes and lives. Fighting wildfires in urban areas requires special training, and I am proud that this legislation enhances fire administration training for wildland-urban interface fires.

Firefighters today are called upon to respond to an ever-broader range of emergencies. This authorization bill gives USFA the authority to make sure its training program keeps pace with the increasing challenges to the fire service.

The bill also addresses an important priority of the fire service in USFA, and that is to update the National Fire Incident Reporting System, or NFIRS. This system provides important data on fire events to policymakers at all levels of government. The current system is slow to report the data to the National Fire Data Center, and does not capture data on every fire, thus limiting its value to users. H.R. 4847 would direct USFA to update NFIRS to a real-time reporting, web-based system.

The bill also directs the U.S. Fire Administrator to continue USFA's leadership in firefighter health and safety. Every year over 100 firefighters die in the line of duty. H.R. 4847 directs USFA to educate local fire departments about national voluntary consensus standards for firefighter health and safety, and to encourage local departments to adopt these standards. This provision will help reduce the tragic loss of life the fire service suffers each year in line-of-duty deaths by promoting good practices in a variety of fire emergencies.

I also understand there have been some concerns that this provision would affect the jurisdiction of NIOSH, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. I would like to reassure my colleagues that it is not my intent for this bill to have any effect on NIOSH or any other agency of the Department of Health and Human Services.

H.R. 4847 is the product of bipartisan collaboration, and is supported by major fire service organizations, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, National Fire Protection Association, and the Congressional Fire Services Institute.

The resources and leadership of the USFA are an essential part of the ability of the fire service to protect our cities, towns and communities. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.