

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2026

Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary  
Department of Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Secretary Burgum:

We write to express serious concerns regarding a “reassignment letter” sent on Monday, May 18th, to at least 13 public affairs and information officers serving in Bureau of Land Management (BLM) district offices located in the Pacific Northwest, and demand that you immediately reinstate these employees to their original roles. According to reports from Department staff, these individuals have been reassigned to different bureaus or locations, leaving our BLM district offices understaffed and without critical support.

These actions run counter to the Department’s stated objective of supporting localized decision making to best support American communities and undermine your promise that major changes would not occur during fire season. Public Affairs Officers (PAO) and Public Information Officers (PIO) play a critical role in keeping our communities safe and informed during active wildfires. These positions are vital during wildfire season as they are the face and voice of the agency, providing life-saving information to communities about disaster conditions, evacuations, and advised responses. As you undoubtedly know, between record-low snowpack and drought, Oregon and Washington are facing what could be a historic wildfire season. Given that these officers were not reassigned to communications for the new unified departmental U.S. Wildland Fire Service, removing these employees from communicating with the communities they have connection with at the very start of fire season with no apparent plan to replace them leaves communities across our states without the information and resources they need to stay safe during fires; this may have life-threatening consequences. Many of the reassigned individuals were even ‘red card’ holders, qualifying them to support wildland firefighting operations.

We have repeatedly expressed concerns that federal agencies tasked with fire prevention and response in Oregon and Washington are understaffed and underprepared going into the 2026 fire season. It is extremely concerning that there are now zero on-the-ground, district level personnel to communicate critical public safety information to our constituents, the media, and local officials. Your actions are putting public safety, rural communities, and critical infrastructure at extreme risk. This latest decision to reassign qualified wildfire response personnel is leaving our states even less prepared to respond when disaster strikes.

This intentional and reckless elimination of expertise is not government efficiency. It is part of a calculated scheme by the Trump administration to conceal critical information from the public, avoid accountability for the increased risk it has created, and actively mismanage public lands. After last year's staffing reductions, hiring freezes, and withholding of funds, this latest unnecessary reorganizing of agency professionals into new positions puts lives at risk and knowingly sets your own agency up for failure.

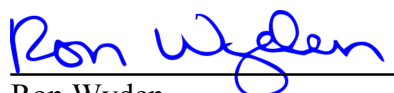
We stand in unwavering opposition to such efforts, and demand that you reverse these reassignments immediately before they result in tragic, preventable losses of life and property.

In addition, we insist you share the following information before June 15, 2026, so that communities in Oregon and Washington can respond:

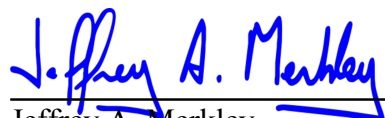
1. Please provide the number of public affairs specialists, including PIOs and PAOs, that were reassigned from BLM offices in the Pacific Northwest.
2. Please list all factors that were considered in selecting staff for reassignment. Were firefighting qualifications or years of experience among the factors considered? If so, why were individuals with wildfire response credentials reassigned?
3. Please explain the methodology for determining where these staff are being reassigned to, and why.
4. Without district-level PIOs and PAOs, please provide the Department's plan for localized communication during fire season.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

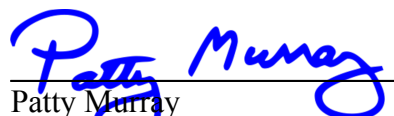
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator