United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 27, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Rollins:

We write to express serious concern regarding reports that Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment Michael Boren used his position to remove firefighting personnel and resources from active fires elsewhere to suppress a fire near his private ranch in Idaho. We request a full investigation into the nature and extent of Boren's involvement in response to the Cabin Creek Fire and a detailed accounting of the safeguards the agency has implemented or plans to implement to prevent political interference and conflicts of interest in wildfire response.

Earlier this month, The Washington Post reported that Mr. Boren used his position to pressure U.S. Forest Service personnel to divert much-needed resources away from other fires to instead suppress a fire near his own property. The Cabin Creek Fire began on July 12, 2026, near Mr. Boren's 480-acre ranch on the Sawtooth National Forest in Idaho. The fire burned seven acres before it was fully contained. During that time, nine aircraft were reportedly assigned to the fire, an extremely high number for a fire of this size. Mr. Boren reportedly called Forest Service officials multiple times – questioning why more aircrafts were not deployed to fight the fire and asking when more assets would arrive at the scene. One official quoted in the Post's report described Boren's interactions as "putting pressure on [staff] to throw more resources" to fight the fire.

During this record setting fire season, fires of much larger size have not received even a fraction of the same commitment of resources. For example, the Grasshopper Fire on the Mt. Hood National Forest is over 90,000 acres and less than 50% contained with a similar number of aviation resources assigned to it. The personal interests of political employees should not be a factor that influences the allocation of wildfire resources to communities threatened with devastation. Most states are already lacking the sufficient personnel and resources needed for this historic fire season due to the Trump administration's own budget and staffing cuts and ill-conceived reorganization plans. Mr. Boren's actions constitute potentially a misuse of taxpayer funds and put American families at further risk by diverting scarce resources from high-priority wildfires threatening communities elsewhere in the region and country.

As Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment, Mr. Boren's duties include overseeing the Forest Service. His history of conflict with the agency is well documented and came up during the pendency of his nomination before the Senate. In fact, Mr. Boren was pointedly asked during the nomination process whether he would commit to recusing himself from matters involving his properties. Those concerns now appear to be validated by this incident. It has been nearly a year since Mr. Boren was confirmed by the Senate to serve in his current role. We must ask what, if any, safeguards have the administration put in place to ensure against this type of reported abuse of power. Political interference in wildfire response jeopardizes lives, property and federal resources.

We request that you respond by Thursday, September 10th detailing how the Department will prevent this type of inappropriate interference, or even the appearance of it, in wildfire response going forward. Additionally, we request transparent communication of the findings of the investigation to all members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Finance

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

CC: Inspector General John Walk
CC: Director and Designated Agency Ethics Official Stuart Bender