

CONGRESSMAN JOE NEGUSE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEMBERS DAY TESTIMONY
April 28, 2022

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). As you work to finalize the House version of the FY23 NDAA, I request that you include the following provisions to protect our public lands, support federal wildland firefighters, and ensure that veterans have streamlined access to essential local services.

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, a bill which passed the House for a fourth time in last year's NDAA, would preserve approximately 400,000 acres of public land in Colorado and includes a first-of-its-kind National Historic Landscape to honor the 10th Mountain Army Division and the legacy of local WWII veteran Sandy Treat. The public lands protected in the CORE Act are important to all Americans, including sportsmen and ranchers, and help to sustain Colorado's \$28 billion outdoor recreation economy. After years of collaboration, careful consultation, and negotiation, the CORE Act enjoys the full support of seven counties, 12 cities and towns, the State of Colorado, and countless outdoor businesses, sportsmen, conservation, and recreation organizations. Given the broad support for this bill and its inclusion in the FY2021 and FY2022 House-passed NDAA's, I urge you to include the CORE Act in the final FY23 NDAA.

I would also like to mention two provisions that I introduced as stand-alone measures and as amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act of FY2022. The Housing Our Firefighters Act would establish a housing stipend for federal wildland firefighters, hired at a location more than 50 miles from their primary residence, and the Care for Our Firefighters Act would secure mental health programs for federal wildland firefighters, including a mental health awareness campaign, peer-to-peer support network, expansion of the Critical Incident Stress Management Program, mental health leave, and making sure that trauma-informed mental health professionals are available to provide their services.

This increase in public demand and expectations placed on wildland firefighters to respond to the ever-growing wildfires is only expected to exponentially increase in the coming years. I applauded the committee for including those important provisions in the fiscal year 2022 NDAA, but I was disappointed to see that, at the insistence of the Senate, the legislation was not included in the final conference report. Our firefighters take on both physical and mental burdens to keep our communities safe. I urge you to include these provisions in the final FY23 NDAA to secure adequate benefits for this critical profession.

Finally, I would like the Committee to consider including the bipartisan HUBS for Veterans Act, to support local "network hubs" which streamline access to essential resources for veterans, servicemembers, and their families. I am working in consultation with the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Education & Labor to submit the bill as an amendment

to the FY23 NDAA. For those who have stepped up to serve, we must ensure we are fulfilling our commitment to ensure access to adequate health care, education services, housing and job training opportunities when they return home.

In closing, thank you Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Rogers for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding some of my NDAA priorities. I look forward to working with the committee on these issues and many more.

Sincerely,

Joe Neguse

Member of Congress