

Rural County Representatives of California Update on Wildfire and Disaster Funding

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October 29, 2017 - A second disaster aid package passed the U.S. Senate last week, providing \$36.5 billion in relief to areas recovering from a series of hurricanes and wildfires. The bill passed with 82 votes, and includes \$18.67 billion for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster relief fund; \$16 billion in debt forgiveness for the National Flood Insurance Program; \$1.27 billion in supplemental nutrition assistance funds for low-income Puerto Rico residents; and \$576.5 million for wildfire suppression.

Before the vote, several members expressed their frustration that the relief package did not address fire borrowing in a meaningful way, preventing the U.S. Forest Service from conducting active management programs that reduce the risk of future fires. Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-New York), Senator Kamala Harris (D-California), Senator Patty Murray (D-Washington), Senator Jon Tester (D-Montana), and Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Washington) called on Congress to pass a legislative solution to fire borrowing in order to provide the U.S. Forest Service the funding it needs to improve forest resiliency. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) took the Senate Floor Wednesday night, urging his colleagues to pass the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act which would stop fire borrowing and grant the U.S. Forest Service access to the disaster funding accounts that are used in response to other natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes. In addition, Senator Wyden and Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California) co-authored an op-ed for *CNN.com* which again calls on Congress for a legislative solution to fire borrowing. Senators Wyden and Feinstein note that the U.S. Forest Service first made Congress aware of the problem in 2002, and after 15 years, it is time for lawmakers to act. Although fire borrowing was not addressed in the package which was passed this week, President Trump is expected to request a third disaster aid bundle in the near future, offering western senators another opportunity to secure relief and wildfire funding reform.

Source: Rural County Representatives of California

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