

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to cease the ongoing government shutdown and allow our nation's forestry professionals and firefighters to continue forest restoration work and training certifications in advance of the coming fire season. The failure to reopen the government puts peoples' lives at risk by undermining their ability to respond to wildfires and will only serve to delay critical forest restoration and safety projects. These young men and women put their lives on the line to protect the nation's natural resources and other public and private property, and they deserve to have the best training possible in preparation for increasingly difficult fire seasons.

As the fire season grows longer, time for federal agencies to prepare and train for the upcoming fire season shortens. Federal firefighting agencies like the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) use the winter months to train existing firefighters, hire seasonal firefighters for the upcoming season, and issue contracts for equipment critical to responding to fires.

Furthermore, firefighters must take a refresher course annually each year to be eligible to respond to wildland fires. Elite crews, like hotshots or smokejumpers, and incident managers, take additional courses. Individual courses can range from several days to months. Already the Tennessee-Kentucky Wildland Fire Academy canceled a week long training because of the shutdown and, if the lapse in appropriations continues, more will follow. If enough firefighters fail to be recertified, the nation could face a critical shortage of qualified firefighters during fire season.

Beyond the significant implications of halting firefighter training and recertification efforts, the shutdown is also delaying critical forest health projects across the country. Press reports indicate that hazard tree removal, pile burning, and other important forest restoration activities are on hold indefinitely. By stopping these important forest management activities, during the very winter months when it is safest to carry many of them out, you are needlessly putting people and rural forested communities at risk.

Unless these firefighter trainings and forest health projects resume soon, the health and safety of our communities mostly in rural areas will be continue to be put at risk during this government shutdown. We strongly urge you to agree to reopen the government.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



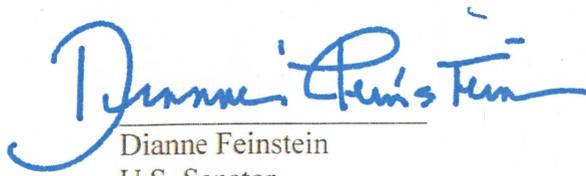
Tom Udall
U.S. Senator



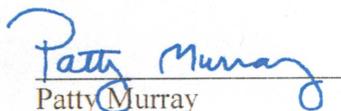
Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senator



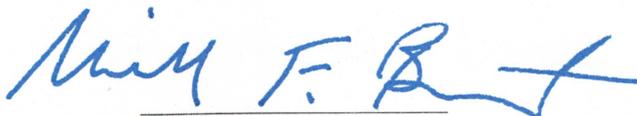
Kamala D. Harris
U.S. Senator



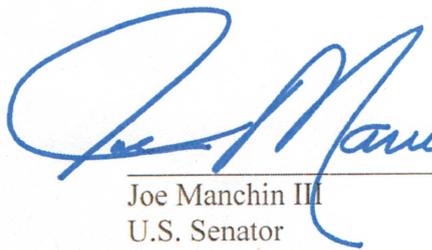
Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



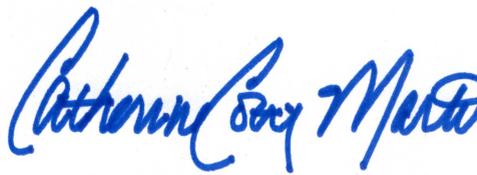
Joe Manchin III
U.S. Senator



Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
U.S. Senator

CC: Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Agriculture
David Bernhardt, Acting Secretary of Interior