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MEDIA CONTACT: PFA Public Information Officer and Media Team | 970-658-5502 or PFAMedia@poudre-fire.org

**Firefighters Gain Access to High-Priority COVID-19 Testing**

Firefighters in Poudre Fire Authority (PFA), throughout Colorado and across the country can now be quickly tested for COVID-19. PFA Fire Chief Tom DeMint played a pivotal role in getting firefighters access. This will allow those who test positive to more effectively self-quarantine and those who test negative to return to duty faster.

About a month ago, DeMint and three other fire chiefs spoke directly to Congressman Neguse during a meeting with the fire chiefs of the 2nd Congressional District. When Neguse asked about the issues facing fire departments in Colorado; the chiefs spoke about staffing concerns and testing. DeMint explained that they need to know if a responder has COVID-19 in order to maintain staffing levels and keep fire stations safe.

“Our PFA firefighters perform outstanding work each and every day on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said DeMint, who also serves as president of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs (CSFC) organization. “We’re so grateful to have this prioritization. Keeping our firefighters safe will, in turn, keep the community safe. Our next goal is to find testing for asymptomatic firefighters and ensure that firefighters and other first responders are at this high level of priority when a vaccine becomes available.” After the meeting with the fire chiefs, Neguse led the drafting of a bipartisan letter to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which resulted in the change.

The close contact that firefighters have with the community as well as with other responders, made this a high priority concern for DeMint and other fire chiefs across the state. PFA firefighters live and work in stations that house between three and ten other first responders, so PFA takes a sick responder very seriously.

Over 80 percent of PFA’s calls in 2019 were for emergency medical calls, but the agency is also ready to attack a fire, perform a high angle rescue at Horsetooth Rock, and save someone from the Poudre River. Other emergencies have continued throughout this event and with wildfire season almost here, it is imperative that PFA maintains the staffing levels necessary to deliver these services.

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