

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 14, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
United States Department of
The Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of
Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
United States Office of Personnel
Management
1900 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20415-1000

Dear Secretary Haaland, Secretary Vilsack, and Director Ahuja:

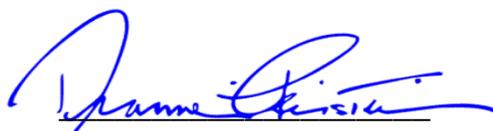
We write today in support of the bipartisan infrastructure bill (the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and urge you to prepare for rapid implementation of provisions relating to federal wildland firefighters. Specifically, we ask that your agencies begin working together now to be in position to swiftly implement the pay increase for federal wildland firefighters, the development of a distinct “wildland firefighter” occupational series, and the conversion of at least 1,000 seasonal firefighting positions to permanent positions once this bill is signed into law.

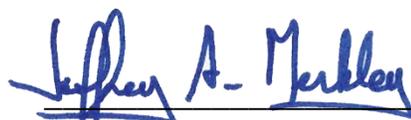
The disparity in pay between federal and non-federal wildland firefighters has led to a shortage of federal firefighting personnel and limits our nation’s ability to respond to these increasingly devastating natural disasters. Recognizing this, Congress worked on a bipartisan basis to include \$600 million for wildland firefighters in the bipartisan infrastructure bill. This is an important step toward reducing significant pay discrepancies and bolstering our federal government’s firefighting capacity. Given that such a large percentage of land in the United States and the West is managed by the federal government, we have an obligation to ensure agencies have the personnel they need to prevent and fight fires on that land, and to ensure that our firefighting personnel are adequately compensated for the highly skilled and dangerous work they do.

As you know, there is no longer a wildfire “season” as wildfires are now a year-round threat. This year has already seen catastrophic fires in the West, including the Dixie fire in California and the Bootleg fire in Oregon. As the 6th Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes, the last decade was hotter than any period in the last 125,000 years. The historical heat waves in the West, severe drought, and increased wildfire activity will be more common as temperatures continue to warm. While we must do all we can to mitigate future emissions, we must also adapt and increase resources committed to protecting communities, natural and cultural resources, and wildlife from fire.

Thank you for your ongoing work to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Please do not hesitate to let us know if there are any resources Congress can provide to further bolster our nation’s preparedness and ability to respond.

Sincerely,


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

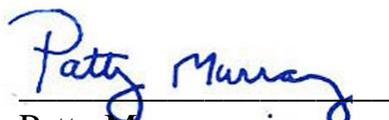

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