



**Briefing from the Colorado State Fire Chiefs
Governor Jared Polis
Presented by Chief Tom Demint, President**

**Annual Governor's Wildfire Briefing
May 7, 2019**

Good Morning Governor Polis,

I am Chief Tom Demint, representing the leadership of the more than 375 fire departments in Colorado....urban, suburban and rural. These fire departments have about 14,000 firefighters in Colorado.... career, combination and volunteers. These fire fighters protect the state's economy, the state's natural resources, the state's critical infrastructure and our citizens and visitors.

While there is considerable discussion and appropriate concern about wildland fires, CSFC is even more concerned about the fires in the wildland-urban interface (WUI fires). WUI fires are the most concerning since they immediately involve structures and human lives.

Colorado's municipal fire departments, fire authorities and fire protection districts are the first line of defense in keeping small fires small. Well dispersed, well trained firefighters are our best defense. The local fire departments are the state's initial response plan....for both WUI and wildland fires.

We have three items for you this morning:

- Gallagher
- Fire Commission
- Mental Wellness of Firefighters

Gallagher

The majority of the firefighters who provide the "boots on the ground" in Colorado for the initial attack on wildland fires, and especially for the initial attack for fire in the wildland urban interface are from local fire departments..... local fire departments....not state, not federal, these are all local firefighters

As you know, the Colorado fire service is in the middle of an ongoing fiscal crisis which is the result of the continued reduction in the residential assessment rate and the negative synergy between the Gallagher Amendment and TABOR. Your leadership on the RAR is greatly appreciated and the RAR passed by the 2019 General Assembly at 7.115% provides a temporary two-year stay of the ongoing fiscal crisis for the fire service, but it does not provide a solid fiscal foundation for the future of Colorado's fire service.

It is both appropriate & necessary for the State of Colorado to recognize that the fire departments of Colorado are a state-wide resource.....but receive no ongoing state-level fiscal support. Addressing the negative synergy between the Gallagher & TABOR amendments is the key path to sustaining the capacity, strength and success of our state's fire departments. Solving this challenge will require completely new ideas for funding the fire service of our state likely outside Gallagher and maybe TABOR also

Fire Commission

CSFC supported the legislation creating the new Fire Commission and we ask that your administration facilitate the rapid implementation of the Fire Commission. There is much work to be done, including the development of a statewide fire service mutual aid program to provide hard, heavy & fast initial attack on both WUI and wildland fires.

Mental Wellness of Fire Fighters

In 2017 the Colorado Firefighter Heart & Circulatory Benefits Trust and the Firefighter Cancer Benefits Trust were combined to create the "Colorado Firefighter Heart & Cancer Benefits Trust". The Trust moves firefighter heart, respiratory and cancer coverage out of worker's comp and into a separate trust self-funded by the participating fire departments and municipalities

The Trust has lowered worker's comp premiums and increased the speed of the delivery of benefits to firefighters....lower costs for employers and increased services to firefighters with a diagnosis of heart, respiratory and cancer conditions....happy employers and happy firefighters!

We would like to have firefighter mental wellness included in the Trust and will need legislative authority to do that. Your support and leadership of this effort to bundle heart, respiratory, cancer and mental wellness will provide Colorado's firefighters an unprecedented level of support.....all with voluntary participation of the employing authority

What is our ask of you today?

Three things:

- Find a long-term solution to the negative Gallagher/TABOR negative synergy and specifically the negative impact on fire protection districts
- Quickly implement the new Fire Commission
- Help us address the mental wellness of firefighters by supporting legislation to include mental wellness into the existing Heart & Cancer Trust

I would be pleased to answer your questions