FLOOR STATEMENT

**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

**H.R. 4661** – United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017

December 18, 2017

I rise in support of the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017.

I hope we can all agree on the urgency of reauthorizing this program before the sunset in current law would terminate the programs in January. We heard from the local, state, and federal experts at our hearing in July just how essential these programs are to ensuring both firefighter and community safety in all of our districts across the nation.

This bill authorizes funding at the 2017 levels for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), Assistance to Firefighter Grants (AFG), and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants.

It also directs establishment of a grant monitoring and oversight framework, makes important technical fixes to current law, and ensures lesser-resourced fire departments have the tools to successfully apply for grants. These are critical programs to ensure the safety and security of all Americans, and they must be reauthorized.

Unfortunately, I must also express my disappointment and frustration with the Majority’s insistence on including a new sunset clause in the bill. The sunset currently in law is putting these programs at risk as we speak. Congress shouldn’t need sunsets to do our jobs properly.

And in this case, arbitrary program sunsets put lives at risk. Every single firefighting organization wants this sunset out. On a bipartisan basis, the Senate has voted to remove the sunset.

Yet here we are today, running up against a program termination that nobody wants, and senselessly adding a future program termination date that nobody will want.

Legislating by self-created emergency is bad for Congress and bad for our country. Here we are in December, desperately trying to avoid terminating assistance to firefighters. At the same time we are desperately trying to keep the Federal government from shutting down. And we are desperately trying to provide disaster assistance to Americans who are suffering. Of course, we’ve already missed the deadline on CHIP, and now 9 million children all across our country are in danger of losing health coverage. This is no way to run a country.

So we’ll vote for this bill today, and in 7 years, probably be right back in the same boat we are today. We can and should do better than this.

Thank you, and I reserve the balance of my time.