

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
*“U.S. Fire Administration and Fire Grant Programs Reauthorization:
Examining Effectiveness and Priorities”*
July 12, 2017

Thank you Chairwoman Comstock for holding this hearing. As the Committee considers reauthorization, it is helpful to exam the effectiveness and priorities of the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program (SAFER). I want to welcome all of the witnesses, and I appreciate them being here to share their insights with us.

I was pleased to announce earlier this year that the City of Duncanville, in my district, received an AFG grant. As with other grant recipients, the award will help the Duncanville Fire Department in its efforts to protect the health and safety of the public and emergency response personnel. The availability of these funds is critical to many communities. Local fire departments respond to a myriad of hazards, from structural fires and automobile accidents, to wildfires, other natural disasters, and even terrorist attacks.

Faring better than many other programs, USFA and the fire grants programs would remain flat funded under the Administration’s fiscal year 2018 budget proposal. However, that budget request and the recent appropriations for these programs have fallen well below the authorized levels. In addition to providing fewer resources for training, purchasing life-saving equipment, and hiring enough firefighters to respond safely to emergencies, under-funding also affects Congress’s ability to conduct oversight of these programs. When the agencies do not have proper funding to carry out the required studies and reports, we lack data and feedback on the effectiveness of the programs. I urge this Committee to continue to support authorization levels that acknowledge the significant demand for these important programs.

This hearing is also an opportunity for us to review changes made to the programs since the last authorization. In 2016, GAO reported that FEMA has incorporated a majority of the changes Congress required in 2012. However, GAO also recommended greater coordination between USFA and FEMA, as well as the establishment of clearer performance metrics for the grant programs. The agencies still have work to do to meet those recommendations. Coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies is key. For example, while wildfires are handled by the U.S. Forest Service, wildfires often approach and even hit populated areas. I am interested in hearing more about collaboration between federal agencies, state, tribal, and local jurisdictions in addressing wildland-urban interface fires.

Finally, the fire service community relies on advances in fire-related scientific research and technological innovation, including communications technologies, protective gear and equipment, and firefighting tactics. I hope that Dr. Onieal and Dr. Horn will provide us an update on fire-related research needs and any technology gaps that need addressing, as well as

federal agency collaborations and university partnerships. USFA and the fire grants program provide critical resources to address the nation's emergency response challenges, and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses how Congress can ensure they have the support they need to assist fire departments effectively across the nation.

Thank you. I yield back.