

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 7, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Majority Leader and Minority Leader,

Like hurricanes, wildfires are a natural part of the landscape. Also like hurricanes, wildfires are getting bigger and more destructive. Right now, we are in the middle of a natural disaster across the American West: the burning of over 7.65 million acres of forests. Just as our friends in the South have done in response to hurricanes, Governors across the West have declared states of emergency, with the evacuation of towns and homes, and the loss of businesses. In addition, millions of dollars' worth of private, state and federal timber has been damaged - much of it beyond use.

Currently more than 27,000 firefighters from across the country are risking their lives to fight these fires and protect communities in harm's way. Sadly, six firefighters have died. Full containment is not expected for months. It will take homeowners and businesses years to recover.

The Forest Service has already announced that it will not have enough money to last the remainder of the wildfire season. This means, yet again, the agency will have to cover the deficit by borrowing up to \$300 million from other Forest Service accounts.

Congress must fix the way the government funds wildfire fighting now. The accounts being robbed to fight fires are those that fund wildfire preparedness and mitigation projects in our forests. Instead of robbing one set of priorities for another, what the nation needs is a consistently funded Forest Service that can address wildfire prevention, as well as emergency wildfire suppression, in the same year. If this were the case, the Forest Service could get ahead of these natural disasters and reduce the severity of the fire season. Over the years, we have supported language proposing several different solutions for this wildfire funding problem.

We stand ready to work with our colleagues in a bipartisan way in Congress to do everything we can to ensure the victims of Hurricane Harvey get the assistance they need. As we work to assist Texas and Louisiana on the road to recovery, please do not forget about wildfires – the natural disaster currently raging through the West.

We ask that any disaster aid package or other must-pass legislation that passes through Congress include a wildfire funding fix. This fix is long overdue and people throughout the West desperately need our help.

Sincerely,



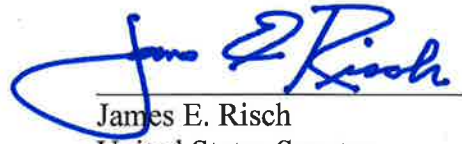
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United States Senator



Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



James E. Risch  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



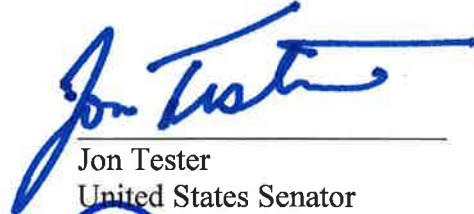
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



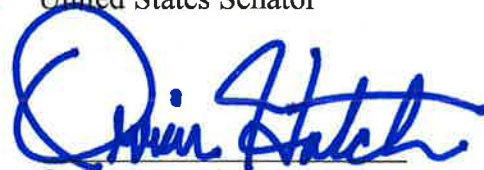
Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



Tom Udall  
United States Senator



Orrin G. Hatch  
United States Senator