

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 2, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 - The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 - The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
& Related Agencies
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, & Related Agencies
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We are writing to ask you to consider the development of a fire supplemental appropriation, a specific budget line item going forward for all fire aviation expenditures, and to provide FY 2019 funding for much needed air tanker procurement to fight unprecedentedly large fires.

The U.S. Forest Service uses retardant-dropping large air tankers and large water-scoopers as one of its most effective immediate responses to limit the expansion of wildfires into uncontrollable mega-fires. U.S. interagency government studies on firefighting strategy show a requirement for 18-28 modern large air tankers available to deploy as initial attack assets on wildfire ignitions. Such a program was the primary recommendation supported in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service *Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy* released February 2012.

We need a modern, highly capable large air tanker and water-scooper fleet. The available aircraft flying this mission today continue to be retired ex-military/ex-civil aircraft, repurposed for air tanker operations and flown by small private contract firms. Age and diminishing structural service life drive safety concerns and limit the number of aircraft available for deployment.

It hardly seems necessary to highlight the impact of the massive wildfire disasters experienced by the west this year and last year and the year before, but we want to stress the importance of building the capacity to more effectively respond, in a cost-effective manner, to these devastating natural disasters. The intensity and duration of the past successive fire seasons confirm the reality that the wildfire suppression workload has grown in severity and complexity due to hotter, longer burning seasons and the expanding wildland-urban interface. These factors will only worsen future wildfire disasters so it is time that Congress and the executive branch

proactively upgrade firefighting assets in order to protect the lives and property in communities facing these massive wildfires.

As we look to addressing disaster recovery in the states devastated by massive flooding from Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael, we also need a fire supplemental appropriation to take action to invest in modern firefighting assets. Therefore, an initial squadron of modern large air tankers and water-scoopers is necessary to control the spread of wildfire ignitions before they escape and expand into massive mega-fires.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



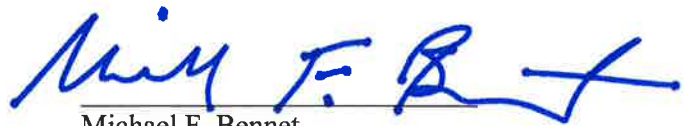
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator