

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 12, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Bernhardt:

We are urgently requesting that any available fire crew chiefs be deployed to Oregon in order to utilize the National Guard teams standing ready to fight the state's catastrophic wildfires. We currently have 375 members of the Oregon National Guard ready to be deployed, with another 250 members coming on-line within the next 7 to 10 days. Without further deployment of crew chiefs to Oregon, however, these vital resources will remain sidelined when they are needed the most.

Oregon is facing its worst drought in nearly 30 years, which has resulted in some of the driest forest conditions on record. On the afternoon of September 7, 2020, a windstorm, with winds up to 50 mph and gusts of 60 mph, moved into the region from the east. These winds, mixed with dry fuel loads, exploded existing fires and caught many communities by surprise. Since then, half a million Oregonians – ten percent of the state's entire population – have been placed under a level one, two, or three evacuation order. At least four lives have been lost and hundreds of homes and most of at least two towns have been destroyed. Most of the state's population is living in a fog of noxious smoke.

Over the past several days, the state has been focusing its resources on saving lives and protecting property. Fortunately, recent changes in weather patterns have allowed the state to finally start containing some fires while maintaining its focus on defending life and property. For context, in recent years an average of about 500,000 acres have burned each year during the entire fire season, so current firefighting resources are clearly not adequate.

Given the severity and speed at which fires are spreading across the state, we must respond swiftly. Fortunately, the National Guard is prepared to train and deploy additional units, but only once they have the crew chiefs needed. We thank you in advance for your assistance in meeting this crisis by providing the additional fire crew chiefs needed to deploy our National Guard members and contain these wildfires.

Sincerely,

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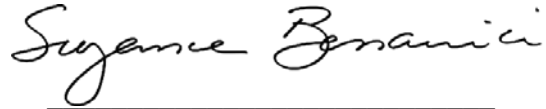
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



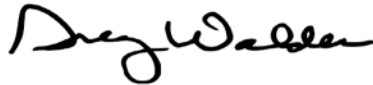
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



Greg Walden
Member of Congress